

**‘THE PRINCIPLE OF THINGS’:  
MATERIALITY AND MORALITY  
FROM  
DUTCH STILL-LIFE TO KOREAN CHAEKGEORI**

by

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## Abstract

Elements from Dutch seventeenth-century still-lives—the *trompe-l'oeil* motif of the painted curtain, vases of flowers, books and writing instruments—appear in a unique form of Korean painting on folding screens (*Chaekgeori*) during the late Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910).

Connecting still-life paintings from the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic to the culture of eighteenth-century Joseon Korea, this thesis explores the natures of representation and vision and anxieties about material wealth and everyday objects in both the Protestant Netherlands and the Confucian Joseon dynasty.

An important bridge between these two cultures is Qing (1644-1911) China, which had closer cultural contact with Europe than Korea during the eighteenth-century. During this period, Korean scholars were part of the same circles in the same environment in Beijing as European envoys and painters in residence at the Beijing Palace, such as the Italian Jesuit father Giuseppe Castiglione (郎世寧, 1688–1766), known for his illusionistic still-lives. Thus, China, Korea and Europe were in direct contact, exchanging ideas on various fields of arts and sciences. Not only do I consider the still-life genre as a series of conventions in painting, but more importantly as a mode of exchange *through* and *in* representation that allows me to position late Joseon Korea within the larger artistic network of the early modern era between Europe and East Asia.

## **Lay Summary**

In connecting still-life paintings from the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic to the culture of eighteenth-century Joseon Korea, This thesis considers the still-life genre not only as a series of conventions in painting, but more importantly as a mode of exchange *through* and in representation that allows me to position late Joseon Korea within the larger artistic network of the early modern era between Europe and East Asia.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Irene Choi.

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## Introduction: A Bookish Inclination

Thus there is in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order. Naturally, his existence is tied to many other things as well: to a very mysterious relationship to ownership, [...] also to a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is, their usefulness—but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate.

—Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library:  
A Talk about Book Collecting” (1931)

In 1791, the twenty-second King of Joseon Korea (1392-1910) Jeongjo (r. 1776-1800) replaced the typical royal *Irworobongdo* (Sun, Moon, and Five Mountain Peaks, Fig. 1) screen behind his throne with a new folding screen showing neatly piled up books in a bookcase. In the old screen symbolizing the King’s sovereign power,<sup>1</sup> natural elements such as the sun, the moon, tall mountain peaks, and rows of pine trees by the choppy water keep a perfect balance of compositional symmetry and harmony. Jeongjo’s new screen departs from the natural setting and moves to a more intimate, private one—an interior space that a bookish scholar-gentleman would take pleasure in. The new screen presented the immaculately organized collection of books with their book binds and chords aligned for display. Pointing to the new screen, Jeongjo spoke to his courtiers, “Do you see them? These are not real books, but paintings.”<sup>2</sup> It was important for Jeongjo to not only let his court officials “see” and witness the subject matter of the new painted screen, but also to point out the fact that it was a painting, not an actual collection of books. He

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<sup>1</sup> Jung Im Kim, “An expanding usage and development of the image of The Sun, the Moon, and Five Peaks in the

<sup>2</sup> *Hongjaejeonseo (Collection of King Jeongjo's Writings)*, 162. Translated by Byungmo Chung and Sunglim Kim, eds. *Chaekgeori: The Power and Pleasure of Possessions in Korean Painted Screens*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2017), p. 29. Jeongjo placed *Chaekgeori* screens as a backdrops of his office *Seonjeongjeon* in Changduk Palace between 1791 and 1798; Sunglim Kim, “*Chaekgeori*: Multi-Dimensional Messages in Late Joeseon Korea,” *Archives of Asian Art* 64, no. 1 (2014): p. 30.

then immediately engaged in a dialogue with a scholar-official in the court, Jae Sun Oh. Jeongjo noted:

Great scholars of the past said that if one occasionally entered one's study and touched one's desk, it satisfied the mind, even though one was unable to read books regularly. Although I take pleasure in reading books, hard work keeps me from indulging in scholarly pursuits. I remember the words of the sage and look at this painting [*Chaekgeori*] and enjoy myself. Isn't this a wise thing to do?<sup>3</sup>

During his 24-years reign from 1776 to 1800, Jeongjo had been a proud patron of painters, printers, librarians, scholars, lexicographers, and typographers, collecting over 4,000 books on 150 different subjects for the Palace Library, *Gyujang-gak*.<sup>4</sup> As a well-known bibliophile, it seems natural for the king to place a *Chaekgeori* screen containing images of books as a backdrop in his office and encourage his courtiers to take a look at it to remind them of the virtues of scholarly endeavor. This unique type of still-life painting on folding screens from Korea during the late Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), *Chaekgeori*, translates as “A view of Books and Scholarly Utensils” or “Scholar’s Accouterments.” Although the very screen that Jeongjo showed to his court officials is no longer extant, a similar “court-style” *Chaekgeori* now at the Palace Museum of Korea (Fig. 2) gives us an idea of what Jeongjo’s screen might have looked like. The painted screen vibrates with silently repeated volumes, striking as garish—with masses of books almost obsessively filling up the space—but strangely seductive at the same time. Unlike later *Chaekgeori* that include depictions of various objects such as scholars’ utensils and curios from China and Europe, earlier *Chaekgeori* paintings like this one show only books with no other items. Historians consider this type of *Chaekgeori* painting the earliest type and the

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<sup>3</sup> *Hongjaejeonseo (Collection of King Jeongjo's Writings)*, 162:2. Translated by Black, “Court Style Ch’aekkeori,” in *Hopes and Aspirations: Decorative Painting of Korea* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1998), p. 23-35.

<sup>4</sup> Sunglim Kim, *From Middlemen to Center Stage: The Chungin Contribution to 19th Century Korean Painting*, Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009, p. 46.

one initially commissioned and favoured by the court of Jeongjo.<sup>5</sup>

Literally, *Chaekgeori* is a compound word consisting of *Chaek*, the Korean pronunciation for the Chinese character “book” (*ce*, 冊), and *-geori*, a bound word added after a noun or an adjective to often describe an array of items or people with similar nature (i.e. *mukeulgeori*, things to eat). Furthermore, as art historians Kay E. Black and Edward W. Wagner pointed out, *-geori* also has the nuance of “the makings of, material for.”<sup>6</sup> *Chaekgeori* therefore refers to books and their scholarly friends, such as calligraphy brushes, scholar’s rocks (also called “viewing stones”) admired for their interesting shapes and material quality, and antique vessels—the ideal ingredients or the makings of a scholar’s study. As these objects transform into a representation, a painting mounted on a folding screen, *Chaekgeori* becomes a painting, or more specifically, as Black and Wagner note, a still-life painting.<sup>7</sup> *Chaekgeori* therefore refers to both “still-life” objects such as books and fine goods that constitute a scholar’s studio and the painting genre that portrays scholar’s accouterments.<sup>8</sup> *Chaekgeori* as a still-life genre then opens up a variety of discussion points such as the issues of display, materiality of objects, and the idea of “representation” itself, as illuminated by Jeongjo who reveled in the pleasures of his new imperial screen as a *trompe-l’oeil* painting.

Similar issues of display and the representation of various material goods are best illustrated by seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings ranging from sumptuous *pronk* still-lives to Jan Davidsz. de Heem’s (1606-1683/4) somber early works from Leiden such as in *Still Life with Books* (1628). With gray-brownish tones, de Heem portrays a studio room filled with

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<sup>5</sup> Gwang Wu Yang, *Studies in 18-19th Century Chaekgeori Painting*. Diss., Hongik University, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Kay E. Black and Edward W. Wagner, “Ch’aekkkōri Paintings: A Korean Jigsaw Puzzle,” *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. 46 (1993): p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> It seems like there is already an inherent self-reflexive quality built in the word *Chaekgeori*, a painting of objects (scholar’s tools) being an object (in the scholar’s study)—a *mise en abyme* of medium, if you will.

open books and a writing set on a wooden table (Fig. 3). Like Jeongjo's *Chaekgeori*, De Heem's painting exhibits a particular fondness for books and the knowledge they contain. In contrast to the cool and tranquil ambiance exuded by the studio, the table is chaotically filled with books with rolled up corners bent with dampness and worn either from use or neglect. Some of these open books have legible inscriptions, inviting the viewer to read their contents. For example, at the center of the painting, an open book which reads, *G. A. Brderoos Treur-spel van Rodd'rick ende Alphonsus*, informs the viewer of the work by the dramatist and the member of the *Rederijkerskamer* (Dutch Chamber of Rhetoric) Gerbrand Adriaenzoon Bredero (1586-1618). Art historian Norbert Schneider suggests that de Heem reflects the heated tension between *rederikers* and academics during the 1630s with this particular painting, condemning the vanity of Bredero's writing as mere fleeting pleasure and acclaiming the values held by academics.<sup>9</sup> As art historians Jan Bialostocki and Ingvar Bergström note, the tradition of depicting books, like de Heem's work, can be traced to Leiden—the principal center of *vanitas* still-lives from around the 1620s to the 1650s—where the books depicted in paintings are reminders of moral judgments and thoughts.<sup>10</sup> It is within these oscillating realms of disorder vs. order<sup>11</sup> and the unprincipled vs. the virtuous that the element of *vanitas* lies in De Heem's *Still Life with Books*. How the Leiden still-life painters connected books and other objects to the *vanitas* theme became an important part in many other Dutch still-life paintings including the *tromp- l'oeil* types and those filled with worldly goods. The *vanitas* theme working on an intellectual, scholarly level in de Heem's work now expands to a material level in still-lives containing fine objects such as Willem Claesz

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<sup>9</sup> Norbert Schneider, *Still Life*, (Taschen, 2003), p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Bialostocki, *The Message of Images: Studies in the History of Art*, (Vienna: Irsa Verlag, 1988), pp. 42-63; Ingvar Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, Reprint of the first American edition 1956. Trans. Christina Hedström and Gerald Taylor. Hacker Art Books, New York, p. 155; Simon Schama, "Perishable Commodities: Dutch Still-Life Painting and the 'Empire of Things,'" *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (Routledge, 1994), p. 481.

<sup>11</sup> "Objectively, the Vanitas motif represents the threat of disorder," in Harry Berger, *Caterpillars: Reflections on Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life Painting* (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2011), p. 9.

Heda's *Still-life with a Gilt Cup* (Fig. 4), which I discuss more in depth in the later chapters. Art historians Simon Schama and Elizabeth Honig in their respective works suggest how the seventeenth-century Dutch Calvinist society was morally troubled by its own material abundance, which is implicit particularly in the genre of still-life. Schama and Honig therefore pay attention to the sense of “embarrassment” or unease about the economic and the material abundance in Dutch society translated in still-life paintings that try to mitigate such discomfort by “castigating the material appetite or by negotiating the invasion of market values into common, domestic existence”<sup>12</sup> with the quintessential *vanitas* theme. The pride about material prosperity and the sheen of fine goods in the Dutch still-life is tempered by the ever-present morality and humility central to the Calvinist faith.

Parallel to the concerns reflected in Dutch *vanitas* still-life paintings, Jeongjo's *Chaekgeori* also delivers a moral value for the painting, serving as a visual rhetoric of his didactic scheme. Art historian Sung Lim Kim notes that Jeongjo used *Chaekgeori* for two main purposes: “first, as a vicarious substitute for books; second, as an agent to teach moral lessons.”<sup>13</sup> Kim suggests that Jeongjo was particularly keen on using *Chaekgeori* to promote morally sound and “correct” reading habits, exemplified by his choice of book titles from his favorite Confucian classics—and other non-Confucian Chinese texts like *Zhuangzi* (莊子)—clearly labeled by title in *Chaekgeori* paintings he commissioned. With these carefully chosen book titles represented in *Chaekgeori*, Jeongjo admonished his court officials who consumed both “inappropriate” books (such as secular novels and short essays)<sup>14</sup> as well as luxury objects imported from China. Such luxury goods, antiques, and curios from Europe through China flooded into Korea during the late

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Honig, “Making Sense of Things: On the Motives of Dutch Still Life,” *Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 34 (1998): p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Sunglim Kim, *From Middlemen to Center Stage*, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

eighteenth-century, and King Jeongjo felt the need to maintain public morality preserving and encouraging socio-political Neo-Confucian norms of frugality by establishing a series of edicts concerning material goods. He banned the import and trade of luxury goods such as patterned silk from China in 1787. Luxurious feasts had been prohibited by 1778, and the use of wigs and hairpieces—measures indicating the wealth of affluent families in Seoul—was forbidden by 1788.<sup>15</sup> A virtuous scholar-official should only read proper Chinese classics and should not indulge in superfluous, material consumption. Jeongjo’s rigorous regulation on consumption culture (of both books and things) reflects just how much Joseon people were interested in material goods and in collecting them.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, when the king’s orders and the influx of brilliant objects were passionately colliding, a tasteful Joseon scholar who consumed *Chaekgeori* or objects represented in *Chaekgeori* was to carefully position himself between the distinct coyness about treating things—holding on to the Neo-Confucian virtue of detaching oneself from material wealth—and the desire to cherish such display of brilliant objects to demonstrate his elegant taste and cultivation.

Apart from Jeongjo’s moralistic concerns, his comment about the *Chaekgeori* screen being a painting instead of actual books also stands out. Walter Benjamin in his essay on book collecting remarks on both the functional and theatrical values that his collected objects offer. Jeongjo’s *Chaekgeori* screen performs the practical, utilitarian role as the “stage” for his didactic agenda. At the same time, as a carefully crafted “scene,” the screen as painting also functions as

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<sup>15</sup> Jungmann, *Pathways to Korean Culture: Paintings of the Joseon Dynasty, 1392-1910* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014) pp. 270-71.

<sup>16</sup> “Lately the habits of the high officials have become very queer, and they try to disrupt the Joseon order and instead want to learn Chinese ways. Not only through [vulgar] books, but also through everyday articles, they use Chinese items to show off their highbrow culture. Ink sticks, screens, brush holders, chairs, antiques—they lay out all these imported items, drink tea, smoke scents . . . I cannot mention them all one by one. Even I, who stay deep in the palace, know this by hearsay, and there must be deep and widespread harmful effects scattered all over.” *Hongjaejeonseo* (Collection of King Jeongjo’s Writings), 175, *Ildegunok* (Records of dialogues between King Jeongjo and his subjects), *Huneo* (Admonition), translated by Kim, “*Chaekgeori*: Multi-Dimensional Messages in Late Joseon Korea,” p. 30.

a stage for deception related to both vision and surface-materiality.<sup>17</sup> As Jeongjo felt the need to ask his courtiers to take a closer look and realize that it is actually a painting, the painted books in the folding screen must have appeared astonishingly life-like—a *trompe-l'oeil*. *Trompe-l'oeil* according to art historian Sybille Ebert-Schifferer refers to “paintings that represent things in an especially deceptive way, so that the representation of a thing seems to be the thing itself.”<sup>18</sup> As both painting of objects and an object itself, *trompe-l'oeil* with its heightened verisimilitude deceives the eye and twists the expectation, reminding the viewer of the disjuncture between what it is and what it seems. Thus, attention should be given to not only what the *trompe-l'oeil* depicts (the subject matter of a *trompe-l'oeil* painting), but also to the status of the *trompe-l'oeil* as a thing, an object, as material presence. A successful *trompe-l'oeil* would also mask its medium/material-specificity—a wooden bookcase filled with brilliant objects would happen to be a painted screen, and what looks like a painted screen might turn out to be an embroidered one (Fig. 5).<sup>19</sup> Further attention should be given to the presence, the response, and the role of an observer of the *trompe-l'oeil*—the court officials in Jeongjo’s court before the king’s new screen.

