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Johan Nieuhof's Cathay: Aspects of Inventing a Travelogue in Early Modern Europe

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As Europeans began to build commercial networks and empires across the globe in the fifteenth century, they encountered cultures that had developed independently of Europe for centuries or even millennia. Chief among these civilizations was China, an empire so large and far reaching that the Europeans were conscious to various degrees of its existence throughout the ages. In fact, while contacts with China and other empires within the Sinic world increased, Europeans glorified China to the extent that eastern flair gradually became desirable in the everyday lives of European consumers of luxury.

Merchants searched for direct access to China's silk, porcelain and tea as insatiable demand for exotic goods in Europe only increased after the sixteenth century. Along with this demand for goods, the demand for information about a mythical Cathay on the other side of the world increased. Furthermore, the spices of Asia became essential to improving the flavors of a bland European diet, drinking tea from porcelain cups became fashionable, and the well-to-do paid large sums to dress themselves in imported silk. New contacts with the East not only brought new goods to Europe but also began a new exchange of information.

The Jesuits placed scholars within the Middle Kingdom in order to carry out in depth cultural observations and use this information as a tool for winning converts. Iberian New World empires gathered intelligence on the region and extracted the ore from mines that Asia-bound cargoes swiftly poured into Asia in exchange for hot items. Explorers even wrote diaries and notes that became marketable to the early modern consumer as glimpses into new and exotic cultures on the other side of a globe that was more massive than Europeans after the fall of Rome had envisioned. While scholars have accepted the first two types of reports as more serious and informed sources of information, the information from culturally detached observers such as Johan Nieuhof are indeed historically significant as well.

Nieuhof, an educated Dutch professional who had developed the writing, sketching and cognitive talents necessary to capture the rich alternate reality of China, wrote the notes as a part of a VOC intelligence report. The final product that Jacob van Meurs, an enterprising publisher in the Dutch Golden Age, and Johan Nieuhof's brother Henri produced was an altogether different piece of work. Additionally, Nieuhof and van Meurs benefited from the patronage of a Cornelis Witsen, mayor of Amsterdam, and his son Nicolas Witsen.¹ However, this piece of work indeed became a successful seller, and in this form as an embellished and decorated travelogue was distributed throughout Europe, not only as a reference material, but primarily as a consumer good designed to appeal to an increasingly large class of merchants able to afford.

In the past few decades, increasing numbers of scholars of Early Modern global history have argued for the usefulness of these notes and diaries as primary sources and added information extracted from them to consideration within historical scholarship. While the records of Jesuits had always held a higher level of credibility among historians as being more well-informed scholarly accounts of alien cultures, the accounts of explorers and merchants were rightfully criticized for the more lax standards of reporting.

Although the information within these accounts is certainly dubious and often collected by observers without knowledge of the host language and culture, the sources nonetheless exert an influence on early modern European culture. Particularly, the sketches that Nieuhof drew while travelling in the country eventually ended up in the published work by the engravers along with his vivid cosmographic descriptions of the country were crucial to "adding many of the finishing touches to the picture of Cathay which was all but complete by the end of the seventeenth

¹ Blussé, Leonard, Guotu Zhuang, and Johannes Nieuhof, *"He shi chu fang Zhongguo ji" yan jiu.* (Amoy: Xiamen da xue chu ban she, 1989), 12.

century.”² In comparison to the extensively doctored and highly imaginative engravings in other travelogues, the final products within the travelogue assembled from Nieuhof’s notes remained noticeably less modified and, thus, certainly more believable to an increasingly educated and worldly consumer.

The travelogue assembled from Nieuhof’s notes certainly defies the trend of shoddy reporting rampant within the early modern travelogue. Moreover, the book predates the eighteenth century Age of Reason in which ‘travelers and travel liars’ popularly wrote and read about distant lands and cultures to satisfy both idle and scientific curiosities.³ Others have gone further and argued that Nieuhof’s work came to being in a seventeenth century where “the discovery of new worlds and the new natural sciences stimulated a different concept of visible reality” that could be rationalized by observing patterns in data extracted from travelogues.⁴

China has exerted its influence on the European imagination since the times of ancient Rome. Caravans of silk regularly arrived from eastern to western Asia and then finally to Europe, adding exotic flair to the lives of Roman nobles. However, until the mushrooming of European trade and information networks in the fifteenth century, Europeans maintained regular, direct contact with neither the lost kingdom of Prester John nor the quasi-mythical Cathay of Marco Polo. As the Portuguese and Spanish established a lasting presence in East Asia, this situation began to change. Due to the commercial and organizational necessity of dissecting new cultures, Iberian merchants and Catholic Jesuits composed the notes, studies, and research that also became the new wave of information on exotic kingdoms in East Asia. More importantly, in their research on China, the Jesuits did not view them as savages like cultures in the New World. Instead, the Jesuits grudgingly viewed the Chinese as at least equals with whom scholars needed

² Honour, Hugh, *Chinoiserie: the vision of Cathay* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 21

³ Adams, Percy G., *Travelers and travel liars, 1660-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 9

⁴ Standaert, N. 2005. "Seventeenth-century European Images of China". *China Review International*. 12 (1): 258

to reason by introducing science, technology and open theoretical discussion in order to win respect.⁵ Historically, it can be argued that Europeans developed an image of China as a model civilization.

Following the popularization of Marco Polo's travelogue about East Asia from the first publication of the fifteenth century, Europeans went wild over mythical Cathay and developed a comprehensive conception of the kingdom based on the notes. Jonathan Spence summarized this China as a "benevolently ruled dictatorship, colossal in scale, decorous in customs, rich in trade, highly urbanized, inventive in commercial dealings, and weak in the ways of war."⁶ A huge demand for information on China had gained speed, and Europeans who increasingly ventured outside of their continent and encountered the Middle Kingdom recorded these wild observations for practical necessity, organizational objectives, sheer curiosity, or the profitability of selling such information.

