

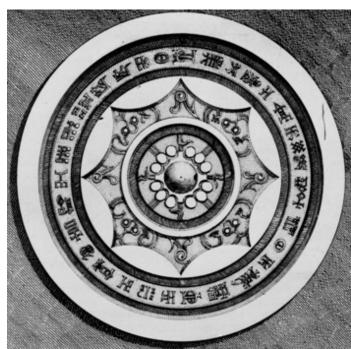


Dutch reflections in Chinese mirrors

interpreting China in the Netherlands through encounters with inscribed Chinese artifacts

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Princess Mary Stuart (1662-1694)

Detail from Jan Verkolje *Portrait of Queen Mary II of England* (c. 1688), oil on canvas, 40 x 32 cm. National Portrait Gallery





Chinese lacquer cabinet

Limewood and Coromandel lacquer, 1695, h. 215 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687)

Caspar Netscher *Portrait of Constantijn Huygens in his seventies*(1672), oil on panel, 27 x 23 cm.

Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.



Tothe Royal Hyglain of the Host Tumble stones to White and realise male and finale of the might femous and might Topin of line, to the namber of a grown many race million, of Timple the the mounted Aristonitigan wir about sweene up The tother extrane in sutania ching informed low a cirtain public fitte of proof of their mater industry the Tresing Eads als lassinis to fall into Post High notte land None must in bin to Song con little fruits aring and of rasso cross and walaune of their excited Oriest (Sina longer, Most lone to fare for watch willy this noneum god of will and gracions disposition ai reduced to what of slice in and splinter, was all the them Two of Dehuction to no light purpose the to set June - (about , Munerour tought and Dicher cabelling forward art our me trainer Wed no un derstan provid living able for his life to perform a be sections may many, liming and tutally stepling the reget and and and Mother The of it, to that many of the dearry to the Inspeciale Down , legs and for red mist soit of months hours and others, aline to tor valle a confession all mitaracropioses a most videntias ming forangle , dad, he last as well him to be Le Commented) to Dindaing, enemings, Living and distincing the will collecte of their many obseles is and atice. I thinkere that the wine of spices propert intime, paralle forthing at othe light

Huygens to Mary 21 September 1685

'to no higher purpose then to see the walls of some miserable cabinet decked and adorned forsooth with our unhappy ruines [...] dissolving, turning, severing and disjoining the noble collection of those manyfold chosen and selected characters, containing in our excellent Asiatic language the wittiest speeches, proverbs, emblems, parables, paradoxes and other higher mysteries, could be found such incontestable testimonies of our nations high and transcendent wisdom above all other people of the world, in the very center of which we know - in despight of your foolish cosmographers - our Empire situated from all eternity.'

would be the sums sort of sean of, if a piece of y had (Hough in companion of ours but poors and missible)

European Zicturer fall in our land, and was such same
the boldness to cut it in percent and about father in the timplifie mental a minute of about the father in the timplifier mental a minute of about about and the father in the fitter of the minute of the sould be made of the minute of the sould be made of the sould be made of the sould be much to the sould be made of the sould be made of the sould be so

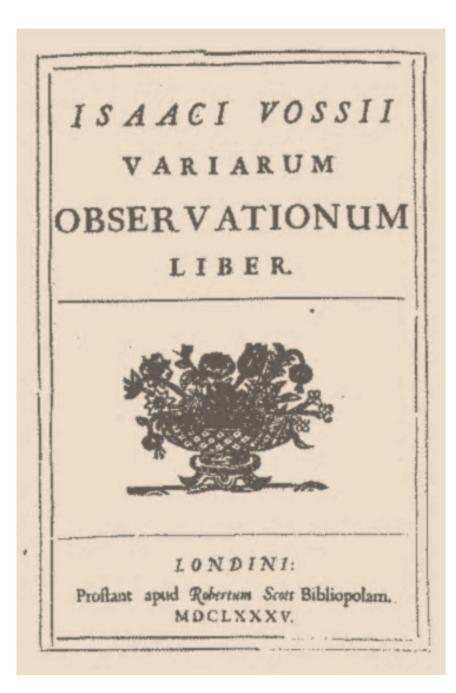
"The same sort of scandal [would be] if a peece of your best – though in comparison of ours but **poore and miserable European – pictures** did fall in our hands, and we came to have the boldness to cut it up in peeces and abuse and dispose of it in the like shamefull a manner as is said above"

"do not understand how to make shadows, and don't know how to temper their colors with oil. This is the reason why their paintings appear very dead and pallid, and look more like dead corpses than like living figures."