As noted by numerous art historians of early modern European art such as Svetlana

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<sup>17</sup> Ulrich Lehmann has stated that surfaces “possess distinct material qualities,” working as a dialectic entity that defines “the integrity of the object, substantiates in material, economic and aesthetic terms,” see Ulrich Lehmann, “Surface as material, material into surface: dialectic in C.C.P. Depth, im/permeability,” in: *Surface Tensions: Surface, Finish and the Meaning of Objects*, ed. Glenn Adamson and Victoria Kelley (New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 147. Although Lehmann focuses on textile and fashion, his analyses of surfaces concerning issues of materiality, production, and consumption are useful for my consideration of *Chaekgeori* as both a material object and as a representational surface. Jonathan Hay offers similar views on surfaces as Lehmann does as he focuses on the importance of surface in decorative art of Ming and Qing China; Hay suggests that surfaces have an agency that opens up, interrogates, and subverts the social connection between objects and humans. More than inanimate objects of appreciation or of desire, surfaces actively engage humans in affective, phenomenological, and dialectic ways, “think[ing] with us.” Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010), p. 78. Thinking about “surfaces” in *Chaekgeori* could benefit from looking at Hay’s and Lehmann’s ideas on materiality and social, economical dimensions of surfaces.

<sup>18</sup> Ebert-Schifferer, Sybille, ed. *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe L'oeil Painting* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2002), p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Hay in *Sensuous Surfaces* also explores the concept of *trompe-l'oeil* tied to Ming-Qing China’s specific social, economical, and political landscapes of Ming-Qing China, which allows me to examine the *trompe-l'oeil* theme in both Dutch still-lives and *Chaekgeori* in a broader context. See Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, pp. 225-235.

Alpers, Victor Stoichita, as well as the media theorist Bernhard Siegert, *trompe-l'oeil* is inherently linked to the genre of still-life, not simply working as “an accessory nor an ingredient added to the ‘real’ still life.”<sup>20</sup> *Trompe-l'oeil* oscillates between the dialectic poles of transparency vs. opacity and the “imaginary pictorial space” vs. the material medium<sup>21</sup> to explore the realms of mimesis, (re)presentation, and materiality that are also central to the still-life genre. Although *trompe-l'oeil* is deeply embedded in the early modern European painting tradition, the element of *trompe-l'oeil* opens up some suggestive questions for this thesis. What is the relevance of still-life paintings from the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and those of eighteenth-century Joseon Korea, *Chaekgeori*? The visuality and materiality of still-lives that this thesis explores reflect socio-political, moral implications of still-life paintings and anxieties about and celebration of material wealth and everyday objects of both the Protestant Netherlands and the Confucian Joseon dynasty. Such multifaceted concerns surrounding material goods are projected, revealed, and concealed in still-life paintings of the two increasingly mercantilist and proto-capitalist circumstances. The socio-political, corporeal, and moral complexes that still-life paintings from these two cultures exhibit encompass the issues of surface and depth, disorder and order, and pleasure and moderation of desire embedded in the medium of painting.

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<sup>20</sup> “Genealogically it is impossible to separate still life from trompe-l’oeil.” Siegert, Bernhard, “Figures of Self-Reference: A Media Genealogy of the Trompe-l’oeil in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life,” *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 167.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 191.



# Chapter 1: Joseon, China, and Europe: Displays of World, World of Displays

## 1.1 Joseon-Europe Artistic Exchange

Recently, *Chaekgeori* have received unprecedented attention by scholars tracking the artistic exchanges between Korea and Europe in the early modern period. The exhibition *Looking East: Rubens's Encounter with Asia* at the Getty Museum in 2013 featured the large-scale chalk drawing of a man dressed in Korean costume by the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens from circa 1617. The Getty describes this drawing as the earliest Western depiction of a person in Korean garments, opening up a wider discussion of various contexts in which “knowledge about each continent [of Europe and Asia] was exchanged during the early modern period, paying particular attention to how Rubens, through his Jesuit patrons in the cosmopolitan city of Antwerp, could have gained access to costume from Joseon dynasty Korea.”<sup>22</sup> In her contribution to the exhibition catalog, art historian Burglind Jungmann explains the foreign, exotic inspirations in early modern Korean paintings ranging from still-lives to portraits and landscapes. Jungmann discusses what she calls Baroque concepts and techniques in Jang Han Jong's eight-panel *Chaekgeori* screen with a curtain (Fig. 6), and compares Jang's painting with Rubens's *Portrait of Nicolas Trigault* from ca. 1616,<sup>23</sup> stressing only the use of the curtains' volumes to provide theatrical spatial background. In contrast, I argue that it will be more fruitful to explore the resonance of *Chaekgeori* with the early modern European still-life genre instead of portraiture. Jang's curtain that is partially folded to reveal (or conceal) the collection of objects behind is comparable to the Dutch tradition of including an illusionistic, painted curtain over a painting, or

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<sup>22</sup> Timothy Potts, “Foreword” in *Looking East: Rubens's Encounter with Asia* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2013), p. vii.

<sup>23</sup> Burglind Jungmann, “Korean Contacts with Europeans in Beijing, and European Inspiration in Early Modern Korean Art,” in *Looking East: Rubens's Encounter with Asia*, 67 and note 1, p. 85.

the Flemish practice of putting an actual curtain over a painting for protection and to signify importance, exemplified in *Still Life with a Flower Garland and a Curtain* (Fig. 7) by the two Dutch artists Adriaen van der Spelt and Frans van Mieris. Van Mieris's curtain points to the interplay between surface and depth as well as the pleasure of looking and being deceived by the illusion. The painting also interrogates the nature and materiality of representation or painting, echoing Jeongjo's particular remark on *Chaekgeori* being a painting above anything else. With particular attention to the motif of the painted curtain in Jang and van der Spelt-van Mieris's paintings, I will connect still-life paintings from seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and eighteenth-century Joseon that concern dynamics of scopic and economic exchanges, *trompe-l'oeil*, and perception in later chapters more in depth.

Connecting *Chaekgeori* and Dutch still-lives profits from considering a range of other media and genres of the early modern world that are relevant to the still-life. The display of material goods and the idea of collecting shown in *Chaekgeori* and Dutch still-life paintings can be linked to the European cabinets of curiosity and Qing China's *Duobaoge* (多宝格) or "ten-thousand-treasure shelf," as suggested by art historians Sunghim Kim and Joy Kenseth.<sup>24</sup> Many European cabinets of curiosity (*Kunstkammer* and *Wunderkammer*) doubled as studies or private treasuries.<sup>25</sup> By the mid-sixteenth-century, the production of cabinets filled with books, antiquities, rarities, and astronomical instruments to satisfy the collector's scholarly pursuits was already widespread across Europe. In his travels across Europe from 1556 to 1560, a

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<sup>24</sup> Sunghim Kim and Joy Kenseth, "From Europe to Korea: The Marvelous Journey of Collectibles in Painting," *Chaekgeori: The Power and Pleasure of Possessions in Korean Painted Screens*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2017), pp.18-34. For comparative analyses on collecting and collections in early modern Europe and China, see: Grasskamp, Anna, *Cultivated Curiosities: A Comparative Study of Chinese Artifacts in European Kunstkammern and European Objects in Chinese Elite Collections*, Diss., Leiden University, 2013; Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991); Peter N. Miller and François Louis eds., *Antiquarianism and intellectual life in Europe and China, 1500-1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Vimalin Rujivacharakul, *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Eva Oledzka, *Medieval and Renaissance Interiors* (London: The British Library, 2016), p. 145.

Netherlandish collector Hubert Goltzius (1526-1583) identified 968 collections of curiosity at every social level, from princes and kings of the Holy Roman Emperor to scholars, artists, and poets.<sup>26</sup> The Italian *studiolo* as well as scholar's cabinet/studio, such as the one shown in Joseph Arnold's *The Dimpfel Family Collections in Rogensburg* (Fig. 8), reflect the centrality of material goods and display of such material presence in the studio owner's intellectual, spiritual introspection of the physical world.<sup>27</sup> Art historian Jerome Silbergeld has discussed various forms of display cabinets from Europe that may illuminate the origin of Joseon *Chaekgeori*.<sup>28</sup> Silbergeld links Italian *studiolo* and Korean *Chaekgeori*, providing a transmission model with a rather uninterrupted genealogy of display cabinet culture from quattrocento Milan to eighteenth-century Joseon Korea.<sup>29</sup> Although the resemblance and connection between the *studiolo* and *Chaekgeori* are palpable, it seems important to look at another agent at play that shaped the art production in fifteenth-century Italy to make the Italy-Joseon connection stronger. As noted by art historian Paula Nuttall, Italy—especially Florence—was deeply engrossed in Netherlandish paintings from the North during this period. Writers like Giovanni Santi (1435-1494) in his *Rhymed Chronicle* praised Flemish painters Rogier van der Weyden and Jan van Eyck, who

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<sup>26</sup> Anthony Shelton, "cabinets of transgression: Renaissance collections and the incorporation of the new world" in eds. Roger Cardinal and John Elsner *Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 180.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the Gubbio *studiolo* demonstrates contemporary Italian scholarly, moral virtues, cosmology, and the centrality of vision/looking, reflected in the verse in distich of the *studiolo*. The first word "*ASPICIS*" prompts the viewer to "look at": "*You see* how the eternal students of the Venerable Mother Men exalted in learning and in genius Fall forward, suppliantly with bared head And bended knee, before [the face of their parent]. With the help of Justice, reverend Piety prevails And none regrets having submitted to his foster mother" translated by Robert Kirkbride, *Architecture and memory: the Renaissance studioli of Federico de Montefeltro* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 96.

<sup>28</sup> Jerome Silbergeld, "From Studiolo to Chaekgeori, A Transcultural Journey: An Introduction to Sungrim Kim's 'Chaekgeori: Multi-Dimensional Messages in Late Joseon Korea,'" *Archives of Asian Art* 64, no. 1 (2014): p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Although Silbergeld's comprehensive scope of cabinet forms across Europe and Asia is illuminating, at one point he conflates the Italian *studiolo* and central-Northern European *Kunstammern* and *Wunderkammern*, suggesting that the *studiolo* "became" those latter wondrous curiosity cabinets. He writes, "As Europe extended its reach through imperial conquest, in German-speaking central Europe the *studiolo* became the *Wunderkammer* (chamber of curiosities) or *Wunderkabinett*, *Kunstammer* (art chamber), and *Schatzkammer* (treasure chamber)." Silbergeld, p. 1.

“surpassed reality many times” in their paintings.<sup>30</sup> Netherlandish painting techniques and pictorial elements definitely captured the contemporary artists’ and writers’ hearts and were actively influencing Italian picture making. Domenico Ghirlandaio’s (1449-1494) fresco *Saint Jerome in His Studio* (Fig. 9) at the Florentine *Chiesa Ognissanti*, features the saint in white beard holding a pen in his right hand as he rests his head on the left hand.<sup>31</sup> Either engulfed in writing or deeply contemplating, the saint in the traditional melancholic pose is surrounded by books, vessels, fruits, documents, and writing tools filling the studio. The room is furnished with a sumptuous carpet and a green, heavily pleated curtain that is pulled back to show the books on the shelf. The side of the saint’s writing desk is equipped with ink tubes, scissors, a ruler, and a pair of glasses. The highly detailed carpet flaunting its material, tactile quality and the pair of glasses are reminiscent of the old Netherlandish painting by Jan van Eyck, *The Madonna with Canon van der Paele* (Fig. 10, 1436).<sup>32</sup> As art historian Walter Melion argues,<sup>33</sup> the highly finished look or the “fastidiousness” of each material depicted is best exemplified by van Eyck, whose use of the medium of oil paint marks a kind of style that distinguishes Northern art from the Italian tradition.<sup>33</sup> The numerous “still-life”<sup>34</sup> objects assembled in the saint’s silent yet

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<sup>30</sup> Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400–1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 193.

<sup>31</sup> The saint resting his head on his hand is in the traditional pose of the melancholic, the humor associated with a “sufferer” in deep introspection. The pose is best known from Albrecht Dürer’s 1514 print, *Melancholia I*, and according to Piers D. Britton, the pose “was commonly given to contemplatives and prophets in quattrocento and cinquecento art both in Italy and in Northern Europe” (182-3). See Britton, “(Hu)moral Exemplars: Type and Temperament in Cinquecento Painting,” in *Visualizing Medieval Medicine and Natural History, 1200–1550* ed. Jean A. Givens, Karen M. Reeds, Alain Touwaide (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), p. 177-204.

<sup>32</sup> Ghirlandaio was influenced by Flemish paintings and especially by Jan van Eyck. See Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Vincent Ilardi, *Renaissance Vision from Spectacles to Telescopes* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2007), p. 263.

<sup>33</sup> Walter Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander’s Schilder-Boeck* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 60.

<sup>34</sup> The triptych *Aix Annunciation* (1442-1445) by the Netherlandish artist Barthélemy d’Eyck (1420-1470s) depicts two prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah (each residing in the left and the right wings of the triptych) framed by stone arches, flanking the Annunciation scene at the center. The top of the arches become niches that store objects—books, fruit, wooden boxes, and cloth, etc.—that are similar to the ones featured in Ghirlandaio’s *Saint Jerome in his Studio*. The triptych is now divided and scattered all over various museums, and part of the left panel showing books

vibrant studio allow Ghirlandaio to demonstrate his virtuosity in the representation of various material goods with different textures and surfaces. European studio portraits, such as Ghirlandaio's depiction of Saint Jerome, and illuminated manuscripts dating back to fifteenth-century are therefore worth noting in this comparative analysis of seventeenth-century Dutch still-life and *Chaekgeori*. Similar motifs of "still-life" objects and scholars or saints in their studies can be found in many Flemish illuminated manuscript miniatures, to which I will return in later chapters.

## 1.2. The Bridge: China

Silbergeld, Kim, Kenseth, and Jungmann all consider China as the important bridge between European modes of display and depictions of things and *Chaekgeori*. As noted by Kim many Qing (1644-1912) Chinese figure paintings such the *Twelve Beauties at Leisure* screen commissioned by the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1722-1735) include a depiction of *Duobaoge* and objects for display as backdrops and as part of a narrative scene.<sup>35</sup> Now at the Beijing Palace Museum, the screen was once placed in Yongzheng's *Deep Inside Weeping Willows Reading Hall* (*Shenliu tushu tang*, 深柳读书堂), a study within his private quarters at the Summer Palace presented to him by his father, emperor Kangxi (r. 1662-1722) in 1709. One of the panels (Fig. 11) portrays a court lady adorned with layers of whisper-thin garments sitting by the writing desk, signaled by the ink stone, engulfed in thought. Surrounding the lady is a comprehensible collection of brilliant objects, ranging from bronze antique vessels to books wrapped in brocaded covers, all carefully and proudly kept in the compartmentalized furniture. Like Saint Jerome, the

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and objects (without the figure of Isaiah) is kept in the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam as a "still-life" painting, entitled *Still Life with Books in a Niche* (Object Number: SK-A-2399).

<sup>35</sup> Kim, "*Chaekgeori*: Multi-Dimensional Messages in Late Joseon Korea," p. 6

beautiful lady seated in the bamboo chair is absorbed in her private thoughts—“thinking with,”<sup>36</sup> as Hay would say—the objects that surround her. As the beauty gently yet surely holds the silken fabric, her gaze goes astray—neither quite looking at something nor paying attention to the splendid antiquities in the *Duobaoge*. And yet, the ever so soft fabric between her fingers seems to fuel her leisurely contemplation and appreciation of the material presence in the room, just as Jeongjo’s study desk would prompt the sitter to reflect on his favorite books upon touching the furniture.<sup>37</sup> The blackness of the court lady’s hair spills into the lacquer box with similar color and smooth texture on the cabinet shelf, making it difficult to determine the boundary between the woman’s body and the object upon first glance. This *trompe-‘loeil* effect is heightened by the woman’s hairpieces doubling as a possible decoration—a flower—on the lustrous lacquer box. Hay notes that lacquer “took on connotations of bodily beauty and tactility”<sup>38</sup> as it was a staple literary routine in Ming-Qing China to compare hair to black lacquer. The size of the box takes over almost the whole compartment’s space and so creates an illusion of appearing like a lacquer panel or a cover/door instead of a recessed niche. This play on surface and depth is registered in the materiality of lacquer itself, as black lacquer “possesses a smooth surface with a restrained gloss that gives the surface a degree of internal depth, an example of the capacity of materials ‘to delay and materialize the passage of light.’”<sup>39</sup> Mental exercise of introspection and sensorial experience oscillate in the depths and surfaces of material objects in the sitter’s studio.

