

The Limits of Consumption: Sawasa Ware In and Out of the Dutch East Indies

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In 1695, Dirck Graswinckel opened his mail to find a “very peculiar copper gilded enameled Japanese *souatsche* Tobacco box.”¹ The item had been sent to Amsterdam by his relative Willem van Outhoorn, Governor-General of Batavia, the Dutch East India Company’s colony-capital in modern day Indonesia. Shifting the solid metal box in his hands, Graswinckel might have noted its heaviness, the texture of its relief decorations against his thumb, and perhaps wondered about the origins of his new gift. It is likely that Graswinckel’s box looked similar to a tobacco box currently held by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (fig. 1). Its blackened, elongated quatrefoil body is edged with warm golden tones. Inside its concentric cartouches is an array of East Asian motifs, primarily cherry tree branches dotted with blossoms and pagodas. To Graswinckel’s curious but untrained eyes, the box appeared to have a black



Figure 1. “Suassa” tobacco box,
Sawasa ware, *shakudō* alloy
(fire-gilded and black-lacquered),
ca. 1700-1800, 3.8 cm x 12.1 cm x 6.4
cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.352177>

enameled surface with a shiny copper inlay. What Graswinckel held was a composite object, a reflection of the cross-cultural mediation of technique, style, and taste characteristic of the burgeoning global trade of novel foreign commodities in the early modern world.

In actuality, Graswinckel's tobacco box was not enameled, but crafted from a chemically treated copper alloy called *shakudō* and coated with a thin layer of black lacquer, the key characteristics of Sawasa ware. The alloy *shakudō* had long been used in Japanese sword-making. However, Sawasa ware, the specific class of East Asian black-and-gold metalware with which this study is concerned, traces its origins to the Dutch presence in Nagasaki, specifically to their trading outpost on the manmade island of Dejima. There, Japanese and, later, Chinese craftsmen produced Sawasa objects from approximately 1650-1800. Japan is the earliest manufacturer of Sawasa, but scholars speculate that this metalware was imitated in Canton, Tonkin, and possibly the Dutch colony-capital of Batavia.² Beyond this biographical sketch, the study of Sawasa ware is challenging. Few examples classified as such survive today, the objects are rarely mentioned in the archives, and, when they are, the range of descriptors is so irregular as to make it nearly impossible to draw connections with certainty. The present article therefore embraces failure: the failure of the archival record to reveal stable identifiers and categories, and the failure of Sawasa ware to attain an eager, or even interested, consumer base.

Amid art history's global turn, it is worthwhile to pause and consider those commodities that stubbornly resisted mass market appeal. It is true that an enormous volume of material commodities was crisscrossing the early modern world.³ The torrent of porcelain, silk, comestibles, and raw materials entering European ports make it appear as if there was no halt to ravenous consumerism in the "globalizing" early modern world.⁴ Counterintuitive as it may seem, studying less desired products of any provenance carries an opportunity to better understand why and to what degree foreign goods were desired by those with purchasing power. This paper grapples with the following questions: Why were certain goods, such as porcelain and lacquerware, commonly desired in early modern Europe while others were not? What were the conditions necessary to create a European market for novel Asian manufactured goods? And, in sum, what were the limits and difficulties of consumption in this period? An incomplete Sawasa coffee service in the Rijksmuseum provides a locus for these questions (fig. 2). Although the service does not represent the dominant type of the surviving Sawasa corpus, it is a prime example of Sawasa's material characteristics and relevance to the popular coinciding rituals of consuming coffee, tea, and chocolate.

Sawasa's sparse object examples, infrequent mention in the archive, and unstable denotation make investigations into its history difficult. Therefore, in order to elucidate Sawasa's trajectory of limited consumption, I first compare *shakudō* export ware with objects designed for Japan's domestic market. I then consider Sawasa's potential pathways to Europe through pri-

Figure 2. Tonkinservies, Sawasa ware, *shakudō* alloy (fire-gilded and black-lacquered), ca. 1700-1800. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COL-LECT.316034>



vate trade and aristocratic patronage. Due to its obscurity, I employ a comparative analysis of Sawasa and two successful, well-studied Asian commodities, porcelain, and lacquerware. As I demonstrate, Sawasa catered to European taste through a program of attributes recognizable to the early modern consumer: a pan-Asian aesthetic, vessel shapes that coincided with trending foodstuffs, and an objectively valuable material composition. Using VOC archives, estate inventories, and material comparison, I propose that a number of factors ultimately contributed to Sawasa ware's limited European consumer audience, including its enclosure within private trade networks, the prohibitive cost of its materials, its apparent failure to appeal to European taste, and its shifting nomenclature.

