

Interior Facies
in Binnen.



Short Notice

Joan Nieuhof's Drawing of a Chinese Temple in the Rijksmuseum*

• JING SUN •

In the Rijksmuseum collection there is a drawing in ink (fig. 1) on a loose sheet that bears a striking resemblance to an engraving in Joan Nieuhof's book *Het Gezantschap* (fig. 2).¹ This book, the first fully illustrated travelogue on China in Dutch, had a considerable influence on Europeans' appreciation of China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The engraving in this book is part of a separate chapter on idol temples, and provided readers with an impression of what Chinese temples look like. The interior of a Chinese temple occupies the left foreground of the drawing and the engraving, with a pagoda and other buildings on the right. There are mountains, a city wall and a few buildings in the distance. The two images are evidently closely connected, and this gives rise to an important question. Which was made first? Is the drawing an original by Nieuhof or is it an anonymous drawing made after the engraving in the book?

Drawings for the Engravings in *Het Gezantschap*

There are more than a hundred and fifty engravings in the first Dutch edition of *Het Gezantschap*, which was published in Amsterdam by the publisher, bookseller and art dealer Jacob van Meurs. These engravings were supposedly produced on the basis of drawings Joan Nieuhof made on the

Detail of fig. 1

journey of the first Dutch mission to China between 1655 and 1657.² When Nieuhof returned to Amsterdam in 1658, he lodged with his brother, Hendrik, and completed a report for the directors of the Amsterdam Chamber of the Dutch East India Company. This manuscript – which contains eighty-one drawings – is held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.³ Three months after his return, he set off for Asia again, leaving all the materials with his brother, Hendrik, who was to coordinate the publication of his account of his travels. According to Hendrik, more than a hundred and fifty sketches made from life were the source of the engravings in the printed book.⁴

Considerable efforts on the part of scholars, down through the centuries, have failed to discover the whereabouts of these sketches.⁵ Nieuhof's drawings in the Paris manuscript are a different set, probably copies of some of the sketches by Nieuhof himself, and it is unlikely that the engravers in Jacob van Meurs's workshop at that time would have had access to them.⁶ Of the hundred and fifty engravings in the book, furthermore, only seventy or so have a connection with drawings in the Paris manuscript: they are either almost identical or contain specific elements from the drawings. This means that eighty engravings are based on



Fig. 1
JOAN NIEUHOF,
*Chinese Temple and
Pagoda*, 1655-57.
Pen and brown ink,
grey wash, 173 x 225 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. RP-T-00-208.