With the *Duobaoge* display cabinet as niches receding into the picture plane, the artist of the *Twelve Beauties at Leisure* was able to demonstrate his ability to render perspective, spatial organization, and representation of objects in a three-dimensional manner. In another panel from

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<sup>36</sup> Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> The reading and dining tables used in Joseon court were often coated with red or black lacquer on wood. See Pai Man-sil, *Dining Tables: Korean Traditional Handicrafts* (Seoul: Ehwa Womans University Press, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, p. 118.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-120.

the same screen (Fig. 12), another woman holds a small enamel watch, sitting by a table with chrysanthemums, seasonal flower for early autumn, and a pile of books in a study. The study is connected to another room through a window with a curtain pulled back. The lifted curtain and the use of perspective allowed the artist to afford additional interior space within the whole composition. The European astrolabe on the highly decorated black lacquer table in the next room together with the enamel watch held by the lady indicate the prevalence of European goods in Qing court's collection of fine objects. Art historian James Cahill suggests that, "elements of style and devices of representation adopted from Western pictorial art are pervasive and important in Chinese painting"<sup>40</sup> from the late Ming (sixteenth century) and that contact with European pictures "opened to Chinese painters a broad range of unfamiliar modes of representation, compositional types, and illusionistic devices on which they could draw as they pleased."<sup>41</sup> The development of linear perspective in Chinese painting followed a different path from that in European painting, but as art historians James Cahill and Kristina Kleutghen suggest, linear perspective at the Qing court was often understood as European or an expression of "Jesuit perspective,"<sup>42</sup> using the term "perspectival painting" (*xianfahua*, 线法画) interchangeably with "scenic illusion painting" (*tongjinghua*, 通景画).<sup>43</sup> Cahill, however, points to different European

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<sup>40</sup> James Cahill, *Picture for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 67-68.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>42</sup> "The *Study of Vision* is generally seen as a demonstration of "Jesuit perspective," a reflection of Jesuit influence at the Qing court and therefore of the Jesuit mission itself." Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), p. 61. Nian Xiyao (1671–1738)'s treatise *The Study of Vision* (*Shixue*, 视学, 1735) mentions the Italian Jesuit father Giuseppe Castiglione and includes diagrams derived from Andrea Pozzo (1642–1709)'s *Perspectiva pictorum et architectonorum* (1707), and Nian specifically credits Castiglione as his teacher "from whom he learned Western painting." *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>43</sup> Kleutghen, *Ibid.*, p. 60. For Chinese studies of vision and linear perspective in relation to European art during the Ming-Qing period, see Kleutghen, "Staging Europe: Theatricality and Painting at the Chinese Imperial Court," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 42, (2013): pp. 81-102; Hui Zhou, "The Jesuit Theater of Memory in China," *Montreal Architectural Review* 2 (March, 2015) pp. 37-54; Hui Zhou, *A Jesuit Garden in Beijing and Early Modern Chinese Culture* (Lafayette, IN: The Purdue University Press, 2011), 96-98; Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Ning Ding eds. *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges between China and the West* (Los Angeles, California: Getty

styles and nuances of rendering space in Qing painting, associating the methods of linear perspective with a vanishing point with “southern” European or Italian schools of painting and techniques of representing interior space with the “effect of light-and-dark shading” with Dutch and Flemish print and painting traditions.<sup>44</sup> The northern (Dutch and Flemish) schools experiment with, as Cahill writes:

a new, more complex systems of spaces opening back beyond the foreground, spaces into which the viewer’s eye could be drawn—not along receding, ultimately converging lines, as in the Italian perspective system, but through windows and doors, or beyond and between objects to further objects and figures diminished [...] The practice in Qing pictorial art of constructing see-through compositions with connected spaces opening into depth, then, must have been based on northern European models, Dutch or Flemish.<sup>45</sup>

Cahill compares two paintings of beautiful women in illusionistically depicted private spaces by Leng Mei (ca. 1670-1742 or after), *Beautiful Women at Dressing Table with Attendant* (Fig. 13), and by Gerard Dou (1613-1675), *Young Woman at Her Dressing Table* (Fig. 14). In both paintings, curtains framing the whole interior space are pulled back, creating not only depth but also the surfaces on which light and dark shades could interact. Closed and open cavities, such as windows and bookshelf (the *Chaekgeori*-like cabinet behind the curtain in Mei’s painting), “constructing see-through compositions” together with the soft *chiaroscuro* proposes a play between opacity and transparency.

The Dutch painter Dou produced a number of illusionistic *vanitas* or *bedriegertjes* still-life paintings often with niches and curtains drawn to the sides. Bergström writes that Dou’s best works were installed within miniature cupboards or on the doors that Dou had painted further

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Research Institute, 2015); Hui Zhou, “Perspective Jing: The Depth of Architectural Representation in a European-Chinese Garden Encounter,” *Chora: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture*, vol. 6, ed. Alberto Pérez-Gómez & Stephen Parcell (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011) pp. 275-304.

<sup>44</sup> Cahill, *Picture for Use and Pleasure*, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



still-life images,<sup>46</sup> recalling the tradition of painting walls or additional space to paint still-life imagery upon them in Greek and Roman antiquity.<sup>47</sup> As Cahill notes, see-through compositions inspired by Dutch and Flemish works were far more prevalent than the Italian system of vanishing-point perspective in Qing Chinese paintings.<sup>48</sup> Depictions of niches and spatial renderings in the *Duobaoge* and the curtain motifs in Qing court paintings provide an important bridge between seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings and Joseon *Chaekgeori*.

As reflected in Jeongjo's concern about people's unchecked consumption of books and things, late Joseon elites and collectors (scholars, and later the wealthy merchant and middle class) expressed passionate interest in Ming-Qing Chinese treatises on material things such as Wen Zhengheng (1585–1645)'s *Treatise on Superfluous Things* (*Zhangwuzhi*, 長物志, 1620–1627) from the sixteenth-century onwards. *Chaekgeori* as portrayal of material objects and as a reflection on the art of collecting or assemblage is deeply related to contemporary Ming and Qing visual and material culture ranging from Qing *Duobaoge* cabinets to Ming connoisseurship of antiquities expressed in the *Bogutu* (博古圖, “Broadly Examining Antiquities” or “Illustrated Catalogues of Antiquities”) genre. Attention to objects and to the treatment of objects in China can be found in various mediums including painting and calligraphy manuals,<sup>49</sup> encyclopedias, birthday screens decorated with the “hundred antiquities” theme, and in literature such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* (also called *The Story of the Stone*, *Hong lou meng*, 紅樓夢, mid eighteenth-century) and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin ping mei*, 金瓶梅, 1610), which are filled with

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<sup>46</sup> Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting*, p. 182.

<sup>47</sup> See chapter “Xenia” in Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 17–59.

<sup>48</sup> Cahill, *Picture for Use and Pleasure*, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> Some examples of encyclopedia and manuals from Ming-Qing period similar to Wen's *Superfluous Things* are: Hu Zhengyan (胡正言, 1584–1674)'s *Ten Bamboo Studio Manual of Calligraphy and Painting* (*Shizhuzhai shuhua pu*, 十竹齋書畫譜, 1633); Gao Lian (高濂)'s encyclopedia, *Eight Treatises on the Nurturing of Life* (*Zunsheng Bajian*, 遵生八箋, first published in 1591).

verses on lavish objects on display and “depictive surfaces.”<sup>50</sup> Neo-Confucianism played a role in practices of collecting ancient objects in both Ming-Qing China and Joseon, with the literati and elites exhibiting an obligation to cultivate themselves into better men (*junzi*, 君子, gentleman or “the perfect man” who “combine(s) the qualities of saint, scholar, and gentlemen”<sup>51</sup>). Hay journeys through a range of pleasurable yet compelling objects for consumption in the Ming and Qing dynasties, examining the affective, phenomenological, and social roles that these objects and their sensuous surfaces perform. Rather than ornamentation or accessories, objects think and live with us, working as a social connector that illuminates the political and economic fabric of the material culture we are positioned in. In keeping with Hay’s idea, looking at contemporary Chinese and Korean figure paintings such as the aforementioned *Twelve Beauty Screen* may inform and aid the study of *Chaekgeori* in terms of the object-human relationship. In a nineteenth-century eight-panel folding screen, an anonymous Korean artist painted the banquet scene of the famous Tang Chinese general Guo Ziyi (697-781) (Fig. 15). As a successful general who showed unwavering loyalty to his country throughout his long career, Guo became a symbol of Confucian virtue. The screen shows the retired general celebrating his birthday with his numerous wives, children, and grandchildren in his palace-like garden estate. These festive banquet screens fit the values and principles of the Confucian Joseon court well, so they were often used to decorate and celebrate both court and folk weddings. In the third panel of the folding screen, the proud, majestic old man sits with two of his grandchildren, surrounded by a wave of people paying him a visit. Amidst the conviviality of dancing and celebrating is a somewhat illogical presence. Under the same tent where Guo is present, piles of books depicted in the manner of *Chaekgeori* are placed on the table. As the attendants of the party are busy

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<sup>50</sup> Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, p. 177.

<sup>51</sup> Nataša Bakić-Mirić, “Confucian Cultural Patterns” in *An Integrated Approach to Intercultural Communication* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publications, 2012), p. 23.

watching the dance and enjoying the celebration, the books remain unopened and untouched. Guo himself is seated with his back to the books. It seems that the only function the books perform in this moment is to display themselves. Here, I do not propose representation as transparent reflections or documents of social reality, but rather as aspects of it, and figure paintings such as *General Guo Ziyi's Banquet*, *Mei's Beautiful Women at Dressing Table with Attendant*, and the *Twelve Beauty Screen* hint at how still-life elements linked to *Chaekgeori* offer a kind of sociability as they interact with figures in the paintings. The social dimension that the objects in these paintings display points to important connections to the moral concerns of still-life paintings, tied to the Neo-Confucian sentiment exhibited by Joseon scholars. Such human-object interactions also uncover the economic layer of things operating in rituals of production and consumption, which I will unpack in relation to the issues of commodity and commodity fetishism in chapter three.

## Chapter 2: The Opaque Window: Curtain, Niche, and Trompe-l'oeil

### 2.1 Curtain

In an eighteenth-century Korean still life painted by the court artist Jang Hanjong, a curtain frames a bookshelf that displays a collection of objects across the eight-panel folding screen. The silk curtain with the double-*xi* (囍) that signifies happiness appears to be rolled up and securely fastened with four ivory hooks. The opening in the curtain reveals the *Wunderkammer*-like ensemble of objects behind. These range from everyday items like fruit bowls to luxury goods from China such as the glazed porcelain vase with cracked-ice pattern that was in fashion during the Chinese Ming-Qing period. Other items include a stone used for grinding ink for writing and painting, interestingly shaped stones, and, most importantly, stacks of neatly piled up books.<sup>52</sup> At the center of the cabinet, the artist included two ink paintings—one with a lotus flower and the other with a shrimp, Jang's specialties as a renowned painter of animals and plants—to create a painting within a painting.<sup>53</sup> Apart from the partially folded curtain, the open door at the bottom of the shelf that reveals the books stored inside also adds to the “naturalness” of the overall *trompe-l'oeil* effect. When folded, Jang's screen would provide even more heightened illusionism with shadows cast by the folded panels reinforcing the niches of the bookshelf while adding three-dimensional volume to the painted curtain.

The first-century Roman author and natural philosopher Pliny the Elder (in his *Natural*

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<sup>52</sup> Books covered in opulent silk brocades like the ones placed beneath Jang's shrimp painting at the center of his *Chaekgeori* were also reproduced in enameled porcelain to imitate the look of stacked books. These *famille rose* porcelain “books” were empty inside, serving as boxes or containers for further use. This provides another layer to the overall *trompe-l'oeil* effect in Jang's painting, now working at the level of medium. One example of these faux books made of porcelain can be found in Christie's Hong Kong, *The Imperial Sale*, 30 May 2006, lot 1235.

<sup>53</sup> Paintings of bird/animals and flowers were often pasted over the inside panels of Joseon display cabinet doors. See: Chung and Kim, eds. *Chaekgeori: The Power and Pleasure of Possessions in Korean Painted Screens*, p. 85. This offers an interesting comparison with the Chinese *Twelve Beauty Screen* panel showing black lacquer box decorated with the bamboo motif appearing like a painting pasted on the cabinet door.

*History*, 79 AD) tells the story about the competition between the Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasios. Zeuxis painted grapes so lifelike that the birds flew down to peck at them. Zeuxis then asked Parrhasios to pull aside the curtain that was concealing his painting, only to learn that the curtain was actually Parrhasios's painted illusion. Pliny's reflection on illusion and *trompe l'oeil* is no doubt referenced in the seventeenth-century still-life painting *Still Life with a Flower Garland and a Curtain*, dated 1658. In this collaborative work, van der Spelt painted the insects and the blooming flowers placed inside a stone niche while van Mieris painted the shimmering blue curtain embroidered with golden edges and partially folded that both reveals and conceals the freshly gathered flowers behind. The curtain and the flowers invite the gazes of the viewer with the tangible presence of materials. This sense of material presence is provided with fine precision in the physical properties of materials. The soft, luxurious, silk curtain looks like it could flutter with a slightest gust of wind; the vibrant petals of roses and tulips equally evoke a sense of soft touch and texture particular to flower petals. Frans van Mieris (1635-1681) was a proud pupil of the famous Leiden painter, Gerard Dou, "the Dutch Parrhasios."<sup>54</sup> Dou's reputation as the master of *chiaroscuro* and meticulous depictions of surface details in his paintings—especially through the curtain and niche motif—benefited from his early training as a glass engraver. Working on fragile surfaces, the engraver must pay attention to the tiniest design elements and to the physical property of glass as a material. Dou's great care with his materials and to the fine details translates well in his illusionistic paintings, which would have influenced the young van Mieris greatly.

When comparing van Mieris-van der Spelt's painting with the Jang's *Chaekgeori* the

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<sup>54</sup> Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 67. See also Dou, "Old Man Lighting a Pipe," c. 1635, oil on panel, 49 x 61.5 (private collection, England) in *Inside the Camera Obscura: Optics and Art under the Spell of the Projected Image* by Wolfgang Lefèvre. Berlin: Max-Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2007, p. 229. This image has a bookcase filled with books and a curtain that is pulled back to reveal the collection in the old man's studio.

viewer is similarly captivated by the artists' skillful representation of diverse objects with varying textures brought together as assemblages. The sensuous forms of the soft, glistening curtain in Frans van Mieris' painting and the carefully piled up books of Hanjong Jang's screen evokes a sense of Freud's "fetishist, auratic shine" of the desired objects.<sup>55</sup> The unembarrassed display of objects in both paintings as well as the "revealing" gesture of the curtain<sup>56</sup> effectively invites the fetishistic gaze of the viewers, allowing them to probe, analyze, and visually consume the painted objects. On a purely visual level, the most striking similarity between the two paintings would be the presence of the illusionistic curtains that emphasize the materiality of the objects depicted while inviting the viewers to ask, like Zeuxis, what lies behind the curtains. The curtains reveal and conceal dynamics of viewing and perception, making apparent that no individual perception or one view could embody or apprehend the multiplicity of views, layers, and meanings. By covering part of the scene, the curtain paradoxically reveals and obscures limits of representation and mimesis. The curtains also concern the reflexive level of painting, as pointed out by Victor Stoichita: "... the motif of the transposed curtain in seventeenth-century painting...involved...a self-definition of the painting as a painting and contemplation as an unveiling."<sup>57</sup> By self-revealing and self-denying, the paintings (of the curtains) show themselves—as representation—by hiding themselves. In van Mieris's case, with the help of the medium of oil paint, the curtain hides its true nature as a representation under the perfected

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted after Foster, "The Art of Fetishism: Notes on Dutch Still Life," in Emily S. Apter and William Pietz eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.), p. 264.