By the mid-sixteenth century, Spanish and Portuguese maritime trading networks as well as Jesuit missionaries had a significant presence in East Asia, and reports of varying quality that built on Polo's conception began to flow back to Europe. Prior to Nieuhof's report, the Jesuits, beginning with the huge success of leaders such as Matteo Ricci during the mid-Ming dynasty, managed to infiltrate the Emperor's bureaucracy and piece together a well-informed perspective of Ming and Qing China previously inaccessible to Europeans. While reports from Iberian and Catholic sources introduced huge amounts of travel information to the European imagination, the Dutch gradually contributed more of their travel experiences to the overall body of information available. The VOC became the most important sponsor of these new information networks.

⁵ Pagden, Anthony. 2000, Preface to *Facing each other: the world's perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the world*. Volume 31, pt. 1. Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate/Variorum, xxix.

⁶ Spence, Jonathan D. 1998. *The Chan's great continent: China in western minds*. New York: W.W. Norton, 3.

After its founding in 1602, the VOC had rapidly consolidated its dominance of important trading hubs in East and Southeast Asia. As an instrument of both trade and war, the VOC encountered not only Iberian powers that had already established key encampments in Malacca, Macao and Deshima but also Chinese merchant and military networks.⁷ By mid-century, the VOC dominated not only European rivals but also began displacing the intra-Asian trade networks dominated by seafaring kingdoms and empires. Although the Dutch had become the premier Western maritime power in East Asia by 1641 with the capture of the Malacca straits, the Ming-Qing civil war engulfing China and the *Bakuhau taisei* policy of Tokugawa Japan halted Dutch advances into the two most prized markets in Asia.⁸ However, the Dutch retained a lasting presence in Deshima under the Tokugawa shogunate and used it to maintain access to Chinese goods sold by Japanese middlemen benefitting from formal relations with the Chinese emperors.

Although restricted to a role as middlemen, the Dutch East India Company profited enormously from the China trade. Between 1602 and 1657, the VOC had shipped over three million pieces of Chinese porcelain to Europe.⁹ However, before the gradual collapse of the Ming beginning in the mid seventeenth century, Dutch traders still struggled to gain an audience with the Emperor, much less a reliable official contact of any sort in the Heavenly Kingdom itself. Dutch ports were even more strictly limited to holdings in Southeast Asia, Deshima, and Taiwan after Jan Coen's botched Macau invasion of 1622. Therefore, the Dutch never successfully established profitable direct trade with the Middle Kingdom. Thus, between 1655

⁷ Blussé, Leonard. 1996. "No Boats to China. The Dutch East India Company and the Changing Pattern of the China Sea Trade, 1635-1690". *Modern Asian Studies*. 30 (1): 61-62.

⁸ *Ibid*, 62.

⁹ Sweetman, John. 1988. *The Oriental obsession: Islamic inspiration in British and American art and architecture, 1500-1920*. Cambridge studies in the history of art. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 50

and 1657, a Johan Nieuhof accompanied a VOC embassy to the Shunzhi emperor's court in order to secure a free trade agreement with the Shunzhi emperor in Peking.

After an initial attempt in 1653, the governors of the Dutch East India Company decided in 1655 to dispatch a formal embassy with generous financial backing led by Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer to Canton in order to seek out a free trade agreement. Johan Nieuhof accompanied them as a purser and cosmographer of sorts, tasked by the Director of the Dutch East India Company, Johan Maetsuycker, with surveying the people, customs, geography, and economy of the kingdom.¹⁰ Prior to Nieuhof's report, the Jesuits, beginning with the huge success of leaders such as Matteo Ricci during the mid-Ming dynasty, managed to infiltrate the Emperor's bureaucracy and piece together a well-informed perspective China previously inaccessible to Europeans. Through Jesuit reporting, China contributed the major exotic influence in Europe. Thus, the notes which later became a travelogue were produced by combining his firsthand observations with information from the works of Trigault, Samedo, and Martini.¹¹ Jesuit information about China that had travelled back to Europe was indispensable in creating any well-informed picture of China. However, Nieuhof's perspective of China added new information to the portrait that had been circulated among Europeans, and this will be discussed later.

Although the veracity and accuracy of merchant travelogues such as Nieuhof's have been criticized on several grounds, the records still contain valuable information recorded with a conscious effort to maintain accuracy. After all, Nieuhof was producing a report for the directors

¹⁰ Nieuhof, Johannes, Pieter de Goyer, Jacob de Keizer, John Ogilby, Athanasius Kircher, and Johann Adam Schall von Bell. 1673. *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China deliver'd by their excellencies, Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer, at his imperial city of Peking : wherein the cities, towns, villages, ports, rivers, &c. in their passages from Canton to Peking are ingeniously describ'd.* London: Printed by the Author at his house in White-Friers, 3.

¹¹ Lach, Donald F., and Edwin J. Van Kley. 1965. *Asia in the making of Europe.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1568, 483

of the Dutch East India Company, a secular organization with a worldly focus and need for Nieuhof's account in particular convey mostly banal, dry information whereas the Jesuit often explored cultural and academic topics that led to ideological conflict with a host culture. As a skilled sketcher and experienced explorer, Nieuhof's was able to generate some 81 sketches that were later included without substantial editing in the final product that van Meurs and Nieuhof's brother created. In a review of Nieuhof's and the earlier van Linschoten's sketches, Nicholas Standaert raised the question: are the sketches depictions of truth or "imaginative embellishments of themes?"¹² Although this is a difficult question to answer, the sketches reflect China from the perspective of a non-Jesuit observer.