Sawasa: Japanese Export Art in Black and Gold 1650-1800

In 1998, Bas Kist (1933-2003), former curator at the Rijksmuseum, collaborated with private collectors and institutions to bring together dozens of black-and-gold metal objects with an East or Southeast Asian provenance for the first time. The only exhibition ever dedicated to Sawasa ware featured 135 individual objects. Notably, all but ten of these came from private collections. This fact speaks to the continued difficulty of studying Sawasa ware as much as it does to the role such wares played as curiosities. The exhibition catalog lists twenty-one swords and related accessories, nine objects of fashion (buttons, cane handles, and buckles), eighteen incense containers, eight pots or ewers, and a handful of mismatched cups, saucers, and serving vessels. Of all the Sawasa objects compiled for the exhibition, around twenty percent were dining

related. On the other hand, tobacco boxes, spittoons, and pipe cases account for approximately half of the total exhibition. Fifty-eight pieces are tobacco boxes. The assortment of tobacco boxes can be roughly grouped based on the nine different stock shapes. Graswinckel's box was therefore probably not a unique specimen, but one of a common mold of tobacco boxes commissioned by the Dutch East India Company (hereafter VOC or Company) in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁵

Graswinckel's description of his "peculiar" tobacco box captures the paradoxical place Sawasa ware occupied: precious and rare, yet unknown and, perhaps, not desired. While Graswinckel was at least minimally familiar with the name of the material (*souatsche*), it is clear that he did not exactly understand what he possessed. The known corpus of Sawasa ware consists of tobacco accessories, jewelry and buttons, and accessories for consuming tea, coffee, and chocolate. The tobacco box gifted to Graswinckel was in step with the European-inspired shapes marketed by Japanese and Chinese traders at Dejima, whether those shapes be Sawasa, porcelain, or lacquerware. Until recently, the European demand for Asian goods has been explained by the unsatisfactory assumption that they were wanted simply because of their exotic origin.⁶ However, European desire for Asian manufactured goods was not self-evident. This study offers a tempered view of global exchange in which the notion that early modern European consumers desired Asian goods solely because of their provenance is called into question.

The present article is indebted to the Rijksmuseum's 1998 exhibition and its accompanying catalog, *Sawasa: Japanese export art in black and gold, 1650-1800*.⁷ To date, this text is the only publication dedicated to Sawasa ware. De Bruijn and Kist define the little-known class of black-and-gold East Asian metalware as products intended for European export, naming the group "Sawasa." The authors chart Sawasa's connections to the VOC through Japanese production, unofficial trade, and private European collections. Importantly, De Bruijn and Kist trace the numerous misspellings, mispronunciations, and descriptions in trade documents and personal records by which Sawasa was denoted. Sawasa's unstable denomination in the archive over time supports my argument that a reliable signifier is one prerequisite to commercial success.⁸ Although he was not the first to make the connection between Sawasa ware and its Japanese origins, Kist's curatorial work constitutes an invaluable contribution to the study of Sawasa ware. To my knowledge, no inquiries into Sawasa's history have been conducted prior to or since the Rijksmuseum's exhibition.

Trade documents and estate inventories, the only sources in which Sawasa is mentioned at least sporadically, were often unclear as to the specific site of a particular Sawasa object's production. While a Japanese provenance was sometimes assigned, Tonkinese and Chinese origins are suggested nearly as often. Peter Hallebeek's essay in the Rijksmuseum catalog summarizes results of scientific analyses conducted on a selection of the wares in the 1998 exhibition. The results confirm Sawasa's material kinship with the Japanese

copper-gold alloy *shakudō*, thus validating the historical link between Sawasa export ware and its Japanese roots. Although curators hoped analysis could help to differentiate between objects of Japanese, Chinese, and Tonkinese origin, Hallebeek's team concluded that the technologies were available in all three regions and thus could not verify the place of manufacture.

