

## *Original Paper*

# Luxury Embodied and Artistic Exchange: Japanese Lacquer in the Dutch Golden Age

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### **Abstract**

*This paper conducts an in-depth exploration of the luxury concept encapsulated within Japanese lacquer during the Dutch Golden Age and its profound implications in cross-cultural exchanges. Through a detailed analysis of the trade history, wherein the Dutch East India Company (VOC) played a pivotal role in introducing Japanese lacquer to the Netherlands, its appearances in paintings that influenced Dutch art, and the emergence of imitations due to its high value, the multi-faceted nature of Japanese lacquer as a luxury item is revealed. In the 17th century, the advanced nautical technology of the Netherlands enabled global trade, and Japanese lacquer, with its exquisite craftsmanship and rarity, became a symbol of wealth and status. The VOC dominated the trade, providing customized lacquer for the aristocracy and using it in diplomatic exchanges. In paintings, its diverse styles led to cultural fusion and artistic innovation. The high price led to Dutch imitations, attesting to its luxury status. Overall, Japanese lacquer was a key luxury symbol, impacting Dutch society, art, and promoting cultural exchange, offering valuable insights into 17th-century Europe-Asia cultural interactions.*

### **Keywords**

*Japanese Lacquer, the Dutch Golden Age, Artistic Exchange, Cross-Cultural Influence*

## **1. Overview**

This study combines an analysis of Japanese lacquer during the Dutch Golden Age with an exploration of the concept of "luxury" in the 17th century. The term "luxury" is ubiquitous in commercial rhetoric, particularly in advertisements by retail giants, and is inextricably linked to notions of desirability and selling points (Christopher J. Berry, 1994). Japanese lacquerware, a premier decorative art form in Japan, has long captivated European audiences with its superior craftsmanship and intricate embellishments. The trade between Japan and Western countries commenced in 1542 with the arrival of the Portuguese, and Japanese lacquer quickly became a significant trade item. The Dutch East India

Company (VOC) further escalated this trade in the early 17th century, establishing a monopoly on Asian trade with Japan that would persist for two centuries.

The 17th century, known as the Dutch Golden Age, saw the Netherlands reach the pinnacle of global acclaim in trade, science, military, and the arts. The social hierarchy was increasingly determined by wealth, with the merchant class ascending to a position of dominance. This shift significantly influenced the art of the period, giving rise to still life and genre painting. Masters such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Frans Hals, Jan Vermeer, and Willem Claeszoon Heda, among others, emerged as leading figures in the world of art. The Japanese lacquerware depicted in these paintings serves as compelling evidence for this paper. The book by Christiaan J. A. Jörg and Oliver Impey, "Japanese Export Lacquer, 1580-1850" (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004), has been instrumental in my research, providing a detailed exposition of the history and evidence of Japanese export lacquer, including its trade with Denmark, Britain, and the Netherlands. The authors use a chronological approach to represent the evolution of lacquer styles, from Namban to intermediate and pictorial styles, making it an essential reference in the field. Martha Boyer's "Japanese Export Lacquers" (Martha Boyer, 1959) complements this by focusing on the lacquer pieces in the National Museum of Denmark, using them as a lens to discuss the historical and technical development of the Japanese lacquer industry, as well as the political and commercial relations between Europe and Japan from the mid-16th to the end of the 17th century. Additional insights have been gleaned from works by Madeleine Jarry, James C. Y. Watt, and Barbara Brennan Ford (1991), all of which have enriched my study. Christopher J. Berry's (n.d.) aforementioned book delves into the multifaceted concept of luxury, while dissertations such as Hidaka Kaori's "Japanese-European Cultural Exchange as Reflected in Japanese Export Lacquer of the 16th through 19th Centuries" and Oliver Impey's (1984) "Japanese Export Art of the Edo Period and its Influence on European Art" have provided further depth.

These references have equipped me with a wealth of knowledge, prompting an inquiry into whether Japanese lacquer symbolized luxury in the Dutch Golden Age. While these sources are thorough in their respective areas, they have not explicitly addressed the transcultural aspect of the Dutch desire for Japanese lacquer as a luxury in the 17th century. My intention is not to delve further into the development of shapes and decorations of export lacquer but to focus on the luxury concept within Japanese export lacquer during the Dutch Golden Age. Thus, I have gathered clues from these references to construct my argument.