Additionally, Nieuhof's notes were important for other reasons. Nieuhof's notes, particularly the detailed sketches, sparked a new craze for Chinese gardens latter 17th century Europe.¹³ More importantly, Lach had described the recorded observations of traders in China as somewhat crude and lacking the thoroughness of Jesuit observers who had attained proficiency in Chinese language and culture. However, men such as Nieuhof frequently encountered the "dregs of Chinese society," petty local and provincial bureaucrats, merchants, laborers, and soldiers. Thus, European merchant and soldier notes often contradicted more flattering Jesuit accounts by communicating accounts of elaborate, stifling bureaucracy led by men of dubious moral and ethical character.¹⁴ Moreover Nieuhof's account is free from the ideological constraints of the Jesuit literature.

While Nieuhof was dispatched to China in order to assemble a record of a trade mission, the Jesuits mission in China, as in all parts of the world, was to win converts. According to Jacques Vernet, "the Chinese judged in terms of their own traditions what the Europeans brought. What

¹² Standaert, N. 2005. "Seventeenth-century European Images of China," 258.

¹³ Sweetman, John, *The Oriental obsession*, 68.

¹⁴ Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, 1568.

appeared to fit these traditions – or rather what could be easily integrated – was accepted . . . all things considered, the Chinese proved quite reticent vis-à-vis the theology but fairly open to the scientific contributions of the West.”¹⁵ Thus, the Jesuits worked to incorporate scientific knowledge into their theological arguments in order to impress Chinese literati and win more converts.¹⁶ Moreover, Jesuit developed strong opinions about Asian religions such as Buddhism and Asian philosophic learnings such as Confucianism. The Jesuits not only reviled Buddhism for being a “debased form of Christianity,” but the Confucian literati’s reviling of Buddhism also tainted Jesuit perceptions of East Asian religions.¹⁷ Thus, while the Jesuits were certainly more familiar with China than Nieuhof was and had first-hand, in country experience combined with theoretical and academic grounding, ideological loyalties created a clear *modus operandi* for Jesuit operations that led to irreconcilable differences between Chinese literati and Jesuits. Nieuhof, on the other hand, contributed an outsider’s objectivity to observations of the Chinese.

Furthermore, Nieuhof’s notes accurately reflect the Jesuit establishment within China, led by the Portuguese actively lobbying against the Dutch. The final travelogue that was sold and marketed to Europe claimed that the Portuguese had bribed Jesuits and Chinese bureaucrats in Peking to oppose any trading with the Dutch. Moreover, the Portuguese spread rumors that the Dutch were pirates interested in not only looting Portuguese settlements but also Chinese settlements.¹⁸ Nieuhof himself described his uncertainty about securing the imperial court’s trust because of the Portuguese slander and the Dutch presence on Taiwan.¹⁹ The rivalries among

¹⁵ Gernet, Jacques, “Christian and Chinese Visions of the World in the Seventeenth Century” in *Facing each other: the world's perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the world*, ed. Anthony Pagden et al. Volume 31, pt. 1. (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate/Variorum, 2000), 275.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 263.

¹⁷ Lach and Van Kley, “Asia in the Eyes of Europe: The Seventeenth Century” in *Facing each other: the world's perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the world*, ed. Anthony Pagden et al. Volume 31, pt. 1. (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate/Variorum), 248.

¹⁸ Nieuhof, Johannes et al. *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces*, 112.

¹⁹ Blusse, Zhuang, and Nieuhof. “*He shi chu fang Zhongguo ji" yan jiu*, 86-87.

major European trading powers manifested themselves in other ways, creating a near lawless maritime Asia saturated with competing maritime powers.

Although the Spanish and Dutch had signed an agreement in Europe that ended open conflict, the huge Asia theatre remained a no-holds-barred warzone. The Dutch had seized Portuguese holdings in Malaysia and burned down crops to eliminate competition.²⁰ Additionally, non-European players from East and Southeast Asia as well as military expeditions from Islamic empires fought with and against Europeans. In particular, Tonio Andrade reminds us of the Ya'rubi dynasty of Oman that began a naval conquest of Portuguese holdings through maritime West Asia and East Africa.²¹ Finally, and most importantly, pirate and mercenary forces operating both beyond the control of and in collaboration with countless maritime powers operating within Asia formed important game-changing factions that continued to plague commercial networks and state control of sea lanes and territories. According to Andrade's work on privateering during the Ming and Qing dynasty, the first Ming Emperor's famous Maritime Prohibition that restricted maritime trade with China to the operations of official tribute missions, and this set of rules established a precedent for increased smuggling through the ports of southern China and an increasing amount of extravagance in tributes required to satisfy the demands of official trade missions.²² Eventually, the burden of enforcing these restrictions, disastrous yet ultimately successful wars against Japanese pirates along the eastern seaboard, and

²⁰ Morse, Hosea Ballou, *The chronicles of the East India company, trading to China 1635-1834*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926, 14.

²¹ Andrade, Tonio, "Beyond Guns, Germs and Steel: European Expansion and Maritime Asia, 1400-1750. *The Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (Brill: 2010), 175.