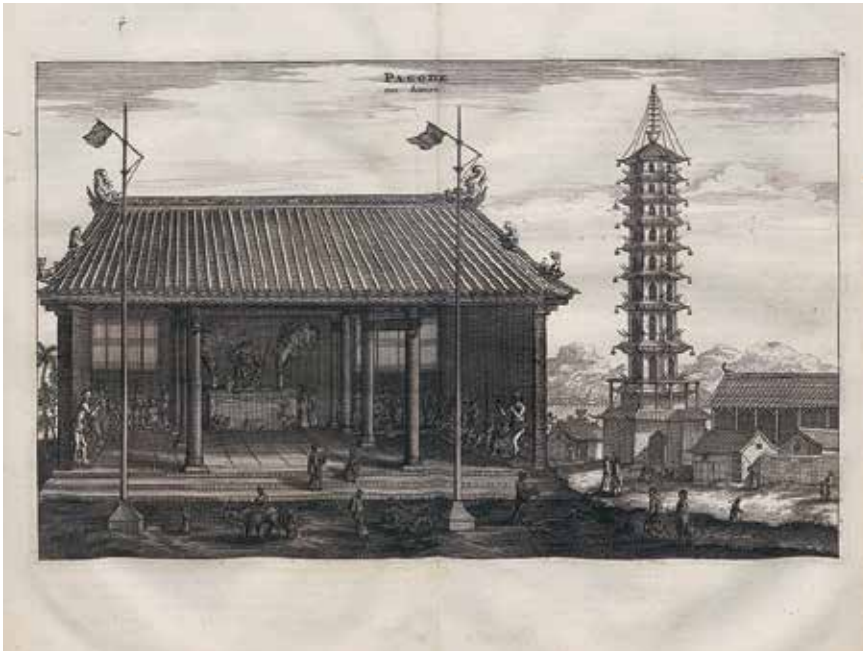


Fig. 2
JOAN NIEUHOF,
*PAGODE le dedans du
TEMPLE van binnen,
Het Gezantschap der
Neerlandtsche Oost-
Indische Compagnie,
etc.*, Amsterdam 1665,
part 2, pp. 88-89.
Engraving,
194 x 314 mm.
Leiden, University
Library, Special
Collections, 22193 A 12.

material that does not correspond directly with drawings in the Paris manuscript. The engraving in fig. 2 is one of these, and its strong resemblance to the drawing in the Rijksmuseum's collection may shed some light on the question of its source.

The Rijksmuseum Drawing and the Engraving in *Het Gezantschap*

The Rijksmuseum drawing is made on a loose sheet of paper measuring 225 x 173 mm, while the sheets in the Paris manuscript are 240 x 170 mm. This makes it unlikely that this specific drawing once belonged to the Paris manuscript. Compared with the other drawings in the Paris manuscript, the Rijksmuseum drawing is more elaborate and has been embellished with specific details, even though the artist's hand and the use of brown ink and watercolour are quite similar.

Although the Rijksmuseum drawing has a great deal in common with the engraving, there are a few significant differences. In the Rijksmuseum drawing, for instance, a broad river

and a sailing ship can be seen through the gap between the temple and the pagoda and there is a long city wall and a few Chinese buildings on the other bank of the river. In traditional Chinese town plans, a temple is very often located outside the city or town, separated by a river or a moat.⁷ The river or moat is usually marked on the map of the county annals as of topographical significance. In the engraving, however, through the small gap between the temple and the pagoda, the viewer can see only a small house and trees standing behind, while a city wall stretches horizontally in the distance, with no clear sign of water. This would appear to be an obscure detail, but it actually contains a significant topographical feature, and this indicates that the Rijksmuseum drawing is earlier.

Secondly, two men stand side by side in the right foreground of the Rijksmuseum drawing. They wear western dress and carry swords at their sides. Similar western figures can be found in a number of drawings in the Paris manuscript. Fig. 3 is a good

Fig. 3

JOAN NIEUHOF,
*A Man in Western
 Dress Beside a Statue
 of King Kang*, from
*Journaal van zommige
 voorvallen, inde
 voyagie vande
 E. Heeren Pieter de
 Goyer en Jacob Keyser,
 ambassadeurs,
 aande grootmachtige
 keizer van Chyna en
 Tartaryen, inde jaaren
 1655, 56 & 1657, c. 1658,*
 fol. 103.
 Chalk, pen and brown
 ink, 170 x 240 mm.
 Paris, Bibliothèque
 nationale de France,
 inv. no. BnF/Cartes
 et Plans/Société de
 Géographie/Ms.in 80/
 17/1271.



example: we see a man in western dress standing beside a statue of King Kang (a guardian god, also known as one of the Four Heavenly Kings) and reaching out to touch it.⁸ This western figure would have been deliberately included by Nieuhof to suggest that the drawing is based on eye-witness observation. The appearance of the two western figures in the Rijksmuseum drawing has a similar purpose and reflects Nieuhof's personal style as seen in the Paris manuscript.⁹ The engraver, though, seems not to have shared his views on this point, so the western figures in the engraving have been replaced by a Chinese couple. The inclusion of the two western figures suggests that the drawing was most probably made by Nieuhof, and that it was not made after the engraving.