While I acknowledge the question of origin, I shift the inquiry to the potential routes Sawasa followed out of Asian ports and the difficulties encountered along the way, focusing attention on two key elements. First, Sawasa occupied a space outside of official VOC trade in private networks and, second, the sparse records of Sawasa's movement are obfuscated by the slipperiness of the language used to describe and name it. For questions regarding VOC trade practices, especially the private trade networks in which Sawasa was almost certainly involved, I rely on the research of Dutch economic historians Jan de Vries, Stoyan V. Sgourev, and Wim van Lent. Reflecting on past scholarship of early modern Eurasian trade, De Vries asserts that widespread consumer acceptance of novel commodities was not as self-evident as it was once posed. Separately, he suggests that private trade, long assumed to have been detrimental to VOC profitability, was more complementary than competitive. Through analysis of Company legislation and provisions over a century and a half, Sgourev and Van Lent corroborate De Vries and upend the long-held negative view of unofficial trade. Rather, top-down control over trade activity was more flexible than previously assumed and private trade permissions tended to be financially motivated. Together, these three historians confirm that Sawasa's absence in trade documents, despite its continued manufacture, points to its position as a privately traded commodity. This fact partially explains the obscurity of Sawasa during the era of the trading companies as well as why the metalware has bypassed art historical study. However, far from hindering the proliferation of imported goods, analyses of VOC records confirm that many successful commodities were implicated in private trade.

Porcelain and lacquerware offer a comparative framework for evaluating the limited consumption of Sawasa due to their mode of trade and the concrete names by which they were anchored. Scholars now argue that the trade of dizzying quantities of porcelain was largely conducted outside of official VOC trade.⁹ Although I make clear the many differences between the manufacture and trade of Sawasa and porcelain, this argument demonstrates that even the most well-known and desired Asian commodity was subject to private dealings. As a slowly manufactured product, lacquerware perhaps offers a more comparable model to the specialized techniques involved in Sawasa production. Despite these similarities, porcelain and lacquerware possessed something Sawasa ware seemed to lack: a stable name. Resigned to transactions invisible to the official record, various phrases denoting Sawasa ware surfaced in bequests and inventories of elite households. Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory signals the importance of fixed nomenclature when studying material culture that traversed space, time, and culture. The

slippage in its denotation impeded the process of its wider recognition and appreciation. As a result, Sawasa ware is a case study of obscurity, an export product few people today could recognize and name.

Sawasa, Shakudō: Export Wares and Domestic Taste

The *Tonkinservies* set held by the Rijksmuseum is a classic example of Sawasa ware (fig. 2). The set includes an urn, two spittoons, two cups, three saucers, and

a sugar bowl. I conclude the set to be both mismatched and incomplete. The two cups are different in their design, there are a mismatched number of saucers and cups, and some standard accessories such as the milk pitcher, tray, and additional cups for serving guests, are missing. All well-preserved with minor surface wear, each of the nine individual pieces exhibit the defining characteristics of Sawasa: fire-gilded and black-lacquered *shakudō* alloy, pan-Asian motifs in relief, and vessel shapes based on European models. All the



Figure 3. Urn from *Tonkinservies*, Sawasa ware, *shakudō* alloy (fire-gilded and black-lacquered), ca. 1700-1800, 37.1 cm x 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COL-LECT.458760>

vessels in the set are decorated with cartouches filled with embossed and repoussé nature motifs.¹⁰ The three saucers echo these designs in contrasting bands of black and gold. The central object of the Rijksmuseum's set, the urn, measures 37 centimeters tall and consists of a minimum of seven separate parts soldered together, as each of the three legs and taps were cast individually (fig. 3). The tapered, pear-like body of the urn was designed to hold larger volumes and to allow easy dispensation of hot liquids.

Tonkinservies presents a binary division between its "Eastern" motifs and its definitively "Western" decorative program, shape, and intended use. Conformity to European taste is immediately clear in the shape of the urn itself, as this novel shape first appeared in France in the seventeenth century in relation to the growing popularity of coffee, tea, and chocolate. Additionally, Japanese and Chinese teacups lacked handles, whereas the *Tonkinservies* teacups possess elaborate gilded handles. The urn stands on three slender, curved