²² Andrade, Tonio. University of Hawaii Press, 2005. "The Company's Chinese Pirates: How the Dutch East India Company Tried to Lead a Coalition of Pirates to War against China, 1621-1662. *Journal of World History*, Volume 15, Number 4 (University of Hawaii Press 2005), 418.

the increasing threat from the tribes of China's northern steppes led to repeal of the Maritime Prohibition in 1567.²³

While the repeal still restricted foreigners to trading in China under the supervision of trade missions, Chinese traders were allowed to travel and trade abroad under the conditions that they paid taxes, obtained licenses and abstained from trade with Japan. The new policy effectively cut rates of smuggling and privateering in Asia, but the prohibition against trading with Japan, a nation perceived as being friendly to pirates, created opportunities for Europeans, first the Portuguese and later the Dutch, to act as intermediaries in the Asian trade.²⁴ The embassy sent to Peking sought to consolidate and streamline the VOC's intermediary role in Asia by establishing a factory directly on Chinese soil.

European colonial powers exploited rivalries among local Asian rulers in order to maintain conditions favorable to commercial interests. In Dutch-Asian relations, the VOC often supplied local rulers with the means of enforcing a dominant position among local competitors and avoided direct control of territory that would require larger amounts of officials and colonists during the seventeenth century. Moreover, the Dutch were obliged to cooperate with larger powers such as China and Japan.²⁵ The contemporary trade empires sought to build monopolies and destroy competitors at any cost. Within this context, since the establishment of the Dutch East India Company in 1602, the Portuguese had experienced a gradual whittling away of their privileged trading position in East Asia.

Before describing Nieuhof's experience in China, it is necessary to briefly recap Chinese-European relations before the 1650s. After the European powers found themselves cut off from

²³ Blussé, Leonard, "No Boats to China," 57-58.

²⁴ Andrade, Tonio, "The Company's Chinese Pirates," 420.

²⁵ Zandvliet, K., and Leonard Blussé. 2002. *The Dutch encounter with Asia, 1600-1950*. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 32.

routes to the East by Muslim empires in western Asia, they took to the sea in order to gain access to markets. The first of these European powers to both reach Asia and establish a strong presence were the Portuguese and Spanish.

As European powers entered Asia and created new trading networks among the other Asian powers competing for trade and influence, resulting economic pressures led to a deterioration of economic conditions. Although a massive inflow of New World silver from Portuguese and Spanish beginning in the 1570s greatly increased disposable hard specie in East Asia, the large influxes eventually resulted in excessive speculation, inflation, and erratic growth in the Ming empire. To make matters worse, when Dutch and English pirates harassed Iberian specie shipping in the seventeenth century, expected inflows plummeted and forced the ratio of silver to copper into decline. Chinese peasants suffered terribly and added to the instability caused by the incursions of northern nomads into the northern Ming empire, for they were required to pay all taxes in silver even though local trade was conducted through the medium of copper.²⁶ While economic pressures burdened the Chinese empire, political upheavals were also underway.

The Ming-Qing civil war provided a golden opportunity for the Dutch to discuss an ambitious set of objectives with a new set of leaders. Although 1644 marks the end of the Ming dynasty in the official records of China, the date simply signifies the fall of Beijing to Manchu invaders. While Nieuhof and his predecessors attempted contact with the southern commercial ports, the imperial bureaucracy of Beijing kept a close tab on the activities. The text within the published travelogue continually depicts the bureaucratic hassle suffered by the embassy in Canton, a city on the southern edge of the empire that had only recently been pacified by the new regime. Canton had only fallen to the Manchus in 1647, and powerful merchants and local bureaucrats

²⁶ Spence, Jonathan D. 1990. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: Norton, 20

far away from Beijing exerted enormous influence independent of the Beijing court.²⁷ Nieuhof described the intricate bureaucracy watching over the embassy's every move and the tenuous position of the vice-roys supervising their stay in Canton. More importantly, Nieuhof juxtaposed the devastation and conquest of Canton less than a decade earlier with levels of prosperity it had successfully reattained by the mid 1650s.²⁸

Despite the return to prosperity, Nieuhof clearly reflects the still tenuous peace in Canton during the '50s, with clear references to the brutality of the Tartar conquerors in fresh memory, stating "I was credibly inform'd, that during the space of 80 days, above eight thousand were kill'd in cold blood by the *Tartars*. Some (amongst which the Jesuit *Martinus* is one, in his Book of the *Tartar War*) say, that there were slain above one hundred thousand; which is not altogether improbable, in regard of the great number there penn'd up."²⁹ The interest in Manchu conquest that started in the first half of the seventeenth century with the Manchu incursions into northern China continues in Nieuhof's travelogue. These events raised a significant amount of interest in the imminent changes that China was bound to undergo and also served "to move China into the European awareness, and for a time, informed Europeans seemed conscious of living in the same world with the Chinese"³⁰ The records and stories of embassies and merchant traveling to Europe added a new perspective to the literature that Dutch printing presses were producing.

European embassies to China were crucial in upgrading the quality of information exchange between East and West. The Ming-Qing political upheavals, like the economic and military

²⁷ Spence, Jonathan D. 1990. *The search for modern China*. New York: Norton, 36

²⁸ Nieuhof, Johannes, Pieter de Goyer, Jacob de Keizer, John Ogilby, Athanasius Kircher, and Johann Adam Schall von Bell. 1673. *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China deliver'd by their excellencies, Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer, at his imperial city of Peking : wherein the cities, towns, villages, ports, rivers, &c. in their passages from Canton to Peking are ingeniously describ'd*. London: Printed by the Author at his house in White-Friers, 38-39.

²⁹ Nieuhof, Johannes et al, *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces*, 39.

³⁰ Lach, Donald F. and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, 1663.

upheavals underway in maritime Asia, resulted in a confluence of factors that demanded greater volumes and quality of information for the purpose of conducting European business in new profitable networks. According to Spence, over time, the overall effect of the embassies was to bring so much new information on China into the West that the new lines of debate underwent a major shift: they moved away from the confines of the missionaries, and into a fresh domain of realistic reportage, some of it exceedingly frank.³¹ However, both the secular writers and the publishers themselves liberally extracted information from previous Jesuit reports in order to create encyclopedic works that would gain more credibility in the eyes of an educated audience.³² The encyclopedic quality of Nieuhof's travelogue in particular exemplifies this trend among the publishers of Europe, and aspects of the creation of Nieuhof's work within the context of the Amsterdam publishing industry must be investigated further.