The essay will be structured into four sections to elucidate my points. The first section will discuss the trade history, the Dutch East India Company, and the pricing of Japanese lacquer. I will begin with a brief description of the Dutch East India Company, as its establishment was a precondition for the trade. Following this, I will analyze the customization of Japanese lacquer, highlighting its exclusivity as a collectible for the wealthy class. I will also discuss instances of Japanese lacquer being used as diplomatic gifts. The subsequent chapter will introduce the styles of Japanese lacquer in the 17th century and their presence in Dutch Golden Age paintings. The fourth section will present the

imitations of Japanese lacquer in Dutch art, illustrating the desire for luxury and the worthiness of imitation. Finally, a conclusion will synthesize the findings.

## 2. Trade of Japanese Lacquer during Dutch Golden Age

### 2.1 A Brief Description of the VOC (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*)

In the 17th century, the Dutch East India Company, officially known in Dutch as the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), was established in 1602 as a formidable entity in global trade. The VOC was a conglomerate of six major Dutch trading companies that were granted a monopoly by the Dutch States-General on all trade activities east of the Cape of Good Hope. This stockholders' company was exclusive, with membership limited to a select group of affluent and distinguished burghers who held committee positions. Each of the six chambers within the VOC had its own directors and board, and a proportional number of delegates from these chambers came together to form the prestigious Board of the *Heren Zeventien*, or the Seventeen Gentlemen. This board was positioned hierarchically above the individual chambers and was responsible for overseeing the overall management of the VOC. The board consisted of a total of 60 directors, with 20 representing Amsterdam, 12 representing Zeeland, and the remaining four chambers each having seven directors. From these directors, the Board of *Heren Zeventien* was formed, comprising eight representatives from Amsterdam, four from Zeeland, and one from each of the other chambers, with the seventeenth directorship rotating between Zeeland and the other chambers. This arrangement, in theory, allowed for Amsterdam to potentially be outvoted, reflecting a carefully balanced structure of power and influence (Figure 1). The *Heren Zeventien* typically convened three times a year prior to 1751, with each meeting lasting a week or longer. The administration was managed by two secretaries, and the meetings in spring and autumn were strategically aligned with the patterns of sailing and trading. This scheduling ensured that the VOC's operations were in sync with the seasonal demands of international commerce.

The first ship of VOC to Japan, the *Roode Leeuw met Pijlen* and the *Griffioen*, arrived at Hirado on Kyushu in 1609. The merchants aboard met the survivors of the *Liefde* and travelled to Edo to ask for a trading-permission from the shogun to trade. This was granted under remarkably favorable conditions (Note 1). A near-disaster called Nuyts Affair (Note 2) which was cost by the Dutch themselves seriously threatened the trade of Dutch in Japan. This incident lead to five years stagnation on Dutch company trade (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 23).

Exports from Japan consisted mainly of minted gold, bar silver (excluded from export in 1668) and especially bar copper. Porcelain (since the late 1650s) and lacquer were important luxury items, as were soy sauce, paper and camphor. Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), a German surgeon who served the Company in Deshima in 1690-92, gives a long account of the VOC's trade in his *History of Japan* (1727). When discussing the return cargoes, he states that processed copper is the most important commodity: 12.000 to 20.000 picul annually. 'In addition', he writes, all sorts of japanned cabinets, boxes, chests of drawers and the like workmanship, all of the very best we can meet with (Note 3).

From then on, other European countries like: France and Germany got in touch with lacquer through the VOC.



**Figure 1. The Installation of William V as Commander of the VOC in the Meeting of Heren XVII in Amsterdam on 1 July 1768. Engraving, H.43, W.56 cm. Private Collection.**

## 2.2 Customized Japanese Lacquer

Before the Dutch arrived in Japan, The Portuguese had already lacquer trade with Japan, In the city of Kyoto a large numbers of workshops existed. These workshops had free access to the foreign merchants and so they were able to explain directly to the craftsmen how they wanted their orders to be made. After 1602, merchants of the VOC frequently visited Japan, this advantage provided favorable conditions for the development of trade between the Netherlands and Japan. The Dutch merchants commissioned Japanese lacquer makers to produce the goods of western flavor for sale back in their country. These objects were western in form but were decorated with Japanese designs in Japanese techniques (James C. Y. Watt & Barbara Brennan Ford, 1991, 170). According to many surviving records of merchants who ordered many lacquer objects from the Kyoto workshops. A letter written in 1617 by Will Adams provide evidence, “*about fifty craftsmen were employed day and night making lacquer in just one of the Kyoto shops that supplied the European trade*” (Note 4).