Joan Nieuhof, Het gezantschap der Neêrlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, Amsterdam, 1665.

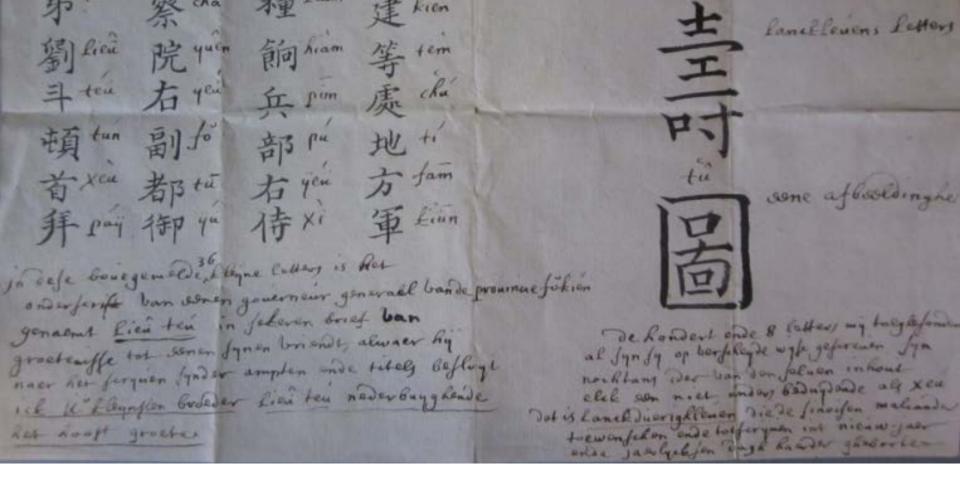


Qian Gu, Portrait of Laozi, 1539.



"Those who say that Chinese paintings do not represent shadows, criticize what they actually should have praised.

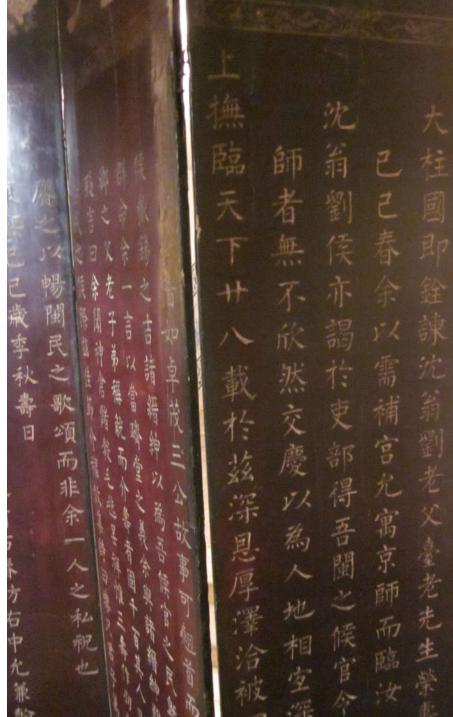
[...] The better the paintings, the less shadow they have; and in this respect they are far superior to the painters from our part of the world."



"[...]true and legal interpretation of these noble characters expressed in your sayd precious skreene, whereby at least you are to acquire a something more advantageous opinion of the most high and divine Empire of China."



Coromandel screen, China, late 17th century, wood and painted lacquer, 56 cm x 159 cm, Museu Medeiros e Almeida, Lisbon





Chinese mirror in N. Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, Amsterdam 1705, p. 750.

Nicolaes Witsen (1641-1717)

Detail from Michiel van Musscher, *Portrait of Nicolaas Witsen wearing a Japanese robe* (1688), oil on canvas, 54 x 48 cm.