golden legs that each emerge from the mouth of a *karashishi*, or Chinese lion. It has three dispensing spouts, one topped with a fish or dolphin, and two rounded handles attached to opposing sides. Its belly and lid are black-lacquered *shakudō* while its golden legs, taps, neck, handles, and the lid's knob are fire-gilded *shakudō*. Flowers, a *karashishi*, branches, leaves, and the occasional pagoda fill the urn's five cartouches. The reliefs inside the cartouches are black-lacquered *shakudō* set against a golden background and appear to have been achieved by a combination of chased and *repoussé* techniques. In between the belly cartouches, the artist has incised floral scrolls and a geometric band. Many of these motifs are typical of Asian manufactured goods intended for a European market in the early modern period.¹¹ While each ornament is known to hold specific meanings in Chinese and Japanese cultural vocabularies, it is unlikely that these carried the same symbolic weight for European buyers. Furthermore, the motifs appear as abstracted stock designs. There is no scene or narrative to make sense of the assortment. A pagoda perches on a tree branch, a *karashishi* prowls in a corner, and repetitive flora fills every space to the degree of horror vacui. The aggregate effect of these motifs is that of a pattern, an aesthetic miscellany of elements by which the exoticized East could be invoked in European consciousness.¹² The shape, decoration, and treatment of *shakudō* objects designed for Japan's domestic market contrast with that of Sawasa objects, further suggesting that Sawasa was a product made exclusively for the European export market.

Two sword mountings in the Rijksmuseum, a sword hand guard (*tsuba*) and a sword handle (*kozuka*), represent the traditional Japanese application of *shakudō*. *Shakudō*—the copper alloy containing gold, silver, and arsenic from which Sawasa ware is made—literally means “black gold” in Japanese.¹³ The highly specialized metalworking process involved in making *shakudō* dates to the Edo period (1603-1867). *Shakudō* was first used in Japanese sword-making, a culturally significant and sacred art form. The metalworking process was a trade secret kept secure within a finite number of family workshops until around 1700.¹⁴ The first explanation of *shakudō* production appears in a Japanese technical metalworking text transcribed in 1781.¹⁵ Once the ores were smelt and mixed, metalworkers converted the finished *shakudō* alloy into workable sheets or plates. Hallebeek's analysis revealed that most Sawasa objects are constructed of many separate parts soldered together and often made using different techniques.¹⁶ The golden sections of the sword mountings and Sawasa objects are both fire-gilded, but the shiny black surfaces were achieved through different methods. Traditional Japanese domestic wares have black surfaces resulting from a scrupulous patination process. After cleaning and polishing the cast object, the long, intricate surface treatment process began. If undesired effects appeared at any stage, the smiths restarted the surface treatment and repeated until the desired look was achieved. The final appearance of *shakudō* surfaces varied depending on the content of gold, as well as the unique properties realized by the patination process.¹⁷ Despite many similarities in the metalworking process, the differences are equally

Figure 4. Tsuba with cherry tree and pheasants, Ishiguro Matsune, *shakudō* and *shibuichi* (patinated and fire-gilded) alloys, ca. 1800-1850, 8.2 cm × 7.5cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.1054>



Figure 5. Kozuka, Iwamoto Konkan, *shakudō* and *shibuichi* (patinated and fire-gilded) alloys, ca. 1800-1850, 10 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.1005>



important to the discussion of cross-cultural objects and the audiences for which they were intended.

Next to the *Tonkinservies*, the sword mountings illustrate striking differences in the applications of *shakudō* for Sawasa ware versus objects made for Japan's domestic market. Aesthetic applications of *shakudō* in Japanese sword mountings are nuanced and delicate in comparison to Sawasa decoration. The artist of the *tsuba* (fig. 4) took great care in detailing the blossoming cherry tree and two pheasants; every stamen on individual flowers and every feather on the two birds' bodies is articulated. Only a small amount of patinated *shakudō* is present on the pheasants' black bodies. The *kozuka* (fig. 5) is asymmetrically decorated with no fewer than five species of plants, including a long-stemmed hydrangea and daffodils. While the flora on the Sawasa cof-

fee urn is rather generic and approximated, the flora and fauna on the sword mountings are precise and highly legible. The Japanese smith emphasized the blackened *shakudō* and placed less importance on the gilded alloy. In contrast, the Rijksmuseum's coffee service features ample gilt finishes, as do most Sawasa vessels, perhaps indicating a European preference for the gilded effect. Unlike the patinated surface treatment of traditional *shakudō* objects, Sawasa ware features black surfaces realized by a coat of black lacquer applied to the metal surface. De Bruijn and Kist confirm this distinction is ubiquitous in objects they classify as Sawasa.¹⁸ The authors speculate whether the lacquered Sawasa implies the reduced quality of wares intended for export. As I later discuss, lacquering is itself a laborious technique requiring care and precision. Regardless of the rationale, the existence of this dissimilarity promotes a more defined profile of Sawasa against a wide variety of Asian export wares. Considering the differences between domestic and export wares made of *shakudō*, we can productively think of Sawasa as an export brand rather than merely a material qualifier. In other words, when I refer to Sawasa, I refer not only to its copper-gold alloy material, but also the constellation of visual and functional properties discussed thus far. This proposal is supported by its limited acquisition by Dutch citizens living abroad in the colonized East Indies.