Besides the official trade, there was also private trading. Since the private trade lacks of evidence, for instance letters, orders, invoices and any other testifies were almost deficient. So some of the Japanese lacquer objects are difficult to distinguished whether it belonged to company trade or private trade. As

Christiaan J. A. Jörg said: we can only assume that a piece was a private order if it has obvious features. For instance, some dishes, plates, boxes and shields with armorials decorations. These are privately bought lacquers, which are customization for some families and nobles.

An exact example in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam is a dish with a black-lacquers ground and the arms of the Huydecoper family in gold, silver and red lacquer in the center, bushy flower scroll on the rim. (Figure 2) *This dish, with its typically low, wide, flat rim and slightly upturned edge, was copied from a pewter example. It was perhaps made for Joan Huydecoper (1625-1704), burgomaster of Amsterdam with intervals, in the period 1673-93, and Director of the VOC's Amsterdam Chamber since 1666. He had good contacts with Andreas Cleyer, Opperhoofd on Deshima in 1682-83 and 1685-86 (Note 5).*



**Figure 2. Large Dish with the Arms of Huydecoper, 1670-1700.  $\Phi$  34,5 cm.**

**Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (inv. NG480)**

A large dish with the arms of the Valckenier family in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam shows a Hofreis scene. It was a popular decoration at that time. The Valckenier family is not a common family. The family members held various important posts in the VOC, not only in Holland but also in Batavia. *This dish may have been made for Pieter Ranst Valckenier when he becomes company director in 1693 and alderman of Amsterdam in 1695 (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 40).* (Figure 3)

As the examples above demonstrate, that Japanese lacquer appeared in the Netherland in the period of 17<sup>th</sup> century in customized objects. Certainly, it was customized by the nobles, gentlefolks and wealthy families. These are luxury collections never belong to the civilians.





**Figure 3. Large Dish with the Arms of Valckenier, 1690-1705. H. 3.5,  $\Phi$  53 cm.**

**Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (inv. BK 1994-30)**

### *2.3 Japanese Lacquer as Diplomatic Gift*

Japanese lacquer was one of the trade items that had interested the Dutch since the very beginning of the VOC's trade with Japan. Although the Portuguese had bought and traded in lacquer since the second half of the sixteenth century, it was not widely known in Western Europe even at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Portuguese used lacquer (and Chinese porcelain) for their inter-Asian trade. It was presented as gifts to Asian rulers and furnished monasteries, churches and castles in Portugal, but was never, at least officially, regarded as commercially viable for northwestern European markets. The Dutch, however, recognized the potential of this high-quality ware in Europe. They realized that the exotic lacquer designs would appeal to a new class of rich merchants and burghers in the Netherlands, and that possessing such costly items from the mysterious East would enhance the status of the owner (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 27).

Nevertheless, both the Company and the States-General presented special consignment of lacquer as gifts to rulers and high officials of foreign countries. Here are two examples, In Sweden, one of the most important documented pieces of lacquer in existence is the so-called Gripsholm coffer, a large, domed coffer decorated in Namban style with birds, a pair of tigers and flowering plants in panels on geometric grounds (Note 6) (Figure 4). The Gripsholm coffer was the States-General by a Dutch Embassy presented to Adolf GustavII who was the King of Sweden on 11 June 1616 (Note 7). In the book written by Oliver Impey and Christiaan J. A. Jörg, they provide an evidence from the treasurer of

the Embassy, who describes the coffer as part of the gifts: *“After the meal Their Honours presented on behalf of the States-General to His Majesty and delivered to him... a Japanese chest of lacquer, inlaid with mother-of-pearl...which was kindly received by His Majesty and was brought into his Cabinet”*. In 1623, the VOC representative in Isfahan, Persia, wrote to Batavia asking to be sent ‘some Japanese lacquer work’, a request that was repeated in later years; the lacquer was doubtless intended for presentation to Persian nobles (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 28, 323).