NOORD EN OOST TARTARYE;

TWEEDE DEEL:

Behelzende de Landschappen Georgia, Mengrelia, Cirkassia, Crim, Astakkia, Altin, Tingoesia, Siberia, en Samojedia,

NICOLAES WITSEN.

GEORGIA OF IBERIA.

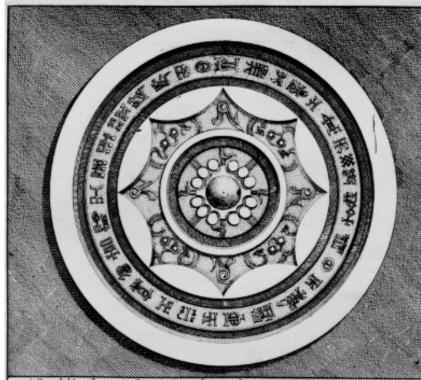


Dagestansche en Cirkassen Land, en ten geschikt, dat'er, volgens Tavernier, twee Zuiden weder aen Persien, in de Nabuur- Prinsdommen van deze Landen geworden

schap van de Kaspische Zee.

met de zelve gemeen hebben. voorige Eeuw, vier Vorsten: de eerste, Rustan taensch Geloof heeft omhelst. Deze ge-

It Landschap is gele- Het Landschap Georgia is dan gelegen gen omtrent op twee tusschen de Kaspische en Zwarte Zee. Geor-en veertig graden, gia word anderzins mede Gurgie of Gurgistan Noorder breete; ftoot | genaemt; strekt bewesten tot aen 't gebergte ten Oosten aen Per- dat Mengrelia afscheid. Het was voor de-R fien , ten Westen zen een gebied , daer al het Volk de Christeaen het gebied van lijke Godsdienstbeleed; doch zedert dat'er den Grooten Turk , veele Mahometanen zijn ingedrongen, is de ten Noorden aen het zaek, daer te Lande, door de Perzen, zoo zijn, die Landschappen, aen't Persiaensche De Georgianen zijn wel eigentlijk geen Hof, genaemt worden : den Konink van Tarters , maer der zelver naeste en aen- Persien kiest daer twee Bevelhebbers , die grenzende gebuuren, wes zy veele zeden de zelve Landschappen bestieren; doch daer toe weigerd hy nu in toekomende iemand In Georgia Heerschten, in de Lente van de te verkiezen, die niet al eer het Mahomegeheten, was Vorst van het gewest omtrent west-bestierders, die tot noch toe altoos Teffis: doch de Stad Teffis was toen al met Princen van 't Land zijn geweeft wie de



Albeeldingh van de Verkeerde zyde ener oude Staele Spiegel. die in zeker graf by Vergaturia in Sibierien is gevonden.

gel van Stael, ruim een span in de midlyn onder't gebergte, zeker byzonder aert groot, der gedaente als hier nevens de ver- over oude Begraef-plaetzen, in de we keerde zyde word vertoont, en my toege- behalven het gebeente der Lyken, e zonden is, wezende de andere zyde glat Huisraed gevonden word, van Met gepolyst, zoo als de Sinesche en Japansche als Zilver, Kooper en Yzer, zoo al Spiegels noch heden uit zeker aert van ge- Heere Soltikof, boven gemelt, van al mengt Stael worden gemaekt : men ziet 'er in de Graven gevonden Zilver , het ge oude Sinesche Letters en Geschrift aen, eener Zabel heeft doen maken, ter gel waer by komt, dat de Sinezen zoo wel als genis van deze zeltzaemheit. de Japanders, diergelijke gedrochten tot Men zegt, dat in Siberia, op zomr Afgoden, mede noch hedendaegs zijn ge- plaetzen, te zien zijn vervallene oude n bruikende, en by hare verstorvene Vrien- ren, en puinhoopen, daer het schynt den, alderhande Huisraed, en ook ver- den oulings gestaen te hebben, in de w beeldingen eeniger Afgoden, gewoon zijn zomtyds gevonden zoude worden ee in de Graven ter neder te leggen, in me- gedenk-tekenen, waer uit zoude blyk ninge, gelijk andere oude Heidenen, dat dat van ouds in die Landen beter geze alzulk tuig de verstorvenen in het andere de Volken gewoont hebben als nu , v Jeven zoude dienen : waer noch by komt, men nu van alzulke gebouwen daer nie dat men in Moegalen-land, en op de Reis- weet : en zouden de hedendaegsche & baen . tuffchen de oorfpronk van de Vliet rienen zeegen : dat de Volkeren, welk-