<sup>56</sup> The practice of depicting curtain as a *trompe-l'oeil* device in religious paintings developed in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the Netherlands and Italy. See: Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*, P. 72. As a liturgical device, the curtain drawn across a rod as exemplified in the miniature of Vincent of Beauvais by the Master of the White Inscriptions in *Le Miroir historique* from Bruges served as "an instrument of divine revelation, at once hiding and, at an important moment, disclosing a sacred object"—books in this case. Hollander argues that the Dutch *trompe-l'oeil* curtain emerged from this religious tradition, applying the motif to secular subject matters starting from the late 1640s.<sup>56</sup> Both in secular and sacred uses, the illusionistic curtain had the function of displaying the "truth" underneath the surface.

<sup>57</sup> Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 258.

mimesis of the material quality of drapery. Meticulous brushwork and painstakingly rendered surfaces of the creased curtain divert the viewer's attention away from anything that speaks of the actual flatness of the picture plane and allow the curtain to refuse its perception as a painted object. The curtain ceases to exist simply as an equal component of the still-life assemblage with other objects, but instead it starts to exist as an "an object endowed with a special force or independent life,"<sup>58</sup> a fetish. The curtain as object thus gains a certain autonomy and a subject-position. The curtain aware of its own material reality goes further to deceive and take pleasure in tricking the viewer's eye, thwarting their gaze (or *dompte-regard* as Lacan puts it) in the form of *trompe-l'oeil*.<sup>59</sup> Stoichita writes that reflexivity, with the development of Cartesian inspired episteme of optics at hand, became an art of "sight watched," as "[t]he Dutch knew how to thematise the act of pictorial perception as self-reflective perception."<sup>60</sup>

Jang's curtain from the eight-panels folding screen similarly plays with gazes and vision to become a fetish. Jang's curtain acts as a "double screen" that not only defines spaces but also "supplies a sense of privacy and security"<sup>61</sup> to screen certain gazes. In addition to the curtain's ability to subvert the viewer's gaze, the heavy curtain of Jang's painting works not only to divide spaces or suggest depth in the painting similar to its Dutch counterpart, but also works to suggest a "(super)natural quality or force"<sup>62</sup> possessed of self-referentiality<sup>63</sup> that "acts as a material space gathering an otherwise unconnected multiplicity into the unity of its enduring

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<sup>58</sup> Foster, p. 253.

<sup>59</sup> "for this [painting] to satisfy them so much...their desire to contemplate finds some satisfaction in it....Don't you see that there is something here that indicates the function I called *dompte-regard*?...if one wishes to deceive a man, what one presents to him is the painting of a veil that is to say, something that incites him to ask what is behind it," Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 111-112.

<sup>60</sup> Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, pp. 156-7.

<sup>61</sup> Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Foster, p. 254.

<sup>63</sup> Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* No. 9 (1985): pp. 5-17.

singularity.”<sup>64</sup> The curtain brings the individual objects assembled in the cabinet behind together as a somewhat unified whole. It offers a certain kind of order or stability to the displayed objects. Jang’s curtain could therefore demonstrate “the fetish’s essential power of singular fixation and ordering repetition”<sup>65</sup> to bring together “previously heterogeneous elements [of the assemblage of still-life objects] into a novel identity”<sup>66</sup> of a painted reality. As for the self-reflexive quality, Jang’s illusionistic curtain cleverly plays with the workings of a folding screen as a medium. As briefly noted earlier, the *trompe-l’oeil* effect is optimized when the *Chaekgeori* is slightly folded, as the multiple perspectives in each panel converge and diverge with the angles created by the folds exhibit a convincing life-like composition of collected objects on a bookshelf. Jang’s heavy silk curtain plays a dual role of covering up the opulent material goods superfluous for true Confucian self-cultivation and of flaunting and displaying such tasteful and luxurious collection. The function of Jang’s curtain to both reveal and conceal the beautiful objects behind is replicated by the irony inherent in the medium/format of the folding screen. The *Chaekgeori* that delivers both a sense of coyness about conspicuous consumption and a sense of lust for material wealth can only be fully realized when the folding screen is in use to either cover/hide something behind or in full display. The premise of Jang’s curtain working on the self-conscious dynamics of revealing and concealing is that the screen must somehow be “seen.” Here, reflexivity works as the representation acknowledges and manipulates the medium that gives material form to the representation. The curtains as a painted reality therefore offer multiple references and insights and they allow me to locate the social meanings of represented objects in still-life paintings that are both revealing and concealing, like the infinite interplay of light and shadow that bounce on a curtain’s manifold creases.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 7.



## 2.2 Niche

Another important element that links these two paintings is the motif of the niche or rooms created by cabinets and niches.<sup>67</sup> Exemplified by early manuscripts and Dou's and van Mieris's works above, the niche or the cabinet may reflect some of the motifs and themes that are central to seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, especially the still-life. Siegert traces the genealogy of *trompe-l'oeil* and still-life from borders and margins of illuminated manuscripts and devotional images with niches and shelves, such as in *Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1475-80 by Master of Mary of Burgundy in the Book of Hours of Engelbert of Nassau (Fig. 16). Siegert proposes a more or less chronological, sequential journey of still-life objects from the border zone to board structures like shelves and horizontal tables. Stoichita similarly considers framing devices like the margins and niches to explain the development of still-life from borders to center stage:

[T]he birth of the new pictorial genres takes on the characteristic of a *distortion* or, if you like, a cut. Born as *marginalia*, a *reverse*, an *outside-the-work*, an image-frame, in a word as a *parergon*, still-life—in the seventeenth century—becomes an *ergon*.<sup>68</sup>

Painting's self-reflexivity, so argues Stoichita in addressing the curtain motif, further includes painting's own investigation of its borders, which gives rise to new pictorial genres. Here the niche, according to art historian Rose Marie San Juan's review of Stoichita's *The Self-Aware*

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<sup>67</sup> Niches appear as integral elements in depictions of scholars working in studios like the miniature of Vincent of Beauvais by the Master of the White Inscriptions in *Le Miroir historique* from Bruges, c. 1480, of Figuretreasuries, or cabinets of curiosities, as well as those of religious devotion (the outside of Rogier van der Weyden's Braque diptych, c. 1452, depicting a skull and a brick placed inside a niche). (Curiosity) cabinets and studies are also linked to the prevalence of still-life motifs and paintings in this period, exemplified in fifteenth-century Italian *Studiolos*, Flemish Book of Hours illuminated manuscript pages, and paintings like Juan Sánchez Cotán's *Still Life with Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*, c. 1602. Still-life paintings were also part of major cabinet collections such as that of Cornelis van Der Geest. The *Cabinet of Van Der Geest* painted by Willem II van Haecht in 1628 features a large still-life painting. Other important examples of this genre include Peter Paul Rubens' and Jan Breughel The Elder's *The Allegory of Sight* (1617-18), one of a series of five allegorical paintings devoted to the five senses commissioned by the Archduke and Archduchess Albrecht and Isabella.

<sup>68</sup> Stoichita, *The Self-Aware image*, p. 23.

*Image*, “which carves the wall but is external to it, prompted the key liminal situation of still-life; while the window, by opening up a space beyond the wall, is the catalyst for the definition of landscape.”<sup>69</sup> The niche interrogates and questions the limits and margins of representation and allows the still-life genre to ask similar questions about self-reflexivity. Niches and cupboard recessions also contribute to the effect of *trompe-l’oeil* in many still-life paintings, as discussed by Ebert-Schifferer, who notes the tactile quality and haptic experience evoked by the painted objects in illusionistic niches that emulate the texture and feel of marble or wooden cupboards and niches. Calling such *trompe-l’oeil* “hyper mimesis,” Ebert-Schifferer suggests how painting’s aspiration to render three-dimensionality and materiality is tied to their response and interaction (*paragone*) with its sister art, sculpture.<sup>70</sup> *Trompe-l’oeil* painting’s material “self-abnegation” to assimilate physical weight and surface of sculpture through the motifs of niches and cabinet shelves is “connected to the extreme self-referentiality of the genre”<sup>71</sup> that brings back the viewer’s attention to the ontology and truths of painting.

The two illuminated folios of the Flemish Book of Hours by Master of Mary of Burgundy (Fig. 16) show the Nativity scene and the Adoration of the Magi set in a wooden display cabinet filled with precious maiolica vessels holding objects like flowers and peacock plumes. The delicate uses of perspective and the balancing of forms enhance the plausibility of gathered objects in religious paintings as a coherent group of easily identifiable luxury earthenware. Framing the vases, dishes, and the religious narrative paintings in a contained composition, the niches in the cabinet do not simply separate, isolate, and “split” (Stoichita’s term) the sacred

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<sup>69</sup> Rose Marie San Juan, “Framing the Early Modern Field of Vision,” *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 23, No. 2 (2000): p. 174.

<sup>70</sup> Hollander also mentions a relationship between the concept of *paragone*, the contest between painting and sculpture, and the juxtaposition of two textures in Dou’s illusionistic paintings. See Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes*, p. 69.

<sup>71</sup> Ebert-Schifferer, p. 28.

from the secular and profane, the paintings from the ceramics and other objects. Maiolicas in the illuminated pages of *Adoration of Magi* were considered luxury items with sensuous surfaces usually imported from Venetian Workshops to Northern European regions in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, but they could also be a carriers of symbolic religious meanings such as Mary's purity and virtue.<sup>72</sup> The maiolica ceramics hold a double identity as both religious and a secular subjects, blurring the exclusivity and "split" between the religious narrative scenes at the center of the cabinet and the apparently "still-life"-like objects surrounding the central images. The peacock's feathers similarly take on an ambiguous identity, containing both the religious connotation of the undecaying body of Christ, hence the association with the Nativity scene, and the earthly one that symbolizes worldly pride or vanity. The maiolica vessels and the magnificent peacock feathers could be equally admired and adored as bearers of religious, spiritual virtues and as precious, luxury objects worthy of conspicuous display. The cabinet niches may very well be those of an altar as well as those of a curiosity cabinet of a proud collector. The *Adoration of the Magi* as a whole then can be literally be about "adoration" of all things: earthly, fleeting pleasures, religious reverence, pride of material wealth, and the dynamics of looking/vision, as the peacock's plumage is also an eye, the product of the Goddess Juno's grace towards the unscrupulous watchman Argus.<sup>73</sup> The objects in cabinet niches placed in the "periphery" are not accessories or *marginalia/parergon* for the religious vision of Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi, but active subjects that alert the viewers to look closely at the self-reflexivity of painting. The niches and the objects placed in these recesses are the very agents that allow the painting to not simply "explore image's boundary and the relationship this

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<sup>72</sup> Oledzka, *Medieval and Renaissance Interiors*, p. 141.

<sup>73</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1,720-23; trans. Allen Mendelbaum, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), p. 32. Peacock's feather (or Argus's eye) as a disembodied eye can be related to the discussion of camera obscura, the viewing subject, and still-life in the later chapter.

boundary had with the real world [or] meditation on the structural co-substantiality between the picture frame and all other types of enframement,”<sup>74</sup> but also realize its “switchbacks of being”<sup>75</sup> as a painting, as a representation that comments on the spectrum of visions, both religious and secular.

### **2.3 Trompe-l’oeil**

Niches allow an artist to experiment with perspectives and shading to render a convincing three-dimensionality onto a picture plane.<sup>76</sup> Scholars have noted the use of European painting techniques in *Chaekgeori* screens, including the use of perspectives, the rendering of illusionistic surfaces, and objects rendered in a three-dimensional manner. In Jang’s case, he incorporated “both Western and East Asian perspective into one style of screen,”<sup>77</sup> showing multiple surfaces of an interior space in the Western style and using multiple vanishing points and isometric perspective to depict book stacks in the East Asian tradition.<sup>78</sup> Art historians Kay E. Black and Edward W. Wagner further note that the pictorial creation of a folding screen that looks like a bookshelf filled with scholarly treasures provides “the perfect geometric framework for the Korean artist’s application of the newly acquired system of artificial perspective”<sup>79</sup> from Europe. As noted earlier, *Chaekgeori* has been compared with contemporaneous Qing Chinese objects *Duobaoge*. In a painting of *Duobaoge* (Fig. 17) attributed to Giuseppe Castiglione, an Italian Jesuit painter at the Qing court, one notices a clear visual similarity to Jang’s *Chaekgeori*. Similar objects and motifs such as the piled-up books and precious bronze vessels fill the

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<sup>74</sup> Stoichita, p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Taussig, *What Color is the Sacred?* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), p. 168.

<sup>76</sup> Hollander in *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*, mention the term *doorsien*, or “looking through” to unpack Dutch uses of perspective and rendering interior space including niches and partially open door. See: pp.8-9.

<sup>77</sup> Black and Wagner, “Ch’aekkori Paintings: A Korean Jigsaw Puzzle,” 65.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

wooden cabinet that recedes into the picture plane.<sup>80</sup> The conspicuous features of the European *trompe-l'oeil* and mimetic realism informed by the use of perspective and soft *chiaroscuro*—with specular highlights and shadows on the heavy, cold vases and the cabinet compartments—offer a striking three-dimensionality and materiality in this ink and color painting on paper.

Castiglione was particularly well known among Korean scholars and artists who traveled to Beijing during the eighteenth-century. For instance, on his trip to Beijing in 1720, the Korean envoy Ki-ji Lee (李器之, 1690-1722) wrote in his travelogue *Ilamyeongi* (一庵燕記) that he wished to acquire a painting by Giuseppe Castiglione whose paintings were renowned for life-like mimetic qualities. He did succeed in acquiring a painting by Castiglione in the end, although it was not a still-life, but a painting of a dog. The painting was delivered to Lee by another Jesuit missionary in Beijing, Xavier Ehrenbert Fridelli (1673-1743).<sup>81</sup> On a rather thick paper, or possibly a panel, Castiglione cut out the painting to follow the contours of the dog painted on it. Lee put it on the ground, letting it lean against a wall, and people passing by Lee's quarter couldn't stop commenting how they had to halt and give a second look at the dog to realize that it was actually a painting. Excited, Lee then invited a monk and his dog from a nearby Buddhist temple. Immediately after spotting Castiglione's dog, the monk's clueless dog approached the painting without hesitation, swinging its tail mightily and sniffing at his new friend. Frightened that the dog might ruin the painting, Lee quickly scared the monk's dog away.<sup>82</sup> For someone

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<sup>80</sup> See: Black and Wagner, "Ch'aekkori Paintings: A Korean Jigsaw Puzzle"; Kim, "*Chaekgeori*: Multi-Dimensional Messages in Late Joseon Korea,"; Kim and Kenseth, "From Europe to Korea: The Marvelous Journey of Collectibles in Painting."

<sup>81</sup> Xavier Ehrenbert Fridelli was an Austrian Jesuit missionary who went to Macau via India in 1705. Later he was summoned by the Qing court in Beijing and participated in producing the Imperial map of China for the Kangxi Emperor (*Huangyu quanlan tu*, 皇輿全覽圖) until 1718. He also participated in producing maps relating to China-Korea borders. Until his death, Fridelli had been a rector for *Nantang* (Southern Church/Wing), the Jesuit Church in Beijing, where Lee saw *trompe-l'oeil* paintings by Castiglione. See: Lee, *Ilamyeongi*, pp. 702-703. Upon giving Castiglione's painting to Lee, Fridelli also pulled out a map and asked about specific details of Korean geography to Lee. Lee then helped Fridelli identify a route from China to Korea. See *Ilamyeongi*, p. 385.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*,.

who wished to obtain a vigorously life-like painting by Castiglione, a cut-out dog was perfect. It is difficult to know whether Lee was familiar with Pliny's *Natural History* or the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios. However, Lee's conscious act of putting this portable cut-out dog in a visible space to fool people's eyes and to later test this half-truth to an animal is still noteworthy. On Castiglione's end, it is also difficult to trace whether he was aware of the similar cut-out technique employed by the Flemish painter Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts (ca. 1610- after 1675) known for his *trompe-l'oeil* still-lives. Gijsbrechts's famous c.1670 work, *Back of a Picture*, now at the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, presents a paradox of representation where the painted canvas must be taken for an actuality, an object that one must turn it around to see the "painting" at the front, as it simultaneously denies itself as such with its unembarrassed display of painterly skills. Stoichita aptly puts it, "the object of this painting is the painting as an object."<sup>83</sup> As an object, it occupies a space, has potential to be handled, inviting the viewer to wonder what the other side of this wooden frame contains. Then as the viewer realizes the true nature of the piece, it quickly switches back to a painted surface, a comment on representation, or a proposition for the viewer to answer where the limits between actuality and representation lie. Such *Chantourné* (*uitgesneden* or *schilderijn* in Dutch sources)<sup>84</sup> or cut-out *trompe-l'oeil* was not intended to hang but to "lean against a wall," inviting the viewer to pick it up as an object occupying a space,<sup>85</sup> just like what Lee did with Castiglione's dog. Whether Castiglione and Lee were cognizant of this tradition or not, both the artist and his admirer gained the maximum satisfaction from experimenting with visual perception, both human and animal.

