

A Pattern of Exchange: Jan Luyken and *Chine de Commande* Porcelain

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CLARE LE CORBEILLER'S *China Trade Porcelain: Patterns of Exchange*¹ was the first monograph devoted to Western models used by Chinese potters and porcelain painters for their *chine de commande* products. In her publication, prints, drawings, glass, silver, delftware and other European ceramics were linked to their Chinese imitations, and other forms of influence were also explored. Besides offering fresh discoveries and suggestions as to which sources might have been used, Clare raised new questions, challenging the field. Some have been answered in the past decades, others still await research or just the happy find. In this essay I propose to discuss such a find.

In *China Trade Porcelain*, Clare discussed a plate in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum decorated in *encre de chine* with a scene of the Nativity of Christ, dated about 1740 (Figure 1).² The typical *Laub- und Bandelwerk* border invited a comparison with Viennese du Paquier porcelain, but for the scene itself she could trace no matching print or other model. Clare ended her survey of pieces painted with related religious scenes with the suggestion that such "carefully black-drawn scenes . . . were quite possibly meant originally to cater to a specifically Jesuit market." This is one of the very few cases where she was not right.

The Nativity is closely related to three other biblical scenes depicted on Chinese export porcelain, namely, the Crucifixion (Figures 3, 5), the Resurrection (Figure 6), and the Ascension (Figure 8). Like the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection are carefully painted in *encre de chine* and heightened with some gold enamel. The Ascension is thus far known only in polychrome enamel colors, but an *encre de chine* version might be expected to come to light. Several border designs are known: some have the same *Laub- und Bandelwerk* as the plate in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 1), others have an elegant Rococo design of linked ribbons, cartouches, and flower sprays (Figure 3), and still others

have a simple spearhead border. Altogether eight border varieties are known.

The Nativity, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection in *encre de chine* are relatively common and represented in several collections of *chine de commande* in the United States and in Europe.³ The polychrome Ascension, however, is encountered much less frequently. The first three scenes also exist in enameled versions, though examples are rare.⁴

Encre de chine, with its thin lines of black enamel, was an excellent medium for the Chinese painter copying European engravings and etchings. And these pieces of porcelain, with their comparable style of painting, subject matter, and border designs clearly were made after prints. But which prints? Many researchers have tried to find the sources for these decorations, but in vain.

Sometimes, however, one is lucky. A private collector in the Netherlands kindly shared with me his find of a small Lutheran Bible containing illustrations by the well-known engraver Jan Luyken that perfectly match the four decorations mentioned above (Figures 2, 4, 7, 9).⁵ There is no doubt: these were the prints that were copied onto porcelain. And it is clear how faithfully the Chinese painter followed these models.

Jan Luyken (1649–1712) and his son Caspar (1672–1708) were among the most prolific Dutch graphic artists in Amsterdam about 1700. The devout Jan illustrated many editions of the Bible and other religious publications.⁶ In 1680 he made a series of twenty-four prints of New Testament scenes that became very popular. In 1712 these were followed by eighteen prints illustrating scenes from the Old Testament, a series that was equally successful. Together the prints were used, with some minor alterations, to illustrate several editions of the Bible, among them a cheap octavo one. This became a sort of common people's Bible and was reprinted again and again, even into the nineteenth century. Therefore the copperplates for printing the illustrations from had to be reworked from time to time, explaining small differences in the prints.⁷ The first octavo Lutheran Bible with Luyken's illustrations

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The notes for this article begin on page 175.

171



Figure 1. Plate decorated in *encre de chine* and gold with a scene of the Nativity, Chinese, European market, ca. 1740. Porcelain, diam. 8¾ in. (22.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Winfield Foundation Gift, 1965 (65.50)



Figure 3. Plate decorated in *encre de chine* and gold with a scene of the Crucifixion, Chinese, European market, ca. 1740. Porcelain, diam. 9 in. (22.8 cm). Groninger Museum (photo: John Stoel, Haren)

Figure 2. Jan Luyken, *The Nativity*. Engraving from the *Lutheran Nederduytsche Bijbel*, Amsterdam, 1750 (photo: John Stoel, Haren)



Figure 4. Jan Luyken, *The Crucifixion*. Engraving from the Lutheran *Nederduytsche Bijbel*, Amsterdam, 1750 (photo: John Stoel, Haren)

was printed in 1734. The title page of this and subsequent editions includes a portrait of Martin Luther above a cartouche showing Christ and his disciples (Figure 10). This title page was engraved not by Jan Luyken but by someone else, yet it is interesting to note that the portrait and cartouche motifs also occur on *chine de commande* plates (Figure 11). Thanks to the discovery of the Luyken prints, the source of this pattern can be traced as well.