This argument is further supported by the depiction of the pagoda. In accordance with Chinese yin-yang theory, Chinese pagodas are always built with an odd number of storeys.¹⁰ We can see by counting the windows that the pagoda in the Rijksmuseum

drawing has a base and seven storeys, whereas the one in the engraving has eight storeys. Moreover, given its structure and position in the Rijksmuseum drawing, the building with columns slightly behind and to the right of the pagoda should be a traditional opera stage, where performances were put on for the gods or as entertainment on important occasions. A traditional opera stage is usually located beside the temple and has two floors, the upper being an open space for the performance (fig. 4). The engraving, however, conveys no sense of the building's depth, its different levels and its spatial relation to other buildings. The roof, which should be laid with tiles from the ridge to the eave, is a grid pattern in the engraving. The person who made the drawing apparently had a better understanding of the structure of a traditional Chinese stage or at least had seen one with his own eyes.

The engraving, it is true, seems clearer and more natural, and contains more details than the Rijksmuseum drawing, but these seemingly specific

Fig. 4

A traditional Chinese stage at Fujun Temple, Changzhi, Shanxi Province. Photo: Jing Sun.





Fig. 5
ILLUSTRATION FROM
JOAN NIEUHOF,
*Het Gezantschap
der Neerlandsche
Oost-Indische
Compagnie, etc.*,
Amsterdam 1665,
vol. 2, p. 87.
Engraving,
102 x 155 mm.
Leiden, University
Library, Special
Collections,
22193 A 12.

aspects do not fundamentally enhance the authenticity of the engraving. For instance, the depiction of the statue of god at the centre of the temple in the drawing is very rough and ready, and it is difficult to establish his identity. The engraver, in contrast, provided a very clear image, as he did in other engravings, and turned the statue into a god resembling King Kang. It seems he was proud of this creation, as duplicates and an even larger version can be found in another engraving in *Het Gezantschap* (fig. 5). However, statues of King Kang were usually placed either side of temple entrances as guardians of the sacred precinct, not worshipped as the main god at the centre of the temple. This was obviously not what the artist intended in the Rijksmuseum drawing; he carefully depicted the god's robes with flowing lines to indicate that they were soft fabric, not the sort of hard armour worn by the guardian god King Kang. The clarity of the image of the main god in the engraving is not equalled by its accuracy. It is worth noting, more-

over, that although the figures wander in front of the temple enhance the credibility of the engraving, one of the engravers' most commonly used 'improvements' was to add more figures and plants to the cityscape or landscape.¹¹ Refinements of details and embellishments made in the engraving consequently do not fundamentally improve the accuracy or specificity of the scene.

The Representation of the Temple in the Rijksmuseum Drawing 'From Life'

The temple appears to be a single building on a small scale without surrounding walls or side halls. Nieuhof must have observed its roof carefully, as he made a convincing representation of its structure, the pattern of tiles, and the ornaments on the ridges. This type of roof structure is known as overhanging gables (*xuanshanding* 悬山顶). They have purlins that extend beyond the end walls so that the double sloping roof can overhang the gables.¹² It has one

main ridge at the upper juncture of a roof with two sloping planes (zhengji 正脊), and four sloping ridges (chuiji 垂脊). The ends of the main ridge always tilt up and are decorated with a creature known as a Chiwei (owl tail 鸱尾), a totem to guard against fire, and the sloping ridges are often decorated with creatures too (fig. 6). It appears that Nieuhof depicted a Chiwei on each end of the main ridge and added two decorations on each sloping ridge, but he evidently had difficulty making out the shapes of these auspicious creatures and was only able to produce a rough outline of them. It is not possible to identify them, but they are correctly positioned. In particular, the lower ones are properly placed at the ends of the sloping ridges. The engraver, on the other hand, clearly had no idea as to how they should be arranged and moved the end creatures back up the ridge, placing them at some distance from the end.