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<sup>83</sup> Stoichita, *The Self Aware Image*, p. 277.

<sup>84</sup> Celeste Brusati, "Honorable Deceptions and Dubious Distinctions," ed. Olaf Koester, *Illusions: Gijsbrechts - Royal Master of Deception* (Copenhagen : Statens Museum for Kunst, 1999), p. 54.

<sup>85</sup> Ebert-Schifferer, "Trompe-l'oeil: the Underestimated Trick," *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe L'oeil Painting*, p. 33. Gijsbrechts's *Back of a Picture* is an excerpted detail from an ensemble of *Chantourné* pieces, *Cut-out Trompe-l'oeil with Fruit Piece*. See: *Ibid*.

Lee also recorded seeing various optical devices and scientific instruments, a copy of an illustrated book on natural history, engravings, and Western-style paintings during his stay in Beijing.<sup>86</sup> Lee saw the “heavenly crafts” (*cheongong* 天巧) and “the apex of human skills” (*ingongjigeuk* 人工之極) in these European works, and commented that the Jesuits extensively mastered “the Principle of Things” (*gunggukmulli* 窮極物理).<sup>87</sup> Lee visited the Jesuit Church in Beijing in late October of 1720. After remarking on various illusionistic wall and ceiling paintings of angels in clouds, the detailed depictions of plants and animals, and the stained-glass windows inside the church, he spots a door propped open on his way out. He sees a dog peering through the door, looking outside the church. Lee goes closer to the door, and realizes that it is actually a *trompe-l’oeil* painting of a dog and a door ajar. His escort tells Lee that it is a painting by Giuseppe Castiglione.<sup>88</sup> A contemporary Chinese visitor to the same church describes other *trompe-l’oeil* paintings executed by Castiglione. He writes:

In the church of *Nantang* there are two paintings in perspective executed by Lang Shih-ning. They cover the whole of two walls, vertically and horizontally, to the east and west of the parlour. If you are standing at the foot of the west wall, close one eye and look at the completely raised bead curtains. The window to the south-west is ajar. Rays of sunlight are playing on the ceiling. Scroll books closed with ivory needles and jade pins fill the library. There is a magnificent cabinet containing “curios” that sparkle from top to bottom. To the north stands a table. And on the table a vase containing a bouquet of pheasants’ feathers. A brilliant feather fan appears in the setting sun. In the rays of the sun the shadow of the fan, the shadow of the vase, the shadow of the table—all perfectly rendered [...] Step forward [...] The curtains of the entrance door are motionless; everything is profoundly calm. Seen from afar, the table in the room is in perfect order. You are tempted to enter... You stretch out your hand and suddenly realize that you are

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<sup>86</sup> Jongtae Lim, “‘Postponed Reciprocity’: How Did a Korean Traveler Portray His Encounter with Westerners in Early Eighteenth-Century Beijing?” *Horizons: Seoul Journal of Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2010): p. 183. For Ki-Ji Lee’s original travelogue entries on receiving or looking at world maps, natural history books, European portraits and astronomical instruments, see: Ki-Ji Lee, *Ilamyeongi* (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies, 2016), pp. 219-222 (Book 2, September 22 entry), pp. 318-319 (Book 3, October 10 entry), p. 378 (Book 4, October 20 entry), p. 380 (October 21 entry), pp. 384-385 (Book 4 October 22 entry)

<sup>87</sup> Ki-ji Lee, *Ilamyeongi*, p. 421. (Book 4, 1720 October 28 entry)

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 409-410. (Book 4, 1720 Oct 26 entry)

facing a wall. [...] Before such a lifelike representation as this, how one regrets that they were ignorant of it!<sup>89</sup>

One could almost apply the visitor's ekphrastic description of the illusionistic cabinet shelf containing still-life objects on the church wall to describe Castiglione's *Duobaoge* and Joseon *Chaekgeori* paintings. Castiglione was not only skilled in rendering illusory depths with perspective (perhaps in the Italian school sense, as Cahill would put it), but also in conveying a sense of materiality and volume to the objects in a dark space with careful *chiaroscuro*. The presence of the illusionistic curtain in Castiglione's wall painting to aid the overall *trompe-l'oeil* effect is also notable. As an avid admirer of Castiglione's paintings,<sup>90</sup> it is highly improbable that Lee missed this wall painting in the same church that he spotted the image of a peering dog. Lee's encounter with *trompe-l'oeil* paintings and other Korean travellers' accounts tell us how these travellers were most curious about and receptive to European arts and sciences that concern vision and spatiotemporal perceptions, as well as the materiality of objects that seemed "other-worldly" (*byulsegae* 別世界)<sup>91</sup> to them. Painting techniques that heightened mimetic realism and display quality with the use of perspective and shadows as exemplified in Castiglione's *Duobaoge* painting must have struck Korean artists and viewers with a particular interest, serving as an inspiration for their own still-life *Chaekgeori*.

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<sup>89</sup> Cecile and Michael Beurdeley, *Giuseppe Castiglione: A Jesuit Painter at the Court of the Chinese Emperor* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1971), pp. 93–94. For the original Chinese text, see: Mikinosuke Ishida, "A Biographical Study of Giuseppe Castiglione," *Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko*, no. 19 (1960): pp. 79-121.

<sup>90</sup> Lee wrote his request to meet Castiglione multiple times in *Ilamyeongi*. See: *Ilamyeongi*, pp. 337-8, 362, 376, 479, 484.

<sup>91</sup> Lee, *Ilamyeongi*, p. 418. (Book 4, 1720 Oct 28 entry)



## Chapter 3: The Principle of Things through a Mobile Eye

### 3.1 The *Camera Obscura*

Argus, you lie low; the light that glowed in many pupils now is spent;  
one night alone now holds in sway your hundred eyes.  
[But] Juno took the hundred eyes of Argus and set them on her sacred bird:  
she filled the feathers of the peacock's tail with jewels that glittered like the stars.

—Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1, 720-23

Due to its strict foreign policy towards Neo-Confucian insularity, Joseon Korea's cultural contact with Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries had largely been mediated through its two East Asian neighbors, Japan and China. During the reigns of three Qing emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, Korean artists and scholars were part of the same environment in Beijing as European envoys and painters in residence at the Beijing Palace, such as the Italian Jesuit father Giuseppe Castiglione, known for his illusionistic still-lives. Korean travellers to Beijing were especially struck by the *trompe-l'oeil* paintings inside the Jesuit Churches of Beijing and brought European books, world maps, paintings, and engravings back to Korea from their trips.<sup>92</sup> By then, it was not unusual for an elite *yangban* (the Joseon ruling class) gentleman or a tasteful *jung-in* ("middle-men": professional technicians such as doctors, lawyers, scientists, interpreters, as well as wealthy merchants) to own a pair of reading glasses, a mechanical alarm clock, or a painting from Europe and keep them in their studios. Art historian Tae Ho Lee writes how the avid *jung-in* collector Kim Guang-Guk (金光國, 1727-1797) acquired a copper etching, *Sultanie, een Stadt in Arak* (Fig. 18), by the German engraver and

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<sup>92</sup> These include: *Explanation of the Telescope* (*Yuanjing Shuo* 远镜说, 1629) by the Jesuit Adam Schall von Bell (1591-1666), and the Chinese translation of Euclid's *Elements* (*Jiheyuanben* 幾何原本) by Matteo Ricci and Matteo Ricci's and Zhizhao's *A Map of the Myriad Countries of the World* (*Kunyu Wanguo Quantu* 坤輿萬國全圖, 1602). See: Myeong-Guan Kang, *Joseon-ae on Seoyang Mulgeondul (Things from the West to Joseon)*,

cartographer Pieter Schenk the Elder (1660-1718) who was active in Amsterdam. Although Lee claims to investigate the presence and appreciation of Dutch “paintings” in eighteenth-century Joseon, the scope of his analyses is confined to this single etching by Schenk.<sup>93</sup> The etching comes from a collection of a hundred cities and port scenes across Europe, Asia, America, and Africa, *Hecatompolis sive Totius orbis terrarium oppida nobiliora centum: exquisite collecta atque eleganter depicta* (1702). Dedicated to Frederick William I of Prussia, Schenk’s book opens with a frontispiece illustrated with a portrait of the ruler in an oval niche, framed majestically with a curtain over the portrait.<sup>94</sup> The *Sultanie* page depicts a vast desert landscape, with a horizontal band of rocky mountain peaks and the village with mosques seen in the distance. On the foreground are figures on horses and on foot with their backs turned, heading

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<sup>93</sup> Tae Ho Lee, “Dutch Paintings in Late-Joseon Dynasty of Korea” *The Journal of International Korean Studies*, no. 2 (2004): 39-68. This study shows the difficulty to track and pin down direct artistic interactions between the Dutch Republic and Joseon Korea during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but more pronounced cultural encounters between the Netherlands and East Asia are exemplified in Japanese *Rangaku* (蘭學), “Dutch Studies/Learning” or “Western Learning” by extension, fuelled by the presence of the East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie [VOC]) in Dejima (or Deshima, 出島: an artificial, fan-shaped island connected to the Japanese mainland by a small bridge) of Nagasaki between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Art Historian Timon Screech in *The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan: The Lens within the Heart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) discusses how *Rangaku* scholars and artists experimented with the camera obscura as well as with other optical devices introduced from Holland in the eighteenth-century to produce pictures that are precise and “authentic in every degree.” In his more recent book, *Obtaining Images: Art, Production and Display in Edo Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012), Screech mentions how Yoshimune, the eighth Shogun of the Tokugawa (Edo) Japan, directly requested for paintings by the Dutch painter Willem Hendrik van Royen (1672–1742)—deemed “the best painter in Europe” by Yoshimune—including a still life in 1722. Royen’s still life along with four of his other paintings, such as “a curious natural-history landscape [with] ‘peacock, parrots, ostrich and tiger with a view of the Rhine’,” were then displayed at one of the most visited temples in Edo. See: Ibidem, p. 317. As many Korean scholars and artists were in Edo when *Rangaku* was popular in Japan, it is probable that Dutch art and scientific devices reached Joseon through Japan.

<sup>94</sup> Schenk also produced images other than maps or city views, exemplified in his 1688 still-life engraving, *Vanitas still life with a skull and soap bubbles*, now at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The self-reflexive quality of bubbles in many seventeenth century Dutch still-life paintings is discussed by Wayne Martin, “Bubbles and Skulls: The Phenomenological Structure of Self-Consciousness in Dutch Still Life Painting,” M. Wrathal and Hubert L. Dreyfus eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 559-587. There is a certain tactile quality in bubbles and a connection to optical sensitivity, as discussed by Crary in relation to Chardin’s *Boy Blowing Bubbles* (1739). Crary writes, “This depicted act of effortless mastery, in which vision and touch work cooperatively, is paradigmatic of Chardin’s own activity as an artist. His apprehension of the coidentity of idea and matter and their finely set positions within a unified field discloses a thought for which haptic and optic are not autonomous terms but together constitute an indivisible mode of knowledge.” Crary, *Techniques of the observer*, p. 64.

towards the village. One of the figures on the right hand corner points to the distant village, urging the viewer to participate in looking at the figure's discovery further lead by the perspectival construction. The use of perspective is explicit here, guiding the viewer's eye to the center, but at the same time, the picture's dominating horizontal composition also prompts the viewer to keep a mobile eye, moving to and fro in the spatial configuration. Resisting the Albertian window on the world which assumes a unified, rational field and a fixed viewer, Schenk's *Sultanie* allows the viewer to roam about the field with freedom, accommodating a number of possible viewing points. The central mountain peak, instead of receding indefinitely into the background as a transparent, piercing vanishing point, bounces the viewer's gaze back to the foreground with its concave, solid geological build.<sup>95</sup> This "distance-point perspective," according to Brusati, with images "deriving from a horizon line which defines the visual field of a seeing eye presumed to be located at the threshold of the construction itself" affords "multiple vanishing points, assuming that the eye of that viewer is constantly scanning and darting from one point to another, each time generating a new cone of vision, and thus forming an image in an additive manner."<sup>96</sup> This active engagement of the viewer's eye is also discussed by Alpers. She writes:

It is the capacity of the *picture surface* (emphasis is mine) to contain such a semblance of the world—an aggregate of views that characterizes many pictures in the north. A source of confusion in looking at and writing about Dutch art is due to the fact that in the north the very word perspective, or *deurzigthmde*, rather than referring to the representation of an object in respect to its spatial relationship to the viewer, is taken to refer to the way by which appearances are

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<sup>95</sup> Alpers suggests this mobile eye and circular nature of northern perspective as a feature of Dutch viewing in Alpers, *The Art of Describing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 27. For similar discussions on the mobile eye in Dutch landscape, see: Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: the art and writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 169-217, especially pp. 188-189. Similar questions are raised in relation to *A View of Delft* (1652) by Carel Fabritius in Walter Liedtke, "'The 'View in Delft' by Carel Fabritius,'" *Burlington Magazine* 118 (February 1976): pp. 61-73; Arthur K Wheelock Jr, "Carel Fabritius: Perspective and Optics in Delft," *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 24 (1973): pp. 63-83.

<sup>96</sup> Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, p. 188

replicated on the pictorial surface.<sup>97</sup>

The curve created by this protruding rock—that deflects the Albertian gaze—now directs the viewer’s attention to not only the spatial composition but also the optical complexity of the print such as the engraver’s line techniques—the picture’s surface—as noted by the owner of this print, Kim. The Joseon collector Kim adds a short inscription and his seal next to this print after letting his eyes wander about the rocky landscape in the picture. In response, he writes, “Although the Western painting technique is different from that of Tang and Song [China], it [the engraving] contains the distant view of a thousand *li*; the marks and method of etching is also beyond marvelous.” Kim’s remark on Schenk’s print shows his fascination with not only the (“Western” use of) perspectival depth but also the marvelous surfaces of the graven lines created by the engraver. The “additive” quality that both Brusati and Alpers refer to in terms of the viewer’s viewing experience, the use of perspective, and rendering surfaces gains another layer as Kim physically attaches his inscription on mulberry paper to Schenk’s printed image.

### 3.2 A “truly natural painting”

Although not a still-life piece, it was the print’s painstakingly rendered, almost scientific details and the interesting use of perspective that caught Kim’s curious eyes. For art historian Arthur Wheelock, Dutch perspective involved optical elements like light, color, and atmosphere rather than geometric aspects as the Italianate manner did.<sup>98</sup> Instruments like the camera obscura, convex and concave lenses, and mirrors aided seventeenth-century Dutch artists to “experiment with perspective rules that resulted in their individualistic expressions of space,” enabling “a

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<sup>97</sup> Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, pp.51-52.