beneffens noch gevonden heeft een Spie- | Niet wyt van Tobol, vind men n

Gijsbert Cuper (1644-1716)

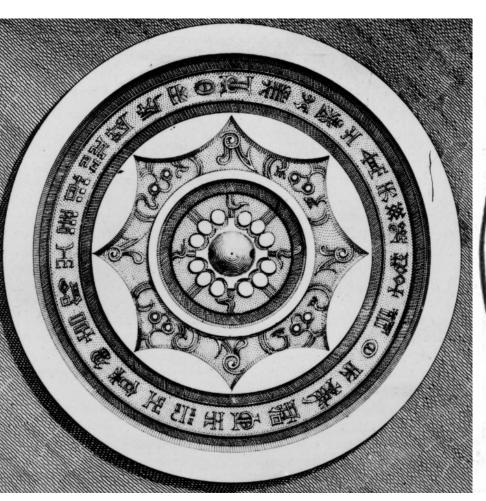
Detail from Jan de Baen, *Portrait of Gijsbert Cuper*, c. 1680, oil on canvas, 133 x 112 cm, Historisch Museum Deventer.



Found in Western Han dynasty (206 BCE – 9 CE) tomb in Changsha, Hunan province, China. Diameter 14.4 cm, 289 g.



© Changsha Municipal Museum





Chinese mirror in N. Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, Amsterdam 1705, p. 750.

Metal mirror found near Irbit (Siberia), from Philip von Strahlenberg (1676-1747), *Das Nord-und Östliche Theil von Europa und Asia*, Stockholm 1730, p. 398.

The global trajectory of Witsen's mirror



- Production site of Han dynasty mirrors
- 2. burial site of the mirror
- 3. Nicolaes Witsen
- 4. Joan van Hoorn
- 5. anonymous Chinese literatus
- 6. Gijsbert Cuper
- 7. Artus de Lionne and

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- 8. Guillaume Bonjour
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- 10. Joachim Bouvet
- 11. Claude de Visdelou
- 12. Abbé Jean-Paul Bignon
- 13. Otto Sperling
- 14. Marthurin de la Croze

Witsen to Cuper 4 November 1705

"to **Rome** and elsewhere to ask the **father Jesuits** whether they could explain the characters, [but] there was no one who could do it. Even those who had lived in China for many years confessed that

they could not do it, only that they thought it to be **broken Chinese**."



The full *qingbai* 清白inscription

潔清白而事君 Making without blemish my pure whiteness to serve you, 怨陰驩之弇明 I resent that impure pleasures may have covered up its brightness;

彼玄錫之流澤 Wearing the shining lustre provided by the polished tin 恐疏遠而日忘 I fear that I will be estranged and day by day be forgotten.

慎糜美之窮皚 Being cautious that my ravishing beauty exhausts brilliant whiteness,

外承驩之可說

I put aside the enjoyableness of pleasing [you].

慕窈窕之靈景 Admiring the divine spectacle of the fair and graceful lady 願永思而毋絕 I wish that there may be everlasting remembrance and never separation.

Verklaring van het omschrift in de ronde kring, der voorgaande Metale Spiegel, uit de Sinesche taale ten besten doenlyk was overgezet tot Batavia, den 22 December 1704. en by de Sinezen geschat over de 1800 Jaaren out te zyn.

in de binnenste omtrek by A, ziet men de letteren, zo aleze op de Spiegel vertoene staan zonde zodanige letteren by de Sinezen gebruikelyk geweest voor veele eenven.

in de buitenste omtrek by B, zyn de hedendaagsche Sinesche letteren tot verklering van het oude Schrijehier nevens gestelt:



Onderricht hoe de Sinezen de Letteren in het omschrift lezen en uitspreken.