**Figure 4. The Gripsholm Coffin, Namban, with Two Large, Pointed Cartouches Framing Animals on a Geometric and Random Pearlshell Mosaic Ground, 1600-15. H. 64, W.131,D.55cm. Royal Collections, Gripsholm Castle, Stockholm. Photograph Alexis Daflos. Presented to King Gustaf II Adolf of Sweden by the States General of the Netherlands in 1616. One of the Earliest Documented Pieces of Japanese Lacquer in the West.**

The famous jewel box, named “Van Diemen box” (Figure 5), now is collected in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It was made between 1636 and 1639 for Maria van Diemen, whose name is inlaid wrote in solid gold in black lacquer on the inside of the lid (Figure 5-b). Maria van Diemen’s maiden name was Van Aalst and she married Antonio van Diemen in 1630. Van Diemen served in the Dutch Indies as Governor- General in Batavia from late 1635 until his death in 1645. In his position, he received gifts of Japanese lacquer from Japanese officials (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 37, 85-89). This exquisite box decoration is mostly in fine gold and silver hira-makie and taka-makie. It

is a typical pictorial-style export Japanese lacquer. The lid of the box depicts a scene from the narrative tales *Genji monogatari* (Tale of Genji) (Figure 5-c). This is different from Japanese domestic lacquer of pictorial-style, because figures rarely appeared in the decoration of traditional Japanese lacquer items (Hidaka Kaori, n.d.).



**Figure 5. The Van Diemen Box.**

**c. 1636-39. H. 16, W.48, D.26.7 cm, Victoria&Albert Museum, London (inv. W 49-1916)**

**Formerly in the Collection of Madame de Pompadour and William Beckford.**



**Figure 5-b. The Interior of the Lid is Inscribed MARIA, UAN, DIEMEN**





**Figure 5-c. The High-quality Decoration Depicts Scenes from the Genji Monogatari.**

In the book: “Japanese export lacquer 1580-1850” also records any other samples. For instance, in 1612, the States- General presented a large gift of lacquer to Sultan Ahmed Khan of Turkey. Interestingly, this present not only included a very large chest and a comptoir of Oriental lacquer, but also a chest and various other items made by Willem Kick, who must have produced convincing imitations (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 28). In 1638, the *Heren Zeventien* made a gift of lacquer and porcelain to Marie de Medici, the queen mother of France, when she visited Amsterdam. In March 1642, they presented lavish gift of textiles, porcelain and Japanese lacquer to Mary Stuart, who had married William II of Orange, to her mother Henrietta Maria of Bourbon, the wife of King Charles I of England, and to her mother-in-law, Amalia van Solms (1602-75), wife of Stadholder Frederik Hendrik (1584-1647), on the occasion of the queen’s visit to the Netherlands. Henrietta Maria received a nest of six coffers fitting into each other, a lacquered table, three cabinets and a lacquered kamerstoel (chamber chair, probably a close-stool). Mary and Amalia also received a nest of coffers, a table and three cabinets each, while Amalia was furthermore presented with two screens, one Chinese and one Japanese (the Japanese one was probably a paper screen). In 1612, Pierre Desmartin, acting as ‘provider of rarities’ for the King of France, requested from the States- General free export of the curiosities he had asked the above-mentioned Jacques L’Hermite to provide. Desmartin was also to provide Louis XIII with Oriental objects in 1619 (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 28).

These examples can indicate that Japanese lacquer was luxurious in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Due to its complex manufactory process and rarity, it was often used on a diplomatic gift.

### 3. Japanese Lacquer Objects in Dutch Golden Age Paintings

After the “Eighty Years War” against Spain (1568-1648), the Netherlands emerged as a leading world power and trading nation. The Dutch Republic was so highly developed at throughout the Netherlands. This period, which became known as the “Dutch Golden Age” (Michael North, 1997). At that time, the

subjects of still life, landscape and genre painting developed. Every year 70,000 pictures were painted, excellent painters emerge as the times require. In this chapter, I have attempted to enumerate several paintings depict Japanese lacquer and give a general overview of Japanese lacquer style spanning the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### *3.1 Japanese Export Lacquer*

#### *3.1.1 The Namban Style*

Namban (Note 8) style is the earliest Japanese lacquer objects made for the European markets. Since they were made for the export-market, so the decoration did not only form the native style but also cater to the foreigner's taste. Namban style lacquer was flavoured by the Portuguese firstly, then the Spanish and English, but little by the Dutch (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 78). As the book "Japanese export lacquer 1580-1850" collated the trade in Namban lacquer during 1602-1616. Date the material from the objects in Namban style. The Dutch market sold little Namban style lacquer after 1608, and the trade about that ceased in 1616. The first record of the importation of Japanese lacquer by the VOC is dated 1610. By 1614, the Heren Zeventien had realized that Namban lacquer was too expensive to sold quickly in the Nertherland. So they ordered Jacques Specx, Opperhoofd in Hirado, not to import more Namban lacquer (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 242).