Pathways of Patronage: Dutch Ex-Pats, Private Trade, and Trial Markets

The *Tonkinservies'* pan-Asian aesthetic, distinct craftsmanship, and European-inspired shapes all point to the likelihood that a Dutch patron commissioned it. Although Sawasa never attained broad European market success, it was known and used by the Dutch elite in the East Indies, mostly procured through private trade from the late seventeenth century until Sawasa manufacture ceased sometime before 1850. A sustained colonial Dutch demand for these objects began around 1690, a demand associated with the fashion and taste of the Batavian aristocracy.¹⁹ The elite class, consisting of government officers and high-ranking merchants, enjoyed privileged access to Asian merchant ships transporting commodities to Batavia and the financial means to commission Sawasa ware.²⁰ The limited number of Sawasa objects that surfaced in European household inventories and royal armories can be traced to VOC personnel, who either sent curios back to Europe as gifts or brought them back home once their contracts ended. In addition to Graswinckel's Sawasa tobacco box with which this essay began, Willem van Outhoorn (1635-1720) sent gifts regularly to his beloved and only granddaughter back in Amsterdam. Such gifts included luxury textiles, custom porcelains and lacquerware, and "suasse" tableware.²¹ It may be presumed that Van Outhoorn

was not alone and that other VOC employees sent gifts back to their home country, too.

The VOC was engaged directly with the trade of Sawasa at first but then its travel seemed to have been limited to the kind private collecting and gifting exhibited by Van Outhoorn. The Sawasa objects that did arrive in Europe were treated as rare curiosities, but their descriptions reveal that collectors had no precise ideas regarding provenance or materiality.²² Importantly, the European written record never referred to these black and gold metalwares as “Sawasa.” Presently, I propose that Sawasa’s limited consumption was exacerbated by the disappearance of its name and its many subversions from official VOC records after 1697, a fact that suggests that Sawasa was, by that time, confined to unofficial, private transactions.

Official Company trade was rarely, if ever, the only mercantile activity carried out within VOC trade networks. Merchants ordered and sold Asian manufactured goods, including Sawasa, porcelain, and lacquerware, through private transactions. Private trade was an important but long-contested accessory to official Company commercial activity. According to De Bruijn and Kist, Sawasa’s continued production despite its absence in VOC trade logs could be reasonably explained by private trade.²³ Independent dealing among Company personnel was a practice nearly as old as the VOC itself.²⁴ One Company decree from 1634 forbade ship commanders or merchants from carrying back merchandise that exceeded one hundred guilders.²⁵ However, the enforcement of this policy and its many future revisions was variable, even nonexistent, and inspections were rarely carried out. Consider the case of Van Outhoorn’s son-in-law, Joan van Hoorn. When Van Hoorn was relieved of his post in Batavia, he brought back thousands of pieces of porcelain and textiles on his own accord. Novel goods like Sawasa often slipped through ports by way of such carriages with little regard. The combined sale value of Van Hoorn’s haul was more than double the annual salary he received as Governor-General and represented one-fifth the total value of the commercial cargo on board the ship he sailed.²⁶ Yet he was permitted entry and paid the standard import tax based on the contents’ total weight. As Van Hoorn would later remark, the chief concern of VOC directors “remained their own affairs,” and that their official positions in the VOC were considered “a profitable sideline.”²⁷

Although the VOC did not permit employees to conduct their own commercial ventures, there is substantial evidence demonstrating that not only did private dealings occur often, but that they were not viewed as negative. Until recently, historians interpreted private trade as unambiguously malfeasant; the VOC prohibited private dealings which, when combined with low wages and high-risk working conditions, led to corruption among employees of all ranks. However, archival analyses executed by Sgourev and Van Lent reveal that VOC Governor-Generals willingly relaxed regulations on private trade. Furthermore, rather than harming the VOC, this arm of mercantile activity was typically beneficial to the Company.²⁸ Especially throughout Japan’s Sakoku period (1603-1868), during which foreign trade

was severely restricted, the movement of Japanese goods depended upon Chinese intermediaries and, to a lesser degree, Dutch merchants stationed in Dejima. Chinese merchants worked out of a large outpost in Dejima and tripled the volume of trade the Dutch conducted out of Japan over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁹ The benefits of private trade, all grounded by the aspiration of profit, also extended to the realms of commercial information and product experimentation.