Tien-boe-kie-keat, Isjeeng-pik-tien, Soe-kuen-soe-lien, Soey-tsi-ambian, Koean-Sik-tsie-onanghean, Kiong-phien-tsian, Tien-dSid-tsi-ocy, Goya treeng-tsi-Siong-tien.

Tien-boc-kie-keat. dat is,

God is xuiver, rein, en onbesmet
in xyn gebeel.

de zebre aanzien als zyn God: zich

Tijeeng pik tien is, God is zoo Schoon, als klaar en helder water.

See kuen-see-tien. beduid. Iemand deer een Koning of Verst bemint en in veele zaaken gebruikt werdende moet Koean Sik trie onanghean. dat is,
Maar wanneer een Konng iemand tot Staat
verheft, en ziet dat zyn gedrag goed en wel is, zoo
wanget by hom in zyn Siet zoo groot als de gebeele Zee.
Kiene phim tian. dat is.

ng phim trian. datis.

Nen is bang wor zyn. Vier als men guaad doet;

maar als men goed en regt wandeld, zoo

is het Nert aloos verheust.

Tien-died tri vey. is, En zooschoon als het schynzel der Zonne. 1) Explanation of the characters (transcription seal script to contemporary) made by 'learned Chinese' from the mainland.

- 2) Phonetic transcription according to the Dutch pronunciation of Hokkien, probably made in Batavia.
- 3) Translation into Dutch, made by 'learned one among [the Chinese at Batavia]'.

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Onderricht hoe de Sinezen de Letteren in het omschrift lezen en uitspreken.

Tien-boe-kie-keet, Triceng-pik-tien, Soc-kuen-soc-kien, Socy-tri ambian, Kocan-tik-tric manghean, Every phien-trian, Tien-did-tri-vey, Coya treeng-tri Siong-tien.

Tien-bee kie keat. dat is.

God is suiver, rein, en enbesmet in syn geheel.

Tijeeng-pik-tien. is,

Ged is zee Schoon, als blaar en

See kuen Joe tien . behail.

e-tion. belout.

Lemand deer con Evning, of Verst bomint en
in veele zeaken gebruikt werdende mootde zelve aanzien als zyn God: zich
wadtende andere to beledigen, wene zuik
doende zoo zal boe ben, gean,

Soer til ambian . is.
All mater dates en afteant.

Keean Sik trie enangbean. dat is,

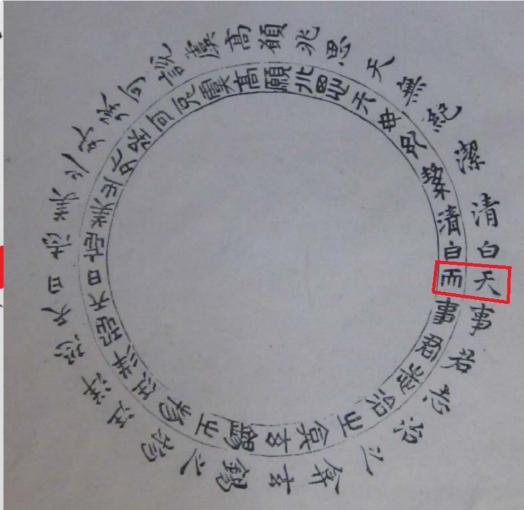
. Hear wanner on Koning isomend tot Staat workift in zeet det nyn golling good en wele zoe weling by hen in syn live on govered de gebele Zee.