Namban style decoration shapes are usually geometric, for instance: squares, rectangles, triangles and interlocking circles pattern always appeared on border decoration. Some patterns like: Floral scenes, scrolling vines, peony, maple, wisteria camellia, five-petalled flower, bellflower and seaweed are surrounded by the geometric rim. The decorations are painted onto the black lacquer ground and sometimes onto the inlaid shell. Additionally, the depictions of tigers, peacocks and any other animal even human figures appeared, but these are exceptions. In this period the gold lacquer rarely in maki-e. The Namban cabinets are usually have lots of drawers concealed behind a fall front which is hinged by pins and eyes. However, Several Namban cabinets without a fall front exist. A small size without a fall front in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Note 9) (Figure 6).

#### *3.1.2 The Intermediate Style*

The Intermediate style indicates the period of change from the Namban style to the full-fledged Pictorial style, called "The Transition period". It only spanned a few years from the late 1630s into the 1650s. Since the so-called "Nuyts Affair" the trade between the Dutch and Japan had an intermission for five years. In 1634, the lacquer trade restarted by the Dutch on a large different style. The orders dedicate the demands from Dutch have changed. There were not for 'classic' Namban lacquer ware. At that time, the Intermediate style emerged. During this period, the techniques and decorations have transformations (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 83).



**Figure 6. The Ambras Cabinet. Namban Cabinet without Fall Front, 1580-1600.**

**H.31, W.42.5, D. 29 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (inv, Kunstkammer 5421). Possibly in  
Ventoried in 1607**

During the end of the Namban period, the borders painted by pearlshell were reduced. A new background material was apparently introduced at that time: ray skin requirement increase by European traders. In the Transition period, maki-e decoration was taking over from painted gold lacquer and was usually in gold on a black ground (Note 10) (Figure 7). However, in this period other colors like green and red were occasionally introduced for the background. Two doors had become standard on cabinets which is follow European demand. And usually depict the continuous motif on the twin doors. Chests with flat lids replaced the domed coffers. The Transition-period coffers usually have no drawers. In general, Transition-style decoration appeared narrative motif, however, geometric elements were reserved on the borders.

### 3.1.3 The Pictorial Style

The pictorial style commenced in the 1930s which overlaps with the Transition period. Continuing during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and as well during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the lacquer objects commissioned by the Dutch were different from domestic Japanese consumption. For instance, human figures rarely appear in the decoration of traditional Japanese lacquer objects, such as the narrative tale: *Tale of Genji* (See the illustration 5 “Van Diemen box” which I mentioned before). Particularly, emerged on the relatively high quality export lacquers that were produced around the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 7. Transition-style Chest with Cartouche on a Plain Ground, within a Cash-pattern Border, this Inside Lacquered Red, 1630-50. H.66.5, W.152, D. 72.5 cm. National Museum of Denmark, Ethnographic Collection, Copenhagen (inv. EAc104). Inventoried in the Royal Danish Kunstkammer in 1674.**

Diversity is a prominent feature during this period. New background for instance: wood, metal, leather, paper and porcelain were among the new materials onto which lacquer could be applied. The object shapes also increased dramatically, not only the common furniture and daily things but also nest of coffers and several small boxes gathered in a circle box. Most objects were decorated in maki-e, pearlshell rarely appeared, except for some pieces that are known with a decoration entirely of pearlshell. Furthermore, Chests with twin doors appeared in this period, but are rare (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 123). The motif on the lacquer during this period not simple for instance: novelistic, landscape, fan, butterflies, flowers and fences.

### *3.2 Japanese Lacquer Emerged in Dutch Golden Age Paintings*

#### *3.2.1 Japanese Lacquer with the Coat of Arms Emerged in Painting*

First, A painting by Cesar van Everdingen (Note 31) in the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf hows Name: *Nymphs offering the young Bacchus wine, fruit and flowers* (Figure 8). In the painting Bacchus is surrounded by nymphs and in the foreground depict a monogrammed Japanese lacquer dish. As Christiaan J. A. Jörg mentioned in his book, he consider it closely resembles the Japanese dish which is a private collection, in the Netherlands. Reproduced from Amsterdam 1963(ill8a.b.c). These are some



lacquered dishes with the coat of arms of Governor-General family (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 328). This mentioned in second chapter which customized Japanese lacquer.