<sup>98</sup> Arthur Wheelock Jr., *Perspective, Optics and Delft Artists around 1650* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p. 6-7.

different awareness of the visual world.”<sup>99</sup> Wheelock especially focuses on the camera obscura “effect” in the tonal variations and in the rendering of shallow and deep recessions in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings that reveal aspects of nature, and perhaps of vision itself.<sup>100</sup> As noted by Ki-Ji Lee’s accounts in Beijing, eighteenth-century Korean scholars and collectors within and outside the Joseon territory were especially enthusiastic towards European arts and sciences that concern vision and spatiotemporal perceptions—qualities that are central to seventeenth-century Netherlandish art, especially the still-life genre. Contemporary Chinese and Japanese reflections on European visual materials during the eighteenth-century such as their interest in optical sensitivity and the visual language of the scientific eye<sup>101</sup> are paralleled in Joseon as well. Late Joseon scholar Jeong Yak-yong (丁若鏞, 1762-1836) used the camera obscura (*chilshilparyeoan* 漆室玻璃眼: literally translated as “a lens in a dark room”)<sup>102</sup> to contemplate the “truth” in images and let his friend Lee Ki Yang (李基讓, 1744 -1802) use it to produce a portrait.<sup>103</sup> The production of *trompe-l’oeil Chaekgeori* using the “Western method of perspective (*seoyanggukjisamyeonchuklianghuabub* 西洋國之四面尺量畫法)”<sup>104</sup> by painters such as Kim Hong Do (金弘道, 1745-1806) and Jang Han Jong (張漢宗, 1768-1815) was at its peak at the eighteenth-century court of Jeongjo. Although there is no written evidence that the camera obscura was used to produce *Chaekgeori*, I would like to shift the question from *what is*

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>100</sup> Wheelock, Ibid. Also see: Carsten Wirth, “The Camera Obscura as a Model of a New Concept of Mimesis in Seventeenth-Century Painting,” Wolfgang Lefèvre ed. *Inside the Camera Obscura: Optics and Art under the Spell of the Projected Image* (Berlin: Max-Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2007) pp. 149-194.

<sup>101</sup> Chinese books such as Nian Xiyao’s (年希尧) treatise on vision, *Shixue* 视学 (1729) were readily available in Joseon by this time. See: Hong Sön-p’yo, *17, 18-segi Chosŏn ūi oeguk sŏjŏk suyong kwa toksŏ munhwa* (17, 18<sup>th</sup> century Joseon’s Reading Culture and Catalogue of Foreign Books), (Seoul: Hyeon, 2006).

<sup>102</sup> Tae Ho Lee, “Camera Obscura and Painters in Late Chosun dynasty,” *Dasanhak* 6 (2005), p. 107.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>104</sup> In the collected writings of the eighteenth-century biographer, Lee Gyu-Sang (1727-99), *Ilmonggo*, Lee comments that the painter Kim Hong Do was particularly good at this method. Lee Gyu-Sang, *18 segi Joseon Inmulji* (*Biographies of Joseon people from the eighteenth century*) (Seoul: Changjak gwa bipyeongsa, 1997)

portrayed (matter or content) to *how* something is portrayed (the manner), in discussing the relevance of camera obscura to *Chaekgeori*.<sup>105</sup> The minute details and the artists' endeavor to produce *Chaekgeori* that are precise and employ the highest level of scientific, artistic inquiry show some resonance with the presence and the workings of the camera obscura in late Joseon cultural circles. Art historian Chin-Sung Chang outlines how vocabularies of lifelikeness and mimetic realism were a valued philosophy among Joseon painters and scholars who wished to explore the principles of things and nature. Chang argues that late Joseon painters strived to achieve life-like, "lively" (*seng* 生) qualities such as "resemblance" (*bangbul* 髣髴) and "verisimilitude" (*pipjin* 逼真)<sup>106</sup> in painting, and such devotion to the notion of "lifelikeness" became "the heart of the artistic discourse of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Korea."<sup>107</sup>

The rhetoric of verisimilitude and the relationship between art and the production of knowledge are well-studied idioms of the seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings. The German mathematician and astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) compared the workings of the camera obscura to the human eye's perception of images and things, and writers and artists such as Samuel Dirksz van Hoogstraten (1627-1678) wrote on how the camera obscura projected a "truly natural painting." Van Hoogstraten writes:

I am certain that the sight of these reflections in the darkness can be very illuminating to the young painter's vision; for besides acquiring knowledge of

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<sup>105</sup> This approach was inspired by Wirth, "The Camera Obscura as a Model of a New Concept of Mimesis in Seventeenth-Century Painting," p. 152.

<sup>106</sup> Chin-Sung Chang, "The Age of Realism: Late Joseon Painting and Lifelikeness," *Misulsawa SigakMunhwa Hakhui* 14 (2014): p. 10; An interesting comparison/parallel with Chinese aesthetics on similar issues of illusionism and verisimilitude around the same time period is explored in Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014); Anna Grasskamp, "EurAsian Layers: Netherlandish Surfaces and Early Modern Chinese Artefacts" *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 63, No. 4 (2015), pp. 362-399; edited by Chu, Petra ten-Doesschate and Ding, Ning, *Qing encounters : artistic exchanges between China and the West* (Los Angeles, California: Getty Research Institute, 2015).

<sup>107</sup> Chang, "The Age of Realism: Late Joseon Painting and Lifelikeness," p. 28.

nature, one also sees here the overall aspect which a truly natural painting should have.<sup>108</sup>

Here van Hoogstraten puts “acquiring knowledge of nature” and “a truly natural painting” side by side, similar to how Descartes proposed how “all objects of thoughts ‘irrespective of subject matter’ can be ordered and compared.”<sup>109</sup> Descartes writes, “Our project being, not to inspect the isolated natures of things, but to compare them with each other so that some may be known on the basis of others.”<sup>110</sup> For van Hoogstraten, in order to produce a “truly natural painting,” or depict things in nature truthfully, one must follow the rhetoric of optics—the camera obscura or the human eye.

Alpers examines how the descriptive nature of Dutch art such as still-lives reflects the “microscopic taste for displaying multiple surfaces”<sup>111</sup> in “the age of observation”<sup>112</sup> of the Dutch cultural milieu. Citing Francis Bacon’s motto, “but to resolve nature into abstractions is less to our purpose than to dissect her into parts,”<sup>113</sup> from his *Novum Organum* (1620), Alpers suggests a marriage between the scopic consciousness in the immaculately rendered, detailed surfaces of individual still-life objects and the acquisition of concrete knowledge of the world.

She explains that such intricate interplay between the two phenomena present in Dutch still-life

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<sup>108</sup> Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: the art and writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten*, p. 71. Alpers also point out the connection between the camera obscura and production of a more truthful image, attempting to “overcome the limitations of [Italian] linear perspective in a very innovative way.” *The Art of Describing*, p. 32. Wheelock too comments on the issue of “verisimilitude” and the camera obscura. “For Dutch artists, intent on exploring the world about them, the camera obscura offered a unique means for judging what a truly natural painting should look like.” “Constantijn Huygens and Early Attitudes Towards the Camera Obscura,” *History of Photography* 1, no. 2 (1977): p. 101.

<sup>109</sup> Cray, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 56. Cray writes that such unity occurs in the camera obscura and that such ground on which things may be ordered, arranged, and compared is also expressed in Encyclopedias. See: Ibid. *Chaekgeori* and European cabinets of curiosities as containers of knowledge and objects—all arranged and ordered—may relate to this idea of the camera obscura and the encyclopedia.

<sup>110</sup> René Descartes, “Rules for the Direction of the Mind,” *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 211. Also note: “I reckon [...] that in fact eloquence can be uttered from no human being [...] as out of the inspection and study of images and things, which we put in order and are able to compare.” Samuel Quiccheberg, *Inscriptiones Vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi* (1565).

<sup>111</sup> Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, p. 90.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 91.

paintings has an educational edge as well, exemplified by the writings of the leading Protestant education theorist Johann Comenius (1592-1670),<sup>114</sup> who wrote in his *Janua Linguarum Reserta* or *The Gates of Languages Unlocked* (1631):

If you demand what it is to be a good scholar, take this for an answer: to know how one thing differeth from another, and to be able to marke out everything by its owne name.<sup>115</sup>

To cultivate the “sentiment in favor of discriminating the identities of things,”<sup>116</sup> one must not only know “everything by its owne name,” but also have a keen eye that is responsive to different visual cues and characteristics that distinguish one thing from another. For Comenius, as Alpers notes, “seeing is believing,” and a “successful seeing” involves a “dissect[ing] visual attention”<sup>117</sup> that correctly isolates and defines each and every thing in the world. Alpers further proposes that Comenius’s educational vision<sup>118</sup> “help[s] us to define the attentiveness demanded by much Dutch painting [...] in particular, of the way in which still-lives isolate and attend to objects.”<sup>119</sup>

At first glance, Alpers’ microscopic, discriminating eye and Descartes’ (and van Hoogstraten’s) unifying vision may seem contradictory. There is, however, a certain order or unity in “discriminating the identities of things,” and some need to recognize differences in unity in return. Michel Foucault writes of the relationship between representation and classification as an ordering of the world is afforded by:

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Alpers, 93.

<sup>118</sup> Such didactic concern reflected in the effort to accurately recognize different natures or appearances of each object oddly resembles Jeongjo’s moralizing scheme with the use of the *Chaekgeori* screen. Jeongjo directed his painters to “name” and write clearly the book titles of the “correct” Confucian classics on the painted books of *Chaekgeori* in order to distinguish the virtuous from the unprincipled. As noted above, Jeongjo was also particularly enthusiastic about the nature of the *Chaekgeori* as a painting instead of an actual collection of books, separating the identity of painting from those of other objects.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 95.



discovery of simple elements and their progressive combination; and at their center they form a table on which knowledge is displayed contemporary with itself. The center of knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the *table*.<sup>120</sup>

A table on which still-life objects with varying physical properties that distinguish themselves stand serves as a platform that provides structure and order. From the tabletop of Willem Claesz Heda's breakfast piece to Jang's multi-level shelf tops, displays of resplendent objects showing off multiplicity of life are highly conditioned and held together with the laws of composition, light and color, and perspective.

As van Hoogstraten suggests further, however, the nature of visible things is not as static as it seems. Things appear differently depending on the position and the condition under which it is seen by the eye, and the painter must accommodate such differences and multiplicity in order to produce a picture faithful to nature. He writes:

For example, a round ball or sphere appears to be a circle with a single horizon, even though we understand with hand and mind that it is made up of an infinite number of such horizons, and that this circular outline barely encompasses the half of the sphere before our eyes, especially if that sphere is somewhat large or very close by. Everyone knows quite well that when we are at sea, we only see the horizon and not the half of the world, as we are able to see the sun and the moon. And if we could take to the skies, we could also see the earth's horizon spreading out in a circle below us.<sup>121</sup>

Van Hoogstraten's telescopic (and also microscopic, as he directs his attention to the anatomical eye as the "center for spherical field of vision"<sup>122</sup>) description of the visible nature of things involves an eye that transcends the physical limits of the human body. To understand the round ball to the fullest, the eye should constantly move itself, shifting its location to view the object

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<sup>120</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), P. 82.

<sup>121</sup> Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: the art and writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten*, p. 184.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 185. Van Hoogstraten on the seeing eye, writes, "We must first note that we see round us with our eyes, and that for this reason there is no straight line which can be drawn which is equidistant from our eye at all points, but only one which is curved like the circumference of a circle whose center is our eye." Brusati, Ibid.

from multiple viewpoints. This mobile eye independent from the limbs of the human body resembles the viewing experience when looking into a camera obscura or a perspective box. The fixed viewing point in the Albertian model is revoked by the movements of the lens in the camera obscura. The camera obscura is mobile yet static, colorful yet controlled, and fragmented yet united. A viewer in a private, autonomous viewing position could access an exciting view of all the different colors, patterns, changes, and movements of the natural world, but it comes at a cost of experiencing it within the safe boundaries of a contained, orderly space of the looking device.

Jang's *Chaekgeori* replicates this dialogue between diversity and unity built in the operation of the camera obscura. As mentioned earlier, the heavy, patterned silk curtain draped over the display cabinet imposes a sense of order as a coherent whole. With the symmetrical wooden frames of the bookshelves and the illusionistic curtain, Jang's painting achieves a kind of structural perfection when viewed from a fixed distance. The use of perspective, however, belies such mode of appreciation. Items placed on the top shelf appear as if a viewer is looking up the cabinet shelf while the ones in the lower shelves suggest a view from above, looking downwards. The viewer cannot see the very top surfaces of the books or the inner rims of the bowls on the top shelves. On the other hand, the surface of the jet-black ink stone at the bottom of the third panel is completely exposed, even with some remnants of ink. This involves a mobile eye from the painter as much as from the viewing party. Objects rendered in multiple spatio-temporal nodes demonstrate the painter's effort to investigate the visible nature of things with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Joseon language of verisimilitude, scientific accuracy, and naturalness—all relevant to the Dutch understanding of the camera obscura during the seventeenth century.

## Chapter 4: Materiality of Still-Life

### 4.1 Tactile Vision: Pleasures of Seeing and Touching

Are wee not more delighted with seeing  
Birds, Fruites, and Beasts painted than wee are with Naturalls?

—John Donne, “That Women ought to paint” (1652)

There is something pleasant in the successful deception or surprise afforded by *trompe-l’oeil*. A truly engulfing illusion/deception would be less interesting than a revealed one, which allows the viewer to decipher and probe what made such momentary illusion possible. Jang and van Mieris’s illusionistic curtains point to the pleasure of discovering, of locating the tension between absence and presence, representation and reality preserved in the folds of draperies. The *trompe-l’oeil* effect in Jang’s *Chaekgeori* and the still-life by van der Spelt and van Mieris afforded by the use of curtains and niches direct our attention to the materiality and objectness of the painted subjects and the paintings themselves. Wolf Singer states that a “good” *trompe-l’oeil* encourages us “to reach out and touch it”<sup>123</sup> and continues:

One reason for this intention is, of course, doubt—the desire either to validate or disprove the conclusions drawn from visual inspection by calling upon the tactile sense for comparison... When we direct our attention to an object within reach, our motor system prepares to grasp and to manipulate the object.<sup>124</sup>

The viewer perceives a visual prompt and translates this perception to an action of touching, driven by the desire to validate and ascertain the “hyper mimesis” of the *trompe-l’oeil*. Singer observes such interaction between perception and action as the reason “why one feels compelled to touch a perfect *trompe-l’oeil* in as much the same way as one is inclined to touch and

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<sup>123</sup> Wolf Singer, “The Misperception of Reality” in Ebert-Schifferer, Sybille, ed. *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe L’oeil Painting*, p. 45.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid p. 45-6.

manually explore a sculpture.”<sup>125</sup> Here, vision becomes tactile. Jean Baudrillard, in his thorough analysis of *trompe l’oeil* as part of his project to map modern simulacra, acknowledges that *trompe l’oeil* is expressed in vocabularies of touch, “in terms of a tactile hyperpresence of things, ‘as if one could touch them and hold them.’”<sup>126</sup> Although Baudrillard’s claim about the sense of touch remains on a rather metaphorical level, his consideration of the haptic quality in *trompe-l’oeil* is useful in channeling our attention to the connection between figurative and literal senses of touch—like Jeongjo satisfying his bookish inclination just by touching his desk or perhaps his *Chaekgeori*.