Amsterdam became the center of the international book trade and Europe's dominant intellectual entrepot by the mid-17th century.³³ Travelogues were translated into the major languages of Europe and marketed to large audiences of literate Europeans. Nieuhof's accounts were ripe materials for a group of publishing entrepreneurs searching for marketable stories and a growing audience of readers interested in the far away Middle Kingdom for a variety of reasons.

First, the 17th century United Provinces was a hotbed of artistic and cultural creation. In particular, the thriving book trade became a multi-layered, highly complex industry with regional specializations. Within the national market itself, the book trade became increasingly

³¹ Spence, Jonathan D, *The Chan's great continent: China in western minds*, 42

³² Lach and Van Kley, "Asia in the Eyes of Europe: The Seventeenth Century" in *Facing each other: the world's perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the world*, ed. Anthony Pagden et al. Volume 31, pt. 1. (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate/Variorum), 244.

³³ Gibbs, G.C. *The role of the Dutch Republic as the intellectual entrepot of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 86 (1971), 323.

competitive and saturated throughout the seventeenth century. However, pliers of the craft managed to eke out razor thin profit margins by marketing increasingly specialized goods to expanding consumer bases in the Netherlands and internationalizing their trades.³⁴ Additionally, increasing trade specialization in smaller, more regional cities, such as the gravitation towards academic publishing in Leiden, expanded the scope of the trade.³⁵ Conversely, the Amsterdam book trade as an industry of an advanced economy producing specialized commodities subject to supply and demand within a market of consumers with increasing purchasing power.³⁶ The position of books within Amsterdam grew alongside other industries as well and signified an overall prosperity in the United Provinces during its Golden Age as much of Europe struggled with the legacy of the devastating Thirty Years' War.

Historians of art have also traced the development of painting markets in the Golden Age Netherlands. Like books, paintings also played a role in the lives of an expanding consumer base of burghers as well as the traditional market for wealthy art lovers. The growth of painting markets for burghers and high end consumers through statistical trends such as the absolute amount of painters in Amsterdam each decade as well as painters who had married and started families according to local archive records.³⁷ However, the Third Anglo-Dutch war between 1672 and 1674, disastrous to the United Provinces and Amsterdam in particular, bottomed out the amounts of both native and immigrant artists plying their trade.³⁸

³⁴ Cruz, Laura, "The Geographic Extent of the Dutch Book Trade in the 17th Century – An Old Question Revisited" in *Boundaries and their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*, eds. Kaplan, Benjamin, Marybeth Carlson and Laura Cruz (Leiden: Brill 2009), 121.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 132.

³⁶ Hoftijzer, Paul, "Metropolis of print: the Amsterdam book trade in the seventeenth century" in *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London*, ed. Patrick O'Brien. (Cambridge University Press 2001), 251.

³⁷ Bok, Marten Jan, "The rise of Amsterdam as a cultural centre: the market for paintings, 1580-1680" in *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London*, ed. Patrick O'Brien (Cambridge University Press 2001), 205.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 192.

Overall, publishing travelogues in the seventeenth century, like selling paintings, was a modestly profitable venture that reaped modest rewards, and contemporary Dutch publishers largely considered books to be commodities sold on a market.³⁹ Among the most notorious Amsterdam publishers of latter half of the seventeenth century was Jacob van Meurs. He was responsible for the assembly of Nieuhof's notes into a travelogue and also produced a prodigious amount of other travelogues, including Montanus' account of Dutch embassies to Japan and Dapper's account of African exploration as well as a second embassy to China in 1670.⁴⁰ Additionally, van Meurs, also an engraver, produced more than 150 copper plates on the basis of Nieuhof's original drawings and sketches of the journey, the first popularized sketches of a realistic China drawn by an eyewitness.⁴¹ However, the publication of Nieuhof's travel notes ignited the career of van Meurs.⁴² The work was so successful that it was translated at least 13 times between 1665 and 1700.⁴³ In this study, the researcher has used an edition that was translated and assembled by John Ogilby, a contemporary London printer who "poached, pirated and published Dutch texts."⁴⁴

Furthermore, the finished products were items marketed to educated middle and upper classes. These types of travelogues about Asia were published primarily at Europe's major city centers and went through printing runs ranging between 250 and 1,000 with regular reprints and new

³⁹ Boterbloem, Kees, *The fiction and reality of Jan Struys: a seventeenth-century Dutch globetrotter*, (Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 135.

⁴⁰ Hesselink, Reinier H "Memorable Embassies: the secret history of Arnoldus Montanus' Gedenkwaardige Gesantschappen". *Quaerendo*. 32 (1/2), 2002: 104.

⁴¹ Standaert, N. 2005. "Seventeenth-century European Images of China," 255-256.

⁴² Wills, Jr., John. 2009. "Author, Publisher, Patron, World: A Case Study of Old Books and Global Consciousness". *Journal of Early Modern History*. 13 (5): 395

⁴³ Lach and Van Kley, "Asia in the Eyes of Europe: the Seventeenth Century," in *Facing each other: the world's perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the world*, ed. Anthony Pagden. Volume 31, pt. 1 (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate/Variorum, 2000), 245.