**Figure 8. Cesar van Everdingen (1617-78),  
*Nymphs Offering the Young Bacchus Wine, Fruit and Flowers.*  
 Oil on Canvas, C. 1670. H. 161, W. 180 cm. Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf.**



**Figure 8-a. Large Dish with the Monogram of Elisabeth van Heijningen and Willem van Outhoorn,  $\Phi$  47cm. Private Collection, the Netherlands. Reproduced from Zandvliet 2002, 222**  
**b. Dish Similar to ill.1, but here the Monogram Has been Placed Upside Down by the Lacquer Worker. Private Collection, the Netherlands. Reproduced from Amsterdam 1963, cat. 187**  
**c. Large Dish with the Monogram of Suzanna Angenita van Outhoorn and Joan van Hoorn,  $\Phi$  47 cm. Private Collection, the Netherlands. Reproduced from Zandvliet 2002, 222**



### 3.2.2 Japanese Lacquer Emerged In Portrait

Second, a *portrait of Joan Jacob Mauricius, Governor-General of Suriname* by Cornelis Troost (Note 12) (Figure 9). From this painting, we can see on the Joan Jacob Mauricius's left arm there is a table. Interestingly, many oriental elements appeared on the table. A Persian style carpet covered the table. What's more, a cockerel and two Chinese figures are made of porcelain placed on a Japanese lacquer. The Japanese lacquer is typical pictorial style lacquer box. This point is my focus. As we know, Joan Jacob Mauricius is the Governor-General of Suriname, was a westerner. In his portrait, he let painter depict Japanese lacquer illustrate he like these oriental art very much. Other implication, Japanese lacquer was a symbol of wealth and status.



**Figure 9. Cornelis Troost (1697-1750), *Portrait of Joan Jacob Mauricius, Governor- General of Suriname* (1692-1768). Pastel on Paper, Signed Amsterdam 1741. H. 73, W. 58 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.**



**Figure 9. (Partly)**

### 3.2.3 Japanese Lacquer in Still Life Painting

The flourishing of still life paintings, as an important art genre exemplified by the Netherlands, was following the flourishing of economic development and inter-cultural communication in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Dutch painters defied the Catholic idolatry by objecting to the placement of icons in churches, showing great keenness on reform and challenging the traditional doctrines. The religious reform in the 17<sup>th</sup> century triggered an “art crisis”, suggested by Gombrich, in that the protestant painters lost the sponsorship from the holy organizations and had to be their own vendors, as not really good ones. However, with the talent and the passion for art, Dutch painters dedicated themselves to still life

paintings instead of religious replications, having gained a pivotal position in the art history of Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by delivering pre-eminent masters like Hals, Rembrandt, Vermeer and a great number of other renowned still life painters to the world. The still life painting was primarily a reflection of wealth and opulences, Still life paintings delineate extravagant lifestyles by portraying prized or priceless items and exhibit people's consciousness and conception of wealth. When Japanese lacquer arrived in the Netherlands as a precious curiosity that was cherished and displayed by the noble and rich, a group of painters naturally found it perfect source material as a still life, among whom was Pieter Gerritsz. van Roestraten (Note 13), a representative Dutch still life painter in the entire 17<sup>th</sup> century and a specialist in containers drawing. In his painting: *still life with a mounted Japanese lacquer jewel box* (Figure 10), a mounted Japanese lacquer jewel box in pictorial style of c. 1640-80 (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 336). Remarkably, this lacquer is a principal part in the composition of picture. The frame with Baroque decorative artistry as a critical constituent of the luxurious display.



**Figure 10. Pieter Gerritsz. van Roestraten (1629-1700), *Still Life with a Mounted Japanese Lacquer Jewel Box*, Oil on Canvas, c. 1680. H.81.5, W. 109.5 cm. Courtesy of Jack Kilgore & Co. Inc., New York.**

#### **4. Imitational Lacquer Emerged in Dutch**

Even in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese lacquer was agreed to be the finest available. However, Europeans should paid steep price for the export lacquer which were too expensive to accept. As a French antique merchant described: *Now everyone knows Japanese lacquer is a treasure, and very difficult to obtain. So it is difficult to get excellent works, especially old-aged. The price is unacceptable, even in the*

