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Editorial

This autumn the Rijksmuseum is staging an exhibition about Asian luxury goods and their significance to Dutch art and culture. *Asia in Amsterdam: Luxury in the Golden Age* (17 October 2015 to 17 January 2016) focuses on the finest Asian luxury goods shipped to the Republic in the seventeenth century. Once the spice trade was established it was not long before porcelain, silk, lacquerware and carved ivory boxes became available – all of them examples of technical mastery in exotic new materials. The impact of this fairly sudden influx was as great as it was because the prices – at least in some cases – remained modest, and large groups of the middle classes were able to afford this form of luxury. They could pay for it and they wanted to have it, so ‘Asia’ quickly spread, in Dutch interiors and in the Dutch consciousness. We have tried to show this process in the exhibition by focusing on the highlights of the luxury goods imported from Asia and showcasing the work of seventeenth-century Dutch artists who included Asian objects – mainly porcelain – in their paintings and Dutch craftsmen who made ceramics, silk and lacquerware in an Asian style.

The relationship between the Netherlands and Asia is a large and wide-ranging subject. The stream of luxury goods is only a small part of it but, we believe, it is an aspect that is interesting enough to merit close attention. We are doing this in the exhibition and accompanying catalogue, and we did the same at the symposium on 9 November, where the ‘image of Asia’, was the main subject – an image that was the result of the imports, of the Dutch fascination with these objects and of the information that poured in.

This special issue of the Rijksmuseum Bulletin is likewise devoted to the exhibition: it sheds light on two subjects that could not be covered, or be covered only in part there. Thijs Weststeijn and Willemijn van Noord show how an Asian object was appreciated not for its lustre and beauty, but as a historical source. Anna Grasskamp analyses the meaning of European objects to Chinese enthusiasts, artists and craftsmen – the opposite movement. Finally, in a short essay, Sun Jing convincingly attributes an anonymous drawing in the Rijksmuseum’s collection to Joan Nieuhof. Nieuhof was a traveller and draughtsman in the service of the Dutch East India Company and, with the publication of his drawings in his famous *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den ... Keizer van China* (1665), was perhaps one of the major ‘architects’ of Asia’s image in Europe.