⁴⁴ Kaplan, Benjamin, Marybeth Carlson and Laura Cruz. 2009. *Boundaries and their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*. Leiden: Brill, 53.

editions⁴⁵. Frequently, these tomes within the genre were “handsome, leather bound volumes in folio, richly illustrated and obviously much more than just encyclopedic compendia of geographical knowledge.”⁴⁶ Most importantly, these books were rather expensive and appealing to a class of the well-to-do able to afford such works, so van Meurs profited modestly in this niche of travelogue publishing. Much like Nieuhof, painters, largely plying their trade as entrepreneurs in the Dutch markets, also sought out niches in the market through ‘product innovation’ that would enable a painter to corner a particular form of painting that could generate enough demands from customers to make a modest profit.⁴⁷ A higher class of consumers increasingly bought not only specialized travelogues but also other specialized categories of luxury items, such as paintings. Recently, scholars have also looked deeper into the ideas that flooded the Netherlands during the Golden Age, especially ideas from the new mercantile empire of the VOC. These ideas and images of far away, exotic places, much like the physical products and works that represented them, created other lines of inquiry and discussion among the different strata of a relatively literate Dutch Golden Age population.

Wills argued that the “even-handed depictions of the realities of many civilizations . . . contributed to the broad turn toward an anti-dogmatic empiricism that was a conspicuous strand in Dutch culture in these years, and even to the ‘Radical Enlightenment’ fringes of that trend.”⁴⁸ Other scholars have also recently discussed the shift of geographical and travel texts from the polemical and political to the encyclopedia and empirical. In his 2010 article about Jan van

⁴⁵ Lach and Van Kley, “Asia in the Eyes of Europe: the Seventeenth Century,” in *Facing each other: the world's perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the world*, ed. Anthony Pagden. Volume 31, pt. 1 (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate/Variorum, 2000), 245.

⁴⁶ Hesselink, Reinier H, "Memorable Embassies," 105.

⁴⁷ Bok, Marten Jan, “The rise of Amsterdam as a cultural centre: the market for paintings, 1580-1680” in *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London*, ed. O’Brien, Patrick. (Cambridge University Press, 2001) 201.

⁴⁸ Wills, Jr., John. 2009. "Author, Publisher, Patron, World: A Case Study of Old Books and Global Consciousness," 376.

Linschoeten's 1600 journey to China, Saldanha argued that the journey contributed to an expansion of Dutch geographical knowledge and expanded consciousness of the outside world. This expanded consciousness opened a new geographical realm which merchants and leaders could shape, create, and exploit.⁴⁹ Schmidt defined the ability to broaden these geographical boundaries as a newly found power to make real and imagined boundaries that define the power of imperial expansion and colonial control.⁵⁰

However, by Nieuhof's time in the mid-seventeenth century, the role of the traveler, intercultural observer and information expanding awareness of the cultural other had lost imperial undertones in the Dutch Republic. Unsurprisingly, as traditional Iberian nemeses lost their power in maritime trading networks, the Dutch, who in 1648 had concluded the contemporary conflagrations in Europe with an enhanced international position, had less to fear from Catholic enemies. Hesselink went so far as to call these travelogues "monuments to Dutch glory."⁵¹ However, by the time of van Meurs, the works were not written as monuments to patriotic sentiment. Rather, the works were a part of a niche field in publishing. Thus, Schmidt pointed out that throughout the seventeenth century, geographical works gradually lost polemical assertions and instead focus on presenting the novel and exotic.⁵²

Dutch travel and geographical literature throughout the period tended to evolve in this manner throughout the period after van Linschoeten's ground-breaking work. Additionally, in recent research about the Dutch in the New Netherland, scholars have also elaborated on Dutch

⁴⁹ Saldanha, Arun, "The Itineraries of Geography: Jan Huygen van Linschoten's Itinerario and Dutch Expeditions to the Indian Ocean, 1594-1602" (*Annals of the Association of American Geographers* vol. 101 issue 1, 2010), 151.

⁵⁰ Schmidt, Benjamin, "Geography Unbound – Boundaries and the Exotic World in the Early Enlightenment" in *Boundaries and their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*, eds. Kaplan, Benjamin, Marybeth Carlson and Laura Cruz (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 36.

⁵¹ Hesselink, Reinier H, "Memorable Embassies," 105.

⁵² Schmidt, Benjamin, "Geography Unbound – Boundaries and the Exotic World in the Early Enlightenment" in *Boundaries and their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*, eds. Kaplan, Benjamin, Marybeth Carlson and Laura Cruz (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 42.

pragmatism through research on intercultural communication and linguistic patterns in border areas around settlements within the trading network. Meuwese's work on pragmatic Dutch intercultural mediators among the usually non-belligerent Mohawks of the Upper Hudson Valley argued that Dutch mediators, though largely uninterested in the extremes of conquest on the one hand and "going native" on the other hand, were still interested in both bridging the Mohawk and Dutch for the sake of maintaining trading relations and maintaining a distinct identity as Dutch colonists.⁵³

Although worldly embassies armed with better weaponry began to tap markets within Asia during the seventeenth century, there was little sense of a superior and developed European world.⁵⁴ In fact, contemporary European intellectuals continued the Jesuit idealization of Chinese civilization. The recent ravages of the continent-wide Thirty Years' War caused intellectuals to begin searching for and experimenting with new models of governance in Europe, and many aspects of Chinese society were worth emulating. As informed Jesuit observers continued to publish and send information about China back to Europe, Europeans were impressed with the immense and orderly bureaucracy that effectively checked the power of the emperor.⁵⁵ Guo Tuzhang and Leonard Blussé argued that the Europeans from the imminent era of Enlightenment actively looked towards the outside to increase their knowledge of foreign ideas worth consideration and application to Europe's situation.⁵⁶ Therefore, China, an empire that had impressed Europeans for generations, could serve as a wellspring of ideas for remedying Europe's troubles. While much of Europe languished from both the carnage of the Thirty Years'

⁵³ Meuwese, Mark, "Pragmatic Agents of Empire – Dutch Intercultural Mediators among the Mohawks in Seventeenth-century New Netherland" in *Boundaries and their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*, eds. Kaplan, Benjamin, Marybeth Carlson and Laura Cruz (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 154.