The Inscriptions

The words *pagoda interior facies van innen* are written at the top of the Rijksmuseum drawing and *PAGODE van binnen* on the engraving in the 1665 edition. None of the drawings in the Paris manuscript has an inscription, whereas each engraving in the printed book has one at the top. In *The Illusion of Verisimilitude* the author argues that the original drawings Nieuhof made on site during his travels in China most probably had inscriptions. The copies in the Paris manuscript did not because they were there to illustrate the report they accompanied, so inscriptions would have been superfluous. However, when Hendrik gave the original drawings to Van Meurs's engravers, they chose to follow the drawings and add the inscriptions to the engravings.¹³ The similarity of the inscriptions is not only further confirmation that the engraving was made after the drawing, it also suggests that this single surviving sheet is one of the drawings that Nieuhof left with his brother for the publication.

Fig. 6
The façade of
Sanzong Temple
(三縱廟) in Zhangzi
County, Shanxi
Province.
Photo: Jing Sun.



This finding is of great importance to the study of Nieuhof's works of China. When *Het Gezantschap* was published, the numerous engravings enabled Europeans to visualize China and had a significant influence on the development of Chinoiserie. One reason for this was the claim that these images of China were made from life. However, readers who later had an opportunity to see China with their own eyes cast doubt on this claim. These controversial statements have attracted the attention of many scholars.¹⁴ The Paris manuscript discovered by Leonard Blussé has laid a very important foundation for the study of Nieuhof's work. Now this Rijksmuseum drawing, supposedly made by Nieuhof in situ – or at least no later than the Paris manuscript – will

advance the study of Nieuhof's images of China, particularly with regard to the issue as to whether and how they were made from life

NOTES

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- 1 Joan Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, ann den Grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China ...*, Amsterdam (Jacob van Meurs) 1665 (*An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China ...*, trans. John Ogilby, 1669).
- 2 On the background and events of this visit see M. Corbett, 'The Dutch Mission to Peking in 1655', *Quaerendo* 16 (1986), pp. 131-36; see also L. Blussé and R. Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden van een Chimareis 1655-1657*, Middelburg 1987 (Stichting VOC Publicaties), p. 14.
- 3 For details of the discovery of this manuscript, see Blussé and Falkenburg, op. cit. (note 2), p. 19.
- 4 *Het Gezantschap*, p. 4.
- 5 On the search for Joan Nieuhof's original sketches, see Blussé and Falkenburg, op. cit. (note 2), pp. 17-18.
- 6 R. Falkenburg briefly compared this Rijksmuseum drawing with the drawings in the

Paris manuscript and came to the conclusion that they were not made by the same hand. See *ibid.*, pp. 71-73.

- 7 This was also observed by Nieuhof who wrote that Chinese temples were 'built at a great cost, and most commonly situated outside of the cities in solitary places'. See *Het Gezantschap*, p. 88.
- 8 In the corresponding engraving, this statue is labelled 'Kingang'. See *Het Gezantschap*, op. cit. (note 1), p. 86.
- 9 The representation of western figures can be found in drawings f13, f103 and f169 in the Paris manuscript. See Blussé' and Falkenburg, op. cit. (note 2).
- 10 Nieuhof noticed this aspect of Chinese pagodas, writing that 'some are nine, others seven stories high'. See *Het Gezantschap*, p. 90. On the storeys of Chinese pagodas see Cheng Jianjun, *Chinese Traditional Architecture and Philosophy of Zhouyi*, Changchun 1991, p. 134, and Zhang Yuying, *Chinese Buddhist and Daoist Art*, Beijing 2000, p. 191.
- 11 See Jing Sun, *The Illusion of Verisimilitude: Johan Nieuhof's Images of China*, Amsterdam 2013, pp. 237-45.
- 12 R.G. Knapp, *China's Old Dwellings*, Honolulu 2000, pp. 138-39.
- 13 See Jing Sun, op. cit. (note 11), pp. 119-20.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-34.