Since the four designs on porcelain are based on Dutch prints, the supposed Jesuit connection is no longer valid. Although there is no mention of any contemporary orders for such plates in the records of the Dutch East India Company (VOC),⁸ it may be assumed that they were bought privately by Dutch traders, like so many other *chine de commande* designs. Reformed Dutch VOC officers always carried a Bible



Figure 5. Coffee or chocolate cup decorated in *encre de chine* and gold with a scene of the Crucifixion, Chinese, European market, ca. 1740. Porcelain, H. 2½ in. (6.3 cm). Groninger Museum (photo: John Stoel, Haren)



Figure 6. Plate decorated in *encre de chine* and gold with a scene of the Resurrection, Chinese, European market, ca. 1740. Porcelain, diam. 8¼ in. (22.6 cm). Groninger Museum (photo: John Stoel, Haren)



Figure 7. Jan Luyken, *The Resurrection*. Engraving from the Lutheran *Nederduytsche Bijbel*, Amsterdam, 1750 (photo: John Stoel, Haren)

in their ship's chest, preferably a small one to save space for other commodities. The octavo edition served their needs well, and it is likely that the prints used as models were taken from such a Bible. A series of Dutch orders could also explain why porcelain with these patterns remained relatively common in the Netherlands.

However, as usual, new answers raise new questions. Apart from these four designs, apparently no other Luyken prints were used for *chine de commande*. Furthermore, only plates and parts of tea, coffee, and chocolate services (Figures 5, 8)⁹ are known with these decorations. No similarly painted tureens, sauce boats, soup plates, or even large bowls¹⁰ seem to exist. Why?



Figure 8. Saucer decorated in polychrome enamels with a scene of the Ascension, Chinese, European market, ca. 1740. Porcelain, diam. 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (12.4 cm) Museum Het Prinsessehof, Leeuwarden (photo: Johan van der Veer, Museum Het Prinsessehof)



Figure 9. Jan Luyken, *The Ascension*. Engraving from the Lutheran *Nederduytsche Bijbel*, Amsterdam, 1750 (photo: John Stoel, Haren)



Figure 10. Title page of the Lutheran *Nederduytsche Bijbel*, Amsterdam, 1750, with a portrait of Martin Luther and a cartouche showing Christ and his disciples (photo: John Stoel, Haren)



NOTES

Parts of this paper have been published before, in Dutch, in C.J.A. Jörg, *Wisselwerkingen*, inaugural lecture, Leiden University, June 12, 1998.

1. Clare Le Corbeiller, *China Trade Porcelain: Patterns of Exchange. Additions to the Helena Woolworth McCann Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1974).
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 67–70.
3. For a survey and discussion of these porcelains, see David Howard and John Ayers, *China for the West: Chinese Porcelain and*

It is also remarkable that no pieces are known depicting the Descent of the Holy Spirit. This could have been expected if one connects the four aforementioned scenes with the traditional high holy days of Christianity: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension Day. However, Pentecost is equally essential and there always is a print of the Descent of the Holy Spirit in the Luyken Bibles. But it seems never to have been copied onto porcelain.

The following is just a theory, based on the fact that Luyken's prints were used not only in editions of the Bible but also in other Dutch publications of a religious nature. In 1732, for instance, the theologian Lambert ten Cate published *The Life of Our Savior Jesus Christ*.¹¹ In that treatise Luyken's prints of the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension are illustrated, but not his Descent of the Holy Spirit, because this episode occurred later than the life of Jesus. When ordering the porcelain pieces, people might have had similar thoughts and wanted only those scenes that were related to Christ himself.

It is remarkable that these porcelains, being rarely abraded, apparently were not meant for regular use. Perhaps they were kept in a cupboard or cabinet and only taken out on special occasions. If so, an interesting connection can be made to a traditional Dutch name for these wares, *rouwgoed* (mourning ware). No less than black attire and other tokens of mourning, a series of plates or a tea and coffee set of this porcelain with its black painting could have marked a period of mourning. Displayed in the living room, it pointed to the incarnation of Christ and his defeat of death.