⁵⁴ Gaastra, F. S. 2003. *The Dutch East India Company: expansion and decline*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers., 37

⁵⁵ Lach and Van Kley, "Asia in the Eyes of Europe: the Seventeenth Century," in *Facing each other: the world's perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the world*, ed. Anthony Pagden. Volume 31, pt. 1 (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate/Variorum, 2000), 253.

⁵⁶ Blussé, Leonard, Guotu Zhuang, and Johannes Nieuhof, "*He shi chu fang Zhongguo ji" yan jiu*, 2.

War and a major economic recession that began in the 1650s, Amsterdam continued to prosper as the hub of the Dutch maritime empire and a destination for European talent and capital.

Audiences and consumers of these types of works also steadily increased particularly in the Netherlands. By the mid-seventeenth century, Amsterdam had become the intellectual center and printing press of Europe. Based on the ability to sign Amsterdam marriage records, researchers inferred that a full half of all males and third of all females had at least a tertiary education.⁵⁷ Increasing education levels among the Dutch population also contributed to an increase in overall sales of books, thus establishing the Dutch book trade as an economic activity benefiting from increasing specialization. Craig Harline in his study of pamphlets, printing and political culture noted that the number of booksellers and printers in the Netherlands “increased perhaps eightfold between 1565 and 1648.” Furthermore, Harline rightfully noted that these booksellers were, first and foremost, sellers. The explosion in printing was not generated by curious historians and bibliographers printing in support of ideology or pursuit of leisure.⁵⁸ Thus, booksellers actively looked for business opportunities in publishing and, thus, paid attention to public discourse on current issues in order to identify market demands. Harline even went so far as to say that “book dealers tried to take advantage of a desire, at time almost a mania, for news of political and other current events in the Republic.”⁵⁹ As the intellectual and publishing center of Europe and host to globally significant centers of commerce and academia, the United Provinces was host to an exchange of information, goods and world news.

⁵⁷ Hoftijzer, Paul, “Metropolis of print: the Amsterdam book trade in the seventeenth century” in *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London*, ed. Patrick O’Brien. (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 254.

⁵⁸ Harline, Craig. 1987. *Pamphlets, printing, and political culture in the early Dutch Republic*. Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 72.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 78.

To a 17th century growing maritime power, “The most tangible picture of the shipping trade with Asia is naturally provided by the descriptions of the brave, energetic and dangerous voyages to Asia. Sending out large, heavily manned and richly loaded ships to unknown destinations definitely did have something spectacular about it – the many travel stories and ship’s logs that were published in the 17th century are evidence of the great interest shown in the voyages by those living at the time. But as time went by the voyages became more commonplace and took place according to more or less fixed time schedules.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, the interconnectedness of Dutch urbanites within the networks of international trade networks increasingly dominated by the VOC created an opportunity for a confluence of business interests among the powerful Witsen family, the Nieuhofs, and Jacob van Meurs. While other publishers struggled to make it through the hard times that fell upon publishers and painters due to the effects of the Third Anglo-Dutch War, van Meurs’ operation benefitted from the patronage of the Witsen family. Moreover, Johan Nieuhof himself was appointed steward of the embassy on the recommendation of Cornelis Witsen.⁶¹

It can be argued that Van Meurs’ decision to create an encyclopedic work from Nieuhof’s notes appealed to the expectations and world views of an increasingly educated and secularly engaged middle and upper-middle class of consumers. In particular, a relatively well educated populace in the Netherlands became increasingly interested in exotic curiosities originating from the far-flung corners of the VOC’s trading empire and developed interest in objects suited for

⁶⁰ Gaastra, F. S. 2003. *The Dutch East India Company: expansion and decline*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers., 111

⁶¹ Wills, “Author, Publisher, Patron, World“, 21.

curiosity cabinets and the life sciences in general.⁶² This curiosity for the exotic was perhaps exemplified by the Tulip Mania between 1636 and 1637.

Schama pointed out that only a “deeply bourgeois culture” could possibly have transformed something as banal as tulips into a speculative trophy. Unlike Chinese porcelain or Turkish rugs, as soon as the rare flower could be domesticated in the United Provinces for a mass market with insatiable demand, a speculative frenzy for authentic goods rather than knock-offs became possible.⁶³ As Bianchi stated, the very attraction to the flower laid in the fact that the endless varieties of tulip that arose were at once “both recognizable and new, both predictable and surprising.”⁶⁴ Thus, in this situation, as well, entrepreneurs identified a niche for curious items of marginal use to consumers. China represented both a cultural other and a set of ideas that book sellers such as van Meurs could mold into marketable and engaging stories.

To a 17th century growing maritime power, “The most tangible picture of the shipping trade with Asia is naturally provided by the descriptions of the brave, energetic and dangerous voyages to Asia. Sending out large, heavily manned and richly loaded ships to unknown destinations definitely did have something spectacular about it – the many travel stories and ship’s logs that were published in the 17th century are evidence of the great interest shown in the voyages by those living at the time. But as time went by the voyages became more commonplace and took place according to more or less fixed time schedules.”⁶⁵ Thus, images of ships and returned crews eventually became a routine part of life in Dutch seaports and centers of commerce that

⁶² Davids, Karel, “Amsterdam as a centre of learning in the Dutch golden age, c. 1580-1700” in *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London*, ed. Patrick O’Brien (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 316.