Jonathan Crary has mentioned how vision was compared to the sense of touch in the European episteme from Descartes to Diderot. Crary examines the optical device camera obscura to explain the relationship between vision and touch in early modern Europe. He writes that the camera obscura was without doubt the “most widely used model for explaining human vision, and for representing the relation of a perceiver and the position of a knowing subject to an external world”<sup>127</sup> during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both as discursive and a technical equipment (but not simply limited to these two identities) the camera obscura allows its subject to see how the material, technical, scientific practice of looking coincides with a discursive formation.<sup>128</sup> As Alpers did in *The Art of Describing*, Crary too suggests that some essential qualities of seventeenth-century Dutch art are inseparable from the Northern European experience with the camera obscura, working as the descriptive eye that unites the empirical mode of seeing and artistic production. Camera obscura clearly demarcates the line between

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. p. 46

<sup>126</sup> Baudrillard, “The Trompe-L’oeil,” in Bryson, Norman, ed. *Calligram: essays in new art history from France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 59

<sup>127</sup> Crary, *Techniques of the observer: on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 27.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

nature and its representation, between reality and its projection to “a priori separate and distinguish image from object.”<sup>129</sup>

Such splits afforded by the mechanical eye of a physical, technical object are replicated in the still-life genre as well. Cary mentions an eighteenth-century French still life painting, J. B. Chardin’s *Basket of Wild Strawberries* from c. 1761 (Fig. 19), to explore the dialogue between perception and knowledge echoed in the camera obscura. On the tabletop of Chardin’s painting lie a transparent glass containing water, a selection fruits with varying textures, two cut flowers and most noticeably, a basket of wild strawberries immaculately piled up in a pyramid shape. With vibrant yet controlled colors Chardin exhibits meticulous details in objects gathered as a harmonious whole. The carefully balanced, geometrical composition of the objects displayed almost mimics the mechanical, empirical gaze through a camera obscura. Chardin’s painterly talents turn vision into a haptic experience. Here, “sensory knowledge and rational knowledge are inseparable.”<sup>130</sup> The strawberries with soft, moist skins invite the viewers to imagine and enjoy not only the sense of touch but also the sweetness and fragrance of the spring fruit. Cary notes that the stacked strawberries are “a sign of how rational knowledge of geometrical form can coincide with a perceptual intuition of the multiplicity and perishability of life.”<sup>131</sup> The painstakingly rendered, “precise” surfaces of the strawberries not only yield a synesthetic moment when different senses like vision, touch, taste (and even smell) crystalize at once. They also offer grounds for exercising the scientific gaze as if the objects rendered on the tabletop were as logically exact and precise as the workings of the camera obscura. The self-consciously geometric composition of the gathered objects also speak to the self-reflexivity of the painting that is aware of its own workings as a representation, a construct split from nature.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

Vocabularies of scientific accuracy and verisimilitude were valued in the production of art and knowledge of eighteenth-century Joseon Korea. This period was marked by the philosophical, social movement called *Sil-hak* (實學) or “Practical Learning” that emerged in response to the highly metaphysical Neo-Confucianism of the time. Scholars and followers of *Sil-hak* were at the forefront in fostering interest in encyclopedia projects, in studying arts and sciences of Europe, and in economical, political, and social reforms. The period between the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries was also replete with written treatises and laws regarding material objects including paintings and their appropriate roles in the civilized, righteous man’s life, such as Seo Yu-gu’s *Imwonkyeongjeji* (*Treatise on Forestry and Economy*)—an encyclopedic compilation of treatises on fields of knowledge such as architecture, medicine, horticulture, agriculture, fishing, astronomy, art, and leisure. A notable figure in the *Sil-hak* movement was the scholar Jeong Yak-yong who recorded his experience using a camera obscura to understand principles of nature. After explaining how to properly use a box-type camera obscura, Jeong writes: “Now when someone asks for a picture without the slightest error even in the rendering of the hair, there is no better way to do it than to use this device.”<sup>132</sup>

Combined with the fascination for the newly introduced technology from Europe, Jeong’s writing stresses the objectivity and the accuracy of the image. This reflects late Joseon’s devotion to notions of “resemblance” and “verisimilitude” that were fundamental to the production of art and knowledge during the eighteenth to nineteenth century. It is important to note here what the values of “resemblance” and “verisimilitude” entailed. Although the emphasis was on the effort to accurately understand and portray the natural world and things without errors as much as possible, the product of such endeavor to represent/simulate real life could be very

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<sup>132</sup> Lee, “Camera Obscura and Painters in Late Chosun dynasty,” *Dasanhak* 6 (2005), p. 111.

close to, but never equal to the nature or actual things. They could resemble and be very similar to, but never be the same as the natural world and its principles. This conscious split between nature and representation, reality and its projection resemble Crary's discussion of the workings of the camera obscura in the European context. Despite such gaps, vocabularies of resemblance and verisimilitude still concern the material, sensory qualities of the physical world. Sensuous surfaces of material objects rendered in heightened illusionism and realism can be found in many *Chaekgeori* paintings of the late Joseon period.

#### 4.2. Plenty and Dearth: The Moral Ground of Still-Life Painting

玩人喪德，玩物喪志。

(By trifling with men he [a ruler] ruins his virtue;  
by finding his amusement in things (of mere pleasure), he ruins his aims.)<sup>133</sup>

—“旅獒: Hounds of Lü,” 書經 (*Book of Documents*)

Curiosity is only vanity  
—Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1670)

From the late seventeenth-century onwards, Joseon Korea faced a growing economy in the capital city and an increase of market activities, including the art market beyond limited private exchanges, opening up the commodification of art as well as other luxury items such as foreign books and novel collectible items from China. Since then, art became a commodity, and as Jungmann notes, “the collecting and display of art became a desirable activity for wider circles of the secondary elite and for commoners who wanted to elevate their social status and

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<sup>133</sup> This text is directed at Emperor Wu (武王) of Zhou (周) receiving tributes from the Lü people of west China. Among many gifts such as vessels, food, fabrics, etc., handsome, well-bred hounds and horses as tributes that only satisfied the eye and ears were considered a danger to virtues, therefore superfluous. 玩物 (Things of mere pleasure) here refers to the beautiful hounds as gifts to Wu, as the phrase “玩物喪志” warns Wu against valuing the extraordinary over the useful and practical.

demonstrate their elegant taste and cultivation.”<sup>134</sup> The style of art, circulated among a wider circle of consumers, also changed drastically from simple, usually monochrome designs to more vibrant, colorful, and elaborate ones. Such popularity of sensuous surfaces and conspicuous consumption through art affected every class, from commoners to the King. The elite class, *yangban*, who saw themselves as privileged literati, showed contradictory stances on literati virtues. On the one hand, they were eager to “conceal the financial gain of the exchange and commissioning of artwork to keep it seen as an elegant pastime,”<sup>135</sup> praising literati virtues of frugality and moral righteousness according to the ideal of detaching oneself from the material world. At the same time, however, they tried to obtain as many paintings from the seller as possible. Middle class merchants, called *jung-in* (“middle-men,” comparable to Dutch burgher), enjoyed tremendous financial gains through the side trade of paintings, books, medical herbs, and other luxuries, which had been harder for them to achieve in the earlier stricter feudal system. Numerous treatises and writings on material things, exemplified by Seo Yu-Gu’s encyclopedic volumes of *Imwonkyeongjeji* (*Treatise on Forestry and Economy*), were published during this period, showing an avid interest and concern for the economy of consumption and production. Chapters on “Yuyeji” (Seeking Delight in the Arts) in the *Hwajeon* volume (Painting a basket) and on “Yewankamsang” (Appreciation of Art works) in the *Iunji* volume (Enjoyment of Clouds)<sup>136</sup> of Seo’s treatise specifically address how the respectful scholar should collect, appreciate, and use antiques and luxury goods, including Seo’s own critical comments on such activities in the context of the late Joseon period. The treatise is very similar to the Chinese text

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<sup>134</sup> Burglind Jungmann, *Pathways to Korean Culture: Paintings of the Joseon Dynasty, 1392-1910* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), p. 270.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

<sup>136</sup> The title is reminiscent of the Song literati Su Shi (苏轼, 1037-1101)’s admonition against scholarly collecting (especially painting and calligraphy) as delights of “clouds and mist that pass by the eyes.” See: Peter Charles Sturman, *Mi Fu: style and the art of calligraphy in Northern Song China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 51.



*A Treatise on Superfluous Things* by Wen Zhengheng from Ming China, about a century and a half earlier. Both texts treat “aesthetic judgment of individual objects—that is the formation of ‘taste’—and the functions of objects within the rituals of social life—that is, a gentlemanly behavior”<sup>137</sup> in a similar manner. It is probable that Wen’s treatise was readily available among scholars of the late Joseon dynasty such as Yu-gu Seo.<sup>138</sup> Both Korean and Chinese texts provide treatises on the conspicuous consumption and extravagant life of the aficionado as well as the material objects themselves in worlds surrounded by the brilliance of objects and commodities. Both treatises however, still present a certain coyness and carefulness about how to treat such objects, holding on to the Confucian virtues of material detachment and anxieties about things. Such tension is well demonstrated in a small eighteenth-century painting by Hong-do Kim, *A Literatus Seeking Delight in the Arts* (Fig. 20). It shows a Confucian scholar holding a lute surrounded by objects that are frequently represented in *Chaekgeori* such as painted scrolls and calligraphies, porcelain and bronze vases, and books to demonstrate his fine literati taste. Accompanying the sitter’s extravagant display of collectibles is the inscription in the upper left corner that reads: “Without pursuing an official degree, I wish to spend the rest of my life only whistling and singing in a humble home with earthen walls and paper windows.” Inscription and image create a tension between the fascination with elegant, lavish objects and the scholar’s pronouncement of Confucian moral conduct of frugal living.

In another early nineteenth-century *Chaekgeori* painting entitled, *Chaekgeori behind a Leopard-Skin Curtain* (Fig. 21), on a eight-panel folding screen by an anonymous artist, similar still-life items as featured in Jang’s painting are displayed, but now with an addition of a pair of

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<sup>137</sup> Honig, “Making Sense of Things: On the Motives of Dutch Still Life,” p. 167.

<sup>138</sup> Yo-Hwa Chen, Hyun-Sil Shin, Won-Ho Lee, Dong-Hyun Kim, Un-Yeon Cho, “The Impact of *Jangmulji* compiled by Mun, jin-hyung and *Imwonkyungjaeji* compiled by Seo, yu-gu on the Garden of Gentry in Late Joseon,” *Korea Contents Society* 11 (2014): p. 127.

glasses at the center as if the sitter reading a book has just left the studio. The glasses are undoubtedly Western imports and similar to those shown in van Eyck's and Ghirlandaio's paintings. The shelf that framed the whole composition in Jang's work has now been transformed into a piece of smaller furniture in the corner, and scholar's accouterments stand rather chaotically and independently on the table, the floor, and in the cabinet. What immediately captivates the viewer in this work is the sumptuous leopard skin curtain painted across the eight-panel folding screen. Out of the eight panels, six full panels are exclusively devoted to the leopard skin, which was an extremely expensive luxury item only given to high-ranking Korean officials or Chinese envoys by the Joseon king.<sup>139</sup> Such conspicuous consumption would be on the top of the list of things to regulate under Joseon sumptuary laws. Just as Jang did with the folded curtain, the anonymous artist illustrates the oscillating tensions between celebration and admonition against material objects with the use of the leopard skin curtain. The leopard skin—the outermost layer of the animal—poses an important question on the relationship between the corporeal body, representation, and surface. It doubly acts as a celebration of and as a careful warning against material indulgence in the Confucian viewer; no matter how luxurious and brilliant the objects and the curtains are, they are at the end of the day, a painted illusion. The objects covered by the curtain as well as the luxurious curtain itself are not meant to be physically handled, utilized, or possessed, but meant to remain in the painted realm. A virtuous gentleman-scholar should not indulge in consuming and purchasing all the actual luxury items shown, but would still be able to enjoy the refined taste of appreciating luxuries through the image of such fine objects.

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<sup>139</sup> Chang, Chin-Sung, "Ambivalence and Indulgence: The Moral Geography of Collectors in Late Joseon Korea," eds. Elizabeth Lillehoj, *Archaism and Antiquarianism in Korean and Japanese Art* (Chicago: The Center for the Art of East Asia, University of Chicago Art Media Resources, 2013) p. 126.

Hay writes that things' affective surfaces could evoke states of mind such as stillness (*jing*) and decorum.<sup>140</sup> Jeongjo's remarks on his highly illusionistic *Chaekgeori* screen illuminate the ethical, moral grounds of still-life paintings. His remark on keeping an image of books reflects his love of scholarly pursuits as well as frugality appropriate to Neo-Confucian ideals. As Neo-Confucian values emphasized frugality and humbleness, they guided many people including King Jeongjo to consider keeping many books as superfluous and luxurious, despite the Neo-Confucian ideal of a gentleman-scholar that inevitably requires acquisition of books. This is a somewhat contradictory and paradoxical point around material possession and scholarly passion with the love of books in Jeongjo's Joseon. Keeping a *trompe-l'oeil* image of books filled with appropriate contents (as shown in the covers of the *trompe-l'oeil* books) instead of buying the actual objects (with the possibility of acquiring immoral, dangerous texts, as Jeongjo feared) comes as an ideal strategy for Jeongjo to promote correct consumption patterns and reading habits. As Baudrillard would say, the primacy of image over actual objects with initial love for material objects of books rises as a "hyperreal" social order that is filled with "image signifiers" and "simulated" objects, "schizophrenically freed from all fixed investments of individual personality and particular desire."<sup>141</sup> Similarly, Pietz has characterized such a social order as driven "not by superstitious ignorance and fear [of fetishism turning free-acting subject subordinate and reified by objective social forms], as in Kant's Enlightenment philosophy, but by fascination and desire for pure formalism itself."<sup>142</sup> The result of this fetishism on forms and image signifiers is an order that material use of products is no longer the object of consumption as much as the objects' codified meaning now revealed as autonomous forces in a context of

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<sup>140</sup> Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, p. 92.

<sup>141</sup> Pietz, "Fetishism and Materialism: The Limits of Theory in Marx," in Emily S. Apter and William Pietz eds., *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.), p. 124.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

viewing and display. This phenomenon is central to Marx's theory on fetishism. Marxian theory of commodity fetishism is a critical, material theory of social desire. Marx viewed "capital" or material things to be a species of fetish.<sup>143</sup> In Marx's view, fetishes in "sensuous supersensuous things" (sinnlich übersinnliches Ding)<sup>144</sup> did not reside in the things' "physical existence or concrete functions per se but in their reality as material forms ("part-objects") of a distinct type of social system."<sup>145</sup> Pietz applies Marxian theory of fetishism as a dialectical idea to the social process as a whole that presents economical, social transactions as a:

real social metaphysics (an institutional objectification of human temporality in the form of labor-power, surplus value, and credit) and, at the same time, a fantastically alien misrepresentation (an inhuman, doubly inverted vision of the collective life of individuals as "civil society").<sup>146</sup>

Jeongjo's screen as a fetish, a "material form," proposes interesting narratives about the social system of late Joseon period. The very material of the study screen in Jeongjo's office to not simply define spaces but also to primarily display objects as images is, "both an exterior object and an extension of [the king's] body."<sup>147</sup> The king's *Chaekgeori* screen containing images of books therefore embodies not only the king himself who stresses scholarly virtues and Neo-Confucian ideals, but also larger social order of Joseon that reflects such a value system. The screen as the material, fetish object becomes a kind of social space that focuses complex economical, social transactions of power and vision of Joseon society in its flat, yet foldable surface. At the same time, it also reveals a projection of "fantastically alien misinterpretation" of "collective life as civil society" pertaining to scholarly, Confucian virtues. The screen displays images of material objects while rejecting the notion of material consumption in the Neo-

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid. p. 129

<sup>144</sup> Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politische Okonomie, vol 1: Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals* (Ullstein: Frankfurt Am Main, 1969), p. 50.

<sup>145</sup> Pietz, "Fetishism and Materialism: The Limits of Theory in Marx," p.129.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Hung, p. 12.

Confucian society, and thus presents this schizophrenic, ambiguous, and “doubly inverted” contradiction of the “civilized society” of the late Joseon era.