King phim trien . Let is . Ann is hong wer syn . Year als now great doct; most als men good on rept wandeld zoo

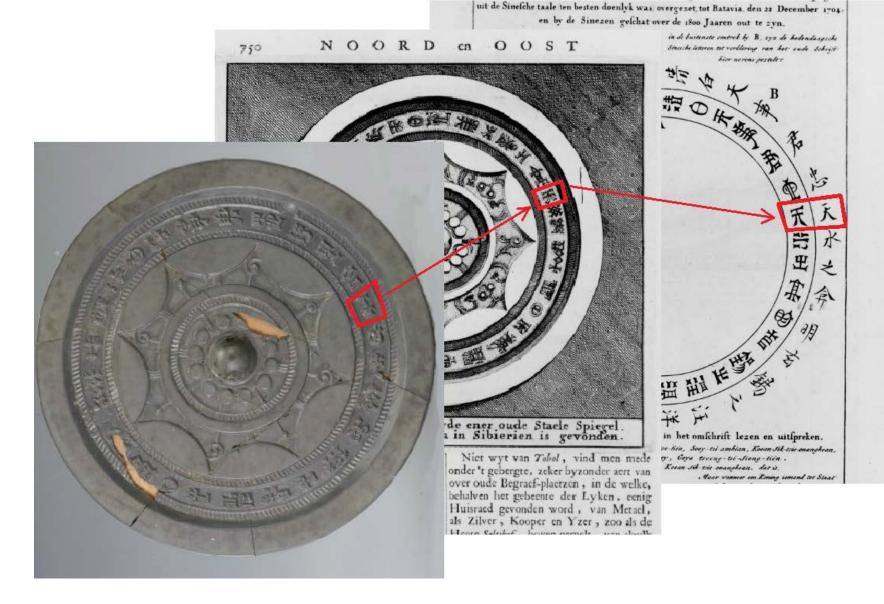
lien-did be very is.

in soo schoon als het schynael der Zonne.

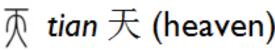
Goya treeng-tri-trieng-trien . is, On wanneer men als dan by de Aenteben zel aengenien worden ab een God op Jark,



Transcription of the inscription on a Han dynasty qingbai mirror in the 12th century catalogue Chongxiu Xuanhe Bogutu [lu]), Revised (Chongxiu Xuanhe Bogutu [lu] 重修宣和博古圖錄 (Antiquities Illustrated of Xuanhe Hall [or Xuanhue Period], Revised), 28.36b



而 er 而 (grammatical particle) 页 tian 天 (heaven)



天無紀絜 Tiën-boe-kie-keat

God is pure, immaculate, and wholly untarnished.

清白天 Tsjeeng-pik-tiën

God is as beautiful as pure and clear water.

事君忠天 Soe-kuen-soe-tiën

One who is held dear by a king or ruler and called upon in many circumstances, should look up to that one as his God: keeping themselves from insulting others, for this is how they shall fare in turn.

水之弇明 Soey-tsi-amhian

Like water which flows out and recedes.

玄錫之汪洋 Koean-sik-tsie-onanghean

But when a king raises someone to the peerage, and sees that his behaviour just, then the rejoicing in his heart will be as vast as the entire ocean.

恐世世 Kiong-phiën-tsian

One is fearful of their Lord when one does evil, but if one keeps to the straight and narrow path, then the heart is always overjoyed.

天日志美 Tiën-dsid-tsi-oey

And as beautiful as the light of the sun.

外承之嵩[天] Goya tseeng-tsi-siong-tiën

And then amongst men one shall be regarded as a God on Earth, for there is none [more?] equal to God.

Witsen to Cuper 20 October 1705

'It is remarkable that these letters are more than a **thousand years old** and the **common man** cannot read them'

'This is a device or *symbolium* from one of the ancient Chinese emperors, around the time of the **so learned and virtuous Confucius** of whom was said, with more reason than was said once about Plato and Seneca, "O Saint Confucius!"

Cuper to Witsen 3 November 1705

"will certainly add to your fame there [...] as scholars will see to what trouble you will go to understand what is hidden from all."

"Confucius was a great man, who has recognized only one God"



Bonjour (1669-1714) to Cuper 15 February 1706

"Therefore the God of the Chinese in this Chinese inscription is, to my mind, *Tian*, "as beautiful as clear and liquid water", namely the visible Heaven"

"I am completely convinced that the Chinese, in the past and now, attributed divinity to the visible Heaven. In describing the beauty of their God as the beauty of water, they appear similar to those pagans who attributed divinity to water"

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