*Netherlands*. Inevitably, they found it tempting to imitate the Asian originals instead of buying it from Asia. That means they had to discover the secret of how to make lacquer (Madeleine Jarry, 1981, 212). However, Lacquer is a natural material made from the tree sap of a particular kind of tree. That tree grows over a large area spanning East Asia and Southeast Asia (Hidaka Kaori, n.d.). So Raw lacquer was unobtainable in Europe, but Oriental lacquer could be and was imitated in almost every European country (Note 14). The Europeans researched various recipes for varnishes, japanning on many kinds of substances. These work itself called “japanning”. As China named its name to porcelain, similar with Japan has given its name to a wide variety of imitations of lacquer. Japanning was widespread in the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries (Oliver Impey & Christiaan J. A. Jörg, 2004, 336). Undoubtedly, The Netherlands were the first European country to imitate Asian lacquer and to use it for finishing furniture. This may benefit from trade and prosperity between Japan and the Dutch. As early as 1610 Amsterdam had its *Lackwercken*. The guide William Kick, the discoverer of the secret for making a kind of lacquer, seems to have played an important role. Until 1690 the Dutch began building type of chest in Dutch manner. Its characteristics are its elevation in legs and its lacquer decoration. One example in the Gemeente Museum made in 1690 by Dutch is fitted with a pair of doors that swing back on hinges to disclose tiers of small drawers, which rest on a three-unit drawers supported by four rather tall legs formed in the Dutch manner. (Figure 11) A few years later, many years passed Holland’s cabinetmakers learned to simplify their furniture, eliminating the lower stack of drawers and transforming the support into a table with tall, slender legs braced with stretchers (Madeleine Jarry, 1981, 136).



**Figure 11. Wooden Cabinet Lacquered Black and Gold.  
Holland. C. 1690. Gemeente Museum, The Hague.**



**Figure 11. (Partly)**

Though the development of imitation lacquer started in Dutch, its' radiance was covered by other European countries which rising at later period time. Nonetheless, the Dutch lacquer use the closest to the original material. And it is difficult to distinguish the Japanese export lacquer and Dutch domestic lacquer (Hugh Honour, 1961).

In this section, I aim to demonstrate that lacquer was not only a symbol of luxury but also a material deemed worthy of imitation. Although some Dutch imitations were adorned with chinoiserie patterns, this is understandable when we consider the historical context. The trade history reveals that both Chinese and Japanese lacquers began to flow into Dutch and other European markets through the Dutch East India Company (VOC) as early as 1607. This influx of exotic and highly valued goods naturally led to their replication, reflecting the European desire to emulate the luxury and craftsmanship of the East.

## 5. Conclusion

As the development of science and engineering created the possibility of maritime trade in considerable scale and guaranteed the occurrence of international communication, two formerly isolated civilizations encountered. The initial acknowledgement of the item happened at the symbolic level in that the novelty and rarity of the item could enable the success of importation and accommodation of the curious pieces. The idea of luxury due to the transportation difficulties constrained the patrons within high class, and that never belong to the common people in that period. Additionally, Japanese lacquer as a status symbol of wealth. So the high class customized it, present it, represent it and imitate it.

In the second chapter, I listed some dishes, plates, boxes and shields with armorials decorations for genteel class and the Company and the States-General presented these Oriental curiosities as gifts to rulers and high official of foreign countries. Next, gave a brief introduction of Japanese export lacquer styles and three paintings that depicted Japanese lacquers. In the last part, I expounded the reason of imitational lacquers that emerged in the Netherlands and also gave an example of lacquer chest imitation. Overall, these all to proof my study's argument: Japanese lacquer in Dutch Golden Age was a concept of "luxury".

As mentioned above, 17<sup>th</sup> century was the so-called "Golden Age" period either for Dutch or Japan. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) played an important role between Japan and the Netherlands. From the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, imitation lacquers appeared in the Netherlands. The VOC not only export exquisite Japanese lacquer to the Netherlands, but also lacquers in Dutch manner made in western countries flowed into Japan. Undoubtedly, lacquer being "luxury" goods in commercial context brought many profits for the merchants. Even more importantly, with respect to art history, the Japanese art left a huge influence on the Dutch art.

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## Notes

Note 1. These privileges were not granted by Shogun Hidetada, but by his father Ieyasu, who had retired but effectively still held power, see Masarella 1990, 84-85.