Commodities and objects played a great role in both the Dutch Republic and the late Joseon cultural consciousness. Their “lived world[s] [were] filled with material goods to an unprecedented extent, and the interest of these objects lay in their status as commodities”<sup>148</sup> and the artistic practice of representing the material wealth through still-life paintings. The genre of still-life in the Dutch and Joseon worlds of goods therefore promotes a visual expression of those interests in material objects. In Willem Claesz Heda’s *Still-life with a Gilt Cup*, the viewer sees various textures and surfaces of objects displayed such as lemon peel, glass cups containing wine and water, silver dish, pewter pitcher, gilt cup, oysters, table cloths and half-eaten breads. With astonishing realism, Heda presents the remains of a partially consumed breakfast against the carefully shaded background. Heda provides a convincing assemblage of objects with immaculate detail and precision. Heda provides a great play of light and shade in various textures of the objects on the breakfast table. The light coming from the upper left corner shines through the glass cup containing water, reflecting back at the viewer’s space by bouncing on the cold, yet soft surfaces of the gilt and silver cups and the pitcher. Heda unifies the whole composition through the cluster of objects by repeating formal elements of ellipses in lemon, jars, oysters, dishes, and cups and a subtle palette of grey tones that stretches across the table. The crinkled, ruffled tablecloth with greatest proximity to the viewer’s space lends both temporal and spatial immediacy of the breakfast table. The wrinkled tablecloth suggests a slice of moment in time and space, implying presence of the absent sitter at the breakfast table. In terms of perspective, Heda creates a delicate network of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines with the table slightly receding back into the picture plane as the viewers’ eyes move further across to the back of the

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<sup>148</sup> Honig, p. 168.

table. Although not prominent, the viewer can sense a subtle single-point perspective from the displayed objects. Roland Barthes in his scathing remark on seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting in “The World as Object” notes:

Oysters, lemon pulp, heavy goblets full of dark wine, long clay pipes, gleaming chestnuts, pottery, tarnished metal cups, three grape seeds—what can be the justification of such an assemblage if not to lubricate man’s gaze amid his domain, to facilitate his daily business among objects whose riddle is dissolved and which are no longer anything but easy surfaces?<sup>149</sup>

Existing for its appearance, for its surface properties, and for its display or advertisement value,<sup>150</sup> an object in Dutch still-life, in Barthes’ view, could hardly ever be comprehended in its essence. Barthes viewed such primacy of the surface as always accompanied by its adjectives and without essences as a moral vacancy in Netherlandish art and social culture characterized by “reigning obsession...of utilization consumption...[and] a world of uses and appetites.”<sup>151</sup> Only emptiness and superficiality lied beyond the “sheen” of fine goods. However, it is the very quality of the immaculately rendered “surfaces” that the still-life lends itself a material, reflexive agency to position itself in a culturally, morally meaningful way. The material goods, represented in their sheer “object-ness” in the Dutch still-life paintings, ironically aid building up a sense of independence and autonomy of the paintings to be situated in a dialogue with the viewer at the subject-to-subject level. The viewer who gazes at the paintings that are replete with sheer material qualities also finds him/herself being gazed at, embarrassed, and becoming anxious.

A Comparison between Heda’s still-life painting and Jang’s *Chaekgeori* is useful to tease out the reflexive, moral dimensions of the seventeenth-century Dutch still-life. Formally, Heda’s

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<sup>149</sup> Roland Barthes, “The World as Object” Ed. Norman Bryson, *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p. 108.

<sup>150</sup> Schama, p. 479.

<sup>151</sup> Schama, p. 478.

and Jang's paintings are both concerned with the sheer "object-ness" of things. The delicate use of perspective and balancing of the forms enhance the plausibility of gathered objects as a coherent group. On another level, both paintings also strive to achieve a degree of perfection: Jang's painting delivers a kind of structural perfection with immaculately organized, symmetrical sections of the bookshelves; Heda's painting offers a perfect, glowing finish to various surfaces and textures of objects with the medium of oil paint. Such desire for order and perfection has been explored by Norman Bryson, who suggests that still-life is able to "provide its viewers with images in which the historically unprecedented instability and volatility of their material culture could appear as regulated and stabilized,"<sup>152</sup> promoting a visual ideology. The two paintings are similar in their promotion of visual ideology within specific cultures through their contents. The pride about material goods with sensuous surfaces in the Dutch still-life is balanced by the looming Calvinistic virtues such as that of frugality. These values were reflected in still-life objects that refer to the vanities of life. The chosen objects in Heda's work communicate the *vanitas* message which is summarized in the Gospel of Matthew 6: 18-21:

Do not lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.<sup>153</sup>

The *vanitas* theme reproaching gluttony and possession of material surplus through various visual metaphors such as lemon peel, oyster shells, unfinished breakfast, glass half full in Heda's work warns the viewer that wealth, power, youth, and most importantly fine goods that embody those things will decay and perish. The painting is the "perfect expression of this troubled culture [surrounded by consumption and material excess] and its castigating or

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<sup>152</sup> Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 132.

<sup>153</sup> Gospel of Matthew, 6: 18-21.

negotiating aesthetic,”<sup>154</sup> offering admonition and Calvinist moral virtue of frugal living. Bryson has further noted that the element of disorder in Dutch still-life, such as leftover meals, chaotic consumption, and overturned goblets, creates a visual tension not to disavow the call to order but to build on the ideology of order or ethics. It allows the viewer and the artist to explore the confusing realm of abundance, but ultimately returns to a rule, order, and ethics.<sup>155</sup> The discourse on the ephemerality of material goods and according moral virtues surrounding the Dutch still-life still is premised on the phenomenon of material affluence and availability. The display and presentation of abundance and material wealth are inseparable from the regime of abstention and regulation around such material affluence through the metaphors of peeled fruit, open liquid, and decaying seafood. A beautiful gilt cup and silver dishes with freshly served breakfast are as much celebrated as reprimanded in the careful material balance between sufficiency and insufficiency. As Bryson notes, “the solution to the problem of abundance is solidarity in the face of dearth and plenty alike.”<sup>156</sup>

Jang’s painting of *Chaekgeori* similarly promotes Neo-Confucian moral codes of the frugal, gentleman-scholar life. The very purpose of the abundance of fine goods and scholarly objects in the painting lies in the religion’s suppression of materialistic consumption to replace all those actual fine goods with a single painting of the goods. In the Neo-Confucian society, great wealth and corruption were widely suspected of being inseparably bound together. All the objects painted in Jang’s work stand quietly and orderly. The strong horizontal and vertical wooden frames of the bookshelves provide rigid order, structure, and distance among the displayed objects. While these objects are not meant to be physically handled, they still allow themselves to be consumed only visually. Despite the emphasis on moral virtues of frugality and

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<sup>154</sup> Honig, p. 169.

<sup>155</sup> Bryson, p. 132.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.



order in the still-life, Jang's painting also paradoxically celebrates the material wealth and abundance at the same time. Superfluous, luxurious objects fill up each space of the bookshelves, flanked by the silk curtain with the symbol of happiness, wealth, and good living (囍) printed on it. On top of the visual fullness achieved by the collection of various things, the nature of things depicted adds to the celebration of abundance and plenty. In the central panel of the painted bookshelves stands the ink painting of a lotus flower. Since the Chinese character for lotus (*lian* 莲) shares the same sound with the word for "continuation" or "family lineage" (*lian*, 连), lotus was frequently used to symbolize a wish "to produce sons continuously" (*lianshengguizi* 連生貴子) in many *Chaekgeori* paintings.

## Conclusion: Of Stillness and Life: an Allegory

On September 15, 1723, Castiglione celebrates the appointment of the new emperor Yongzheng with his still-life painting of blooming flowers in a celadon vase. Freshly gathered lotus flowers, stalks of rice, and peonies from the imperial garden shine brightly in Castiglione's *Auspicious Objects* (or *Gathering of Auspicious Signs*) (Fig. 22) on a hanging scroll. An inscription by Castiglione accompanies the still-life composition. It reads:

In the first year of the reign of the Yongzheng Emperor every kind of good omen emerged: doubled grain stems grew in the fields and lotus flowers bloomed in the small lake of the Forbidden City. Your servant Lang Shining has respectfully painted these auspicious signs on a vase after careful observation, with the purpose of commemorating these events, September 15, 1723.<sup>157</sup>

“After careful observation,” Castiglione sets the stage for a play on balances. Castiglione's descriptive eye (as Alpers would suggest) sees the calm, yet vibrant petals of the lotus flowers and peonies evoking a sense of soft touch and texture as they stand next to the glossy, smooth leaves of the lotus plant. The delicacy of these flowers is accompanied by the solid weight and coldness of the round vase and the wooden base. The lush flowers are flowing with sweetness for the eyes and for the nose. The chiaroscuro—formed by the folds of the leaves, smooth curvature of the vase, specular highlights and shades in the flower petals—offers a particular three-dimensionality and materiality to the painted vase and flowers. And yet, the vase stands mid-air without a support (like a table or a cabinet shelf), occupying a bottomless, depthless space. With clever pun on the word the lotus, just like the one in the Korean *Chaekgeori*, pointing to longevity with its homophonic word, *lian* (连), Castiglione celebrates abundance and peace through the represented objects with a pattern of presenting meanings based on linguistic

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<sup>157</sup> Francesco Vossilla, “The Jesuit Painter and His Emperor: Some Comments Regarding Giuseppe Castiglione and the Qianlong Emperor” *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 49 (2016): p. 75.

references. The lotus flower gains the meaning of longevity through phonetics by two words being (structurally) similar in sounds. The form (lotus) and the meaning (longevity) therefore show a gap or disjuncture, arbitrarily put together to provide some connection—an allegory. Combining both the European painting technique<sup>158</sup> in seventeenth-century Milan—and the Chinese mediums of ink (instead of oil paint) and hanging scroll, Castiglione offers an allegory of good governance<sup>159</sup> and peaceful friendship between Italy and China.

Walter Benjamin theorizes on the concept of allegory to examine how the form of the German Baroque mourning play (*Trauerspiel*) in the seventeenth-century is determined by their truth content. Framing the mood of melancholic contemplativeness as the key characteristic of tragic dramas during the Baroque period of European art history in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century, Benjamin differentiates allegories from symbols. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin notes, “the measure of time of symbolic experience is the mystical instant [*Nu*].”<sup>160</sup> Benjamin’s characterization of symbol remaining in a moment in time, as an instance, resonates with Fletcher’s conceptualization of symbol that is less flexible than allegory. Fletcher argues, with symbol, the mind “perceives the rational order of things directly, by an ‘unmediated vision,’ without any logical extrapolation from the phenomena of material world.”<sup>161</sup> The symbol tries to seamlessly fill in the gap between sign and object, word and thing, thus providing a model for unmediated presence of reality. In contrast to this static quality in

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<sup>158</sup> And perhaps the European example of flower still-life as a gift or an offering as exemplified by Jan Brueghel the Elder’s relationship with Cardinal Federico Borromeo. In a letter to Borromeo, Brueghel claimed to paint his bouquet “after nature,” selecting flowers himself. See: Susan Merriam, *Seventeenth-Century Flemish Garland Paintings Still Life, Vision, and the Devotional Image* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012) pp.57-58. Of course it was physically impossible for Brueghel to paint all the flowers “after nature” as the flowers offered to Borromeo did not bloom in the same season, requiring Brueghel to work with multiple sketches and drafts.

<sup>159</sup> “In 1727, Castiglione sketched other sheaves of foxtail millet for drawings to be printed to accompany a communication from the Yongzheng Emperor attesting to the productivity of farming under his wise auspices in all the territories of the Empire.” See: Vossilla, “The Jesuit Painter and His Emperor: Some Comments Regarding Giuseppe Castiglione and the Qianlong Emperor.” p. 76.

<sup>160</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, (London: Verso, 1998), 165.

<sup>161</sup> Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967) p. 18.

symbols, allegory is something that is dynamic, mobile, and fluid, transgressing the spatio-temporal boundaries.<sup>162</sup> Allegory is not the *conventional* representation of some expression, but an *expression* of convention.<sup>163</sup> As Benjamin perceives allegory as the *experience* of the expression itself rather than just a means of representation or communication, Benjamin's allegory ultimately is ontological in function. Unlike the seamless unity in the world of symbols, allegory hints at the fragmentary, partial, incomplete (the process) nature of the world. Baniard Cowan in "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory" states that:

The affirmation of the *existence* of truth, then, is the first precondition for allegory; the second is the recognition of its absence. Allegory could not exist if truth were accessible: as a mode of expression it arises in perpetual response to the human condition of being exiled from the truth that it would embrace.<sup>164</sup>

To create and perceive allegory through visualized signs is an artistic project to locate the truth content. As Fletcher notes, in allegory, there is always "an attempt to categorize logical orders first, and fit them to convenient phenomena second, to set forth ideal systems first, and illustrate them second [...] This Platonic idea-image relationship can exist only when one is conscious of the philosophic status of the ideas one is conceiving."<sup>165</sup> Thus, the recognition of the existence of truth, and later the acceptance of its absence or incompleteness through allegory lead logically on to reflexivity and consciousness.

Surrounded by the eighteenth-century Joseon discourse on truthfulness, faithful representation, mimetic likeness as well as thoughts on the principle of (material) things,

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<sup>162</sup> Benjamin further states, "Whereas in the symbol, with the transformation of the deceased the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the *facies hippocratica* of history lies before the eyes of the observer as a stiffened, primal landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed as a face—or rather in a death's head." *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 166.

<sup>163</sup> Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 175.

<sup>164</sup> Baniard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 114.

<sup>165</sup> Fletcher, p. 18.

*Chaekgeori* is an allegory par excellence. Between the realms of order and disorder, plenty and dearth, and surface and depth, elements of *Chaekgeori* come together in a loop that is constantly interrogating and re-creating itself, beginning anew as soon as it ends. *Chaekgeori* is, “representation of representation and representation within representation [that] problematizes representation itself.”<sup>166</sup> Here, Eaton’s characterization of self-reflexive representation echoes Benjamin’s notion of allegory that is not the *conventional* representation of some expression, but an *expression*, that very process of convention. Eaton continues and suggests that self-reflexive representation “demands and yet disrupts any possibility of mastering the circulation of mimesis in alterity,”<sup>167</sup> lending a potential for both allegory and representation to play with differences and transgress the loop of self-reflexivity.

Benjamin scholars Peter Osborne and Matthew Charles suggests, “From the perspective of the allegorical, the instantaneous transformation within the symbolic becomes a natural history slowed to such an extreme that every sign appears frozen and—seemingly loosened from every other relationship—arbitrary.”<sup>168</sup> Bryson also agrees on the slow passing of time in still-life paintings. Bryson notes that a still-life is “a response to the slowest, most entropic level of material existence.”<sup>169</sup> He suggests, “Besides the rapid, seismically sensitive rhythms set by consumption, its objects are also turned to a slow, almost geological, rhythm that is all their own.”<sup>170</sup> Objects therefore enjoy states of temporal and spatial impasse. In the contexts of Dutch and Joseon still-lives, the commodities as fetish objects depicted in paintings have “taken the

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<sup>166</sup> Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India 1765-1860* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 194.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Osborne and Charles, "Walter Benjamin", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/benjamin/>>.

<sup>169</sup> Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, p. 13.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

place of the allegorical mode of apprehension.”<sup>171</sup> Still-life paintings of the Dutch Republic and the late Joseon dynasty therefore provide models of allegory with juxtapositions of incongruent, arbitrary elements in fetish objects frozen in time and space. The dialectical images created in images of commodity as fetish offer interesting juxtapositions and structures of different fragments. “Dialectical images” manifested by the device of allegory stands at the middle point with its contradictory moments as axial fields.<sup>172</sup> As Walter Benjamin scholar Susan Buck-Morss argues, the coordinates of a dialectical image’s unfolding occur in extremes and antithetical polarities. Buck-Morss provides axes of binary oppositions, including axes of “waking vs. dream” and “petrified nature vs. transitory nature” with “commodity” at the intersection of two axes (Fig. 23). Buck-Morss notes that each field of the coordinates “can be said to describe one aspect of the physiognomic appearance of the commodity, showing its contradictory “faces”: fetish and fossil, wish image and ruin.”<sup>173</sup> Dutch and Joseon paintings of fetish/commodities/objects rest in this ambivalent, null position of the coordinate, affected by every aspect of the established binaries yet distanced from them. It is both independent from and dependent on those established axes, projecting the very spirit of the “empire of things, presented as pipe-dream.”<sup>174</sup>

Art Historian Roger Chartier proposes a method on understanding representation and culture. He writes that all practices are:

“cultural” as well as social or economic, since they translate into action the many ways in which humans give meaning to their world. All history, therefore—whether economic, social, or religious—requires the study of systems of representation and the acts the systems generate...Describing a culture should thus involve the comprehension of its entire system of relations—the totality of

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<sup>171</sup> Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1913-1926* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006) p. 188.

<sup>172</sup> Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 210.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Schama, “Perishable commodities: Dutch still-life painting and the ‘empire of things,’” p. 487.

the practices that express how it represents the physical world, society, and the sacred.

Exploring the interesting resonances in the genre of still-life from early modern world provided conversations on the material cultures of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and eighteenth-century surrounded by material goods, conspicuous and cautious consumptions, sensuous surfaces, and contesting or combined aesthetics.

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