Figure 11. Plate decorated in *encre de chine* and gold with a portrait of Martin Luther and a cartouche with Christ and his disciples, Chinese, European market, 1740–50. Porcelain, diam. 9 in. (23 cm). Groninger Museum (photo: John Stoel, Haren)

- Other Decorative Arts for Export Illustrated from the Mottahedeh Collection* (London and New York, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 312, 318–321, and the references given there. For additional references, see Catherine Coleman Brawer, *Chinese Export Porcelain*, catalogue of the Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison (Madison, 1992), pp. 133–137; François and Nicole Hervouët, *La porcelaine des Compagnies des Indes à décor occidental* (Paris 1986), pp. 263, 266, 267.
4. Howard and Ayers, *China for the West*, pp. 318–21, nos. 313–15. In addition to their references can be mentioned the plates with the Nativity, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection painted in enamel colors in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; see C.J.A. Jörg and Jan van Campen, *Chinese Ceramics in the Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam* (London, 1997), p. 278. Hervouët, *La porcelaine*, nos. 11.27, 11.28, illustrates polychrome plates with the Resurrection and the Ascension. See Coleman Brawer, *Chinese Export Porcelain*, p. 137, for two coffee cups with the Ascension in enamels. A saucer with the Ascension is illustrated as Figure 8 in this essay.
 5. W. H. Witteveen of Apeldoorn discovered the prints and kindly gave me permission to publish and use his find. His octavo Bible is the Lutheran *Nederduytsche Bijbel*, published in Amsterdam in 1750. The Luyken prints illustrated in this article are taken from this edition.
 6. The standard work on Jan Luyken's life and work is still P. van Eeghen and J. P. van der Kellen, *Het werk van Jan en Caspar Luyken* (Amsterdam, 1905), 2 vols. For the series of New Testament prints, see vol. 1, pp. 25–28; for the Old Testament prints, see vol. 2, pp. 701–9.
 7. The Resurrection scenes sometimes show three men at the background on the right, sometimes just shrubs; see Howard and Ayers, *China for the West*, vol. 1, p. 320. Further research is needed in order to clarify if the motif was derived from a print version or whether a liberty was taken by the Chinese painter.
 8. In 1778, the directors of the VOC, by way of an experiment, sent a Chinese saucer with a scene of the Crucifixion as a model to Canton, to be copied onto plates and tea sets. The Dutch merchants replied that plates would be too expensive and therefore they had not ordered them, but they did send twenty-two tea services decorated in *encre de chine*. They did not have high expectations about the profits but thought they would probably do well in the Catholic Brabant province. The comments of the directors immediately put an end to such orders: the design was regarded as "rather offensive." It is likely that these sets were of the simplified, later design as represented, for instance, in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. See C.J.A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (The Hague, 1982), pp. 108–10 n. 61; Jörg and Van Campen, *Chinese Ceramics*, p. 281.
 9. Although tea and coffee wares with these designs are now relatively rare, there must have been sets around. For instance, the catalogue for the auction of the Amsterdam porcelain shop of Martha Raap on August 24 and the days following, 1778, mentions, as lot 2232 on page 98, "An extrabeautiful tea set, black art, with the Passion of the Savior, consisting of 1 teapot and pat-typan, 1 spoon tray, 1 tea caddy, 1 large rinse bowl, 1 rinse bowl and saucer, 1 sugar bowl with lid and saucer, 6 pair of teacups and saucers and 6 chocolate cups." The set fetched thirty-four Dutch florins, quite a large sum at that time. The only extant copy of this catalogue is in the library of the Princessehof Museum, Leeuwarden.
 10. Smaller bowls are known that belonged to tea and coffee sets. However, there is an *encre de chine* punch bowl in the Reeves collection which has a scene of the Resurrection on one side and a scene of Neptune and Venus on the other. I agree with Howard and Ayers that this isolated anomaly had no religious meaning; see C. H. Eford and K. C. Farnham, *Chinese Export Porcelain from the Reeves Collection at Washington and Lee University* (Lexington, 1973), p. 31, no. 123; Howard and Ayers, *China for the West*, vol. 1, p. 320.
 11. Lambert ten Cate, *Het Leven van onzen Heiland Jezus Christus* (Amsterdam, 1732).