Note 2. Boxer (1935), reprint 1971, pp.xvi-xxv; Blusse, Opstall&Tsao, vol. 1, 1986, pp. xiv-xvi; Masarella 1990, 339.

Note 3. Kaempfer 1727, 370; Bodart-Bailey 1999, 220-21, gives a free interpretation of the original text.

Note 4. Von Ragué 1976, 159.

Note 5. Huydecoper was lord of Maarseveen, a seigniory in Utrecht Province; its armorial shield is shown in the middle. See Jörg 2003, p.231, cat.293, illustrates a Japanese porcelain teacup and saucer with the Huydecoper arms.

Note 6. Gyllensvard, 1966, 62-66.

Note 7. By Resolution of 15 August 1615, the States-General approved the spending 8000 to 9000 guilders for buying “curiosities” to present to the Swedish King by her representatives who had travelled to Sweden and Russia in 1615-16 to attend the preliminary negotiations for the Swedish-Russian peace treaty. The lacquer coffer was part of those curiosities; See Van Deursen 1984, p.493.

Note 8. Namban (or nanban), which literally translates as “southern barbarians,” was a period usually applied to the Portuguese traders who began arriving in Japan in the mid-fifteenth century. During the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the word namban was applied to all foreigners except the Chinese and the Koreans, and sometimes even to them. However, For Japanese lacquer, the word namban refers to the techniques and decorative styles of the earliest group of lacquerware for export to the west.

Note 9. This Ambras cabinet. Namban cabinet without fall front, 1580-1600. H.31, W.42.5, D. 29 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Possibly inventoried in 1607. A full width upper drawer, divided by its decoration to suggest three drawers; there are thus seven drawers in all, resembling nine. The drawer fronts are decorated in Namban style with much shaped pearlshell, within borders of conventional triangle pattern. The dividers are in conventional square patterns and the front of the carcase has triangles and Namban scrolls; the sides and back have Namban scrolls, double-triangle and square borders. The patterns on the drawers are mostly of various type of flowers, but two drawers have an exception decoration: on one there are shells and seaweed, on the other a ship. This latter appears to be unparalleled, The decoration on the sides and back is of the very common floral type, but the decoration on the top is again exceptional: there is a zigzag fence in the lower lefthand corner, and Chinese bellflowers and maples with birds. See Oliver Impey, Christiaan J. A. Jörg. 2004. Japanese export lacquer 1580-1850. Hotei. p. 123.

Note 10. This is a Transition- style chest with cartouche on a plain ground, within a cash-pattern border, the inside lacquered red, 1630-50. H. 66.5, W.152, D. 72.5 cm. National Museum of Denmark, Ethnographic Collection, Copenhagen. Inventoried in the Royal Danish Kunstammer in 1674.

Vermilion and nashiji drawer interiors are known, but are rare. Landscape scenes in a debased Kano style displace the floral or animal subjects, and depictions of human figures are more common. See Oliver Impey, Christiaan J. A. Jörg. 2004. Japanese export lacquer 1580-1850. Hotei. p. 123.

Note 11. Cesar Pietersz, or Cesar Boetius van Everdingen (1616/17 - buried October 13, 1678), older brother of Allart van Everdingen and Jan van Everdingen, was a Dutch Golden Age portrait and history painter. He was born in Alkmaar and educated in Utrecht, where he learned to paint from Jan Gerritsz van Bronckhorst.[1][2] Caesar became a member of the painter's guild in Alkmaar in 1632.[2] His first known painting dates from 1636.

Note 12. Cornelis Troost (1696-1750), Born in Amsterdam, painter Cornelis Troost was the son of a bookkeeper and an actress. The young Troost seemed destined for a stage career: he acted at Amsterdam's Schouwburg theatre from 1719 to 1724. Yet from 1723, his focus was painting. It was in that year that he became an apprentice to portraitist Arnold Boonen. Troost emerged as one of the leading Dutch artists of the 18th century. At first, he mostly painted portraits; in his later paintings the subject was often a scene from a theatre play. In the 1740s, he painted numerous military scenes. Troost lived in Amsterdam his entire life. He was buried at the city's Nieuwe Kerk.

Note 13. Pieter Gerritsz van Roestraten (1630–1700) was a Dutch Golden Age painter of still life and genre scenes. He was a student of Frans Hals and married his daughter Adriaentje in 1654.

Note 14. See the standard work on jpanning is Huth 1971.