⁶³ Schama, Simon, *The embarrassment of riches: an interpretation of Dutch culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 8.

⁶⁴ Berg, Maxine, and Helen Clifford, *Consumers and luxury: consumer culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 99.

⁶⁵ Gaastra, F. S., *The Dutch East India Company: expansion and decline* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers., 2003), 111

people across all strata experienced through seeing these ships, hearing the stories of the returned crews, and using the products that crews brought back.

Within van Meurs' niche of bookselling, large double-column folios, consumers purchased tomes filled with useful information that also functioned as "objects of conspicuous display, meant to be put on a bookstand in a fine library and discussed with a friend; in this way, very much part of the same elite culture as the famous 'cabinets of rarities' of the time."⁶⁶ Therefore, it is not surprising that Nieuhof's brother and van Meurs would insert original sketches into the work in order to increase the credibility of information and convince readers with an added layer of authority that the content was indeed genuinely and authentically exotic. Moreover, the sketches added newness to the predictable set of cosmographic survey material drawn from the Jesuits Trigault, Semedo and Martini and augmented by personal observations.⁶⁷

An encyclopedic rehashing of already established facts about China, conflicting ideas of China, and filler fills many of the pages within the final product assembled by van Meurs. The travelogue itself begins with an incoherent and disorganized overview of Western civilization, covering recent discoveries and developments shared by the Christian world, cartographic information gathered from uncited sources, and even a diatribe about the origins of China's name.⁶⁸ The original notebook contains none of this information, but, rather, begins with a short note from Nieuhof to the Amsterdam directors of the VOC and begins immediately introducing the embassy staff members and describing banal logistical information in a diary format divided into dated entries.⁶⁹ In his original note to the directors of Amsterdam, it should be noted that

⁶⁶ Wills, Jr., John. 2009. "Author, Publisher, Patron, World," 393.

⁶⁷ Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, 1670.

⁶⁸ Nieuhof, Johannes et al. *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces*, 1-36.

⁶⁹ Blussé, Leonard, Guotu Zhuang, and Johannes Nieuhof, "*He shi chu fang Zhongguo ji*" yan jiu, 47-49.

Nieuhof addresses his own limitations in compiling notes for his bosses. He notably describes himself as not proficient in essay writing and unable to communicate in Chinese.⁷⁰

However, Nieuhof does take a genuine interest in the Chinese throughout his notebook. Within the introductory letter to the VOC directors, he also comments on the Romanized spelling that reproduces the sound of Chinese characters and specifying Chinese units of measure.⁷¹ Moreover, he sticks to the task of gathering useful intelligence, dutifully noting names, distances and landmarks within the itinerary from Canton to Peking. Nieuhof's extensive experience as a mid-ranking VOC seaman and purser clearly shapes the type of information that Nieuhof presents within the diary. He also sticks to his mission to prepare a detailed report complete with nautical information, maps, the rankings and names of important officials, diplomatic customs, and monetary values of assorted items. However, because this information was not enough to make an exciting and marketable travelogue, a publisher could augment the original notes with conveniently available sketches from the journey and prior knowledge of China as drawn from Jesuit sources.

There are several reasons why van Meurs may have chosen to add so much extraneous information to the final product. First, these types of books were usually assembled by publishers with a target audience of a few hundred in mind. These few hundred were probably from a select group of individuals who collected these travelogues as a sort of hobby, and, thus, comprised a niche group of "fans" that were already familiar with the body of literature available on China. Also, Blusse and Zhuang point out that Nieuhof further describes the interest in his China journeys during the three month rest he took in Amsterdam during 1658 within the 1682 publishing of his journey to Indonesia. Eventually, before leaving again in 1658 for a new

⁷⁰ Ibid, 47.

⁷¹ Ibid, 47.

assignment with the VOC, Nieuhof gave his notes to his older brother Henri in Amsterdam, who probably added materials to the notes or modified the content.⁷² Thus, by the time van Meurs and Hendrik Nieuhof, Johan Nieuhof's brother, had transformed the original notes and sketches into the final product in 1665, the story had been circulated and modified for many years.

The most important aspect of this work is the glimpse that it offers into an era when there was no certainty in the fact that the West would gain the upper hand in Western-Chinese relations, much less grow to dominate the world. Andrade simply stated that the implicit narrative that much of European history post-1492 frequently leads the contemporary public and even history experts into believing that Europe pursued and achieved dominance over new territories, contacts and exchange networks during the early modern process of exploration.⁷³ This was never the case until the twentieth century when European imperial powers and imperial powers modeling themselves after Europeans, such as the United States and Japan, did indeed comprehensively dominate most of the world. Instead, Saldanha in his study of van Linschoten's *Itinerario*, one of the first popular Dutch travelogues about the Indian Ocean published in 1596, reminds us that the expansion of geographical imagination possible through a readership engaged with travelogues, if anything, underscores the fragility and uncertainty of early modern European networks.⁷⁴

Nieuhof certainly reminds us of the transitional period long before the dominance of Europeans and even the enormous increases in quality of life that characterize contemporary former imperial powers. Research into early modern travelogues comes at a timely juncture as the contemporary West finds itself heading towards a future that it does not dominate and, in

⁷² Ibid, 13.

⁷³ Andrade, Tonio. 2010. "Beyond Guns, Germs, and Steel," pg. 167.

⁷⁴ Saldanha, Arun, "The Itineraries of Geography," 151.

particular, coexisting with a China that has regained great influence in the world after successfully developing for three decades out of the effects of war, chaos and imperialism that gripped the country for nearly two centuries.

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