The structure of Asian trade networks meant that the VOC did not have direct access to either Asian producers of manufactured goods or the European consumers who desired those goods. Therefore, the facilitation of trade and market awareness depended upon local intermediaries who held intimate knowledge of consumer tastes and behaviors. The VOC purchased goods via private merchants at Asian ports, and then sold their entire cargoes via auction in Dutch ports, again engaging with independent dealers. To use Jan de Vries' phrase, this "network of gatekeepers" is now understood as integral to Company trade in Asian territories rather than as nefarious agents undermining profits. Because these individuals were often engaged in lines of trade differing from Company specializations, De Vries proposes that private merchants were more complementary than competitive to the campaigns of the VOC.³⁰

Revolutionary changes in European taste and consumer behavior, in addition to increased competition with the British East India Company (EIC), compelled the VOC to increase trade volume and diversify their offerings in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³¹ However, doing so further exposed the corporation to highly competitive markets and hinged profitability upon efficient shipping operations. Long-distance trade between the eastern regions of Asia and Europe was hazardous, expensive, and time-consuming. The goods that traveled this route had to carry generous profit margins and, ideally, anticipate a high-demand market. One way to hedge the VOC from volatile markets was to establish demand before novel items entered the wider commercial sphere. As the more experimental and dynamic mercantile force, private trade allowed novelties to enter narrow markets on a trial basis. Meike von Brescius has convincingly argued that, within the context of trial markets, the Company seemed to pick up certain products only after they were 'tested' in private trade networks and thus promised reliable returns.³²

Applying Von Brescius's theory, I advance the possibility that the Sawasa brand was sampled in private trade circles, starting with commissions of wealthy patrons, but did not attain the necessary footing to gain a wider consumer base. VOC officers regularly reminded their supercargoes to seek out new and original patterns, color combinations, and materials for merchandise, and Sawasa was unlike anything else the VOC was trading. Not long after the VOC began working in Asian territories, Company agents provided their mercantile intermediaries with sketches and wooden models of shapes desired by European consumers.³³ The *Tonkinservies* vessels are definitively European. The urn shape was a seventeenth century European invention.

Spittoons, regardless of the material, were direct requests from European consumers. Tea, coffee, and dinner services that cost some ten times the price of the same objects purchased à la carte further increased the repertoire of shapes manufactured by artisans in Japan, China, and other Asian regions.³⁴ While these sets were produced in large numbers in porcelain, the Rijksmuseum's *Tonkinservies* is evidence that Asian craftsmen adapted European shapes in different materials. However, Sawasa trickled into stately homes of Dutch expats in small numbers while porcelain surged into Europe.

Material Comparisons: Sawasa, Porcelain, and Lacquerware

Contemporaneous to Sawasa production, Chinese porcelain was spilling into Europe in tremendous quantities. Scholars working on the early modern porcelain trade cannot overstate its mutual economic and cultural impact on Europe and the Asian countries from which the product came. Dutch and Chinese merchants collaborated in order to meet the demand for the utensils that accompany the coinciding consumption practices of coffee, tea, and chocolate. The popularity of those tropical comestibles and the porcelain pieces used to consume them rose in tandem. Porcelain, the ultimate representation of the “East” in European consciousness, was desired for its delicacy, heat resistance, and unique aesthetics and craftsmanship. Such qualities are visible in an eighteenth-century coffee pot (fig. 6) in the Rijksmuseum, exemplifying the iconic blue-and-white porcelain produced in Jingdezhen, China. Pan-Asian decorative schemes enhanced the exoticism of porcelain pieces, a trait shared with Sawasa.

While porcelain can be accounted for in Company trade logs, scholars agree that the scope of private trade in porcelain during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has been underestimated.³⁵ It is possible that porcelain was initially incidental to the trade of tea, spices, and silk, the VOC's staple commodities, as porcelain could protect teas and fragile silks from water damage during transit. Porcelain had the added virtue of heaviness, which made it useful as ballast in the lower cargo hold to improve the ship's stability. Privately, however, supercargoes imported one third as much porcelain on their own accounts as they did in official Company trade.³⁶

Indeed, the millions of porcelain objects exported to Europe during this period was only achievable due to a highly efficient production model. Anticipating modern assembly lines, China's major porcelain manufacturing center, Jingdezhen, utilized over one thousand kilns and seventy thousand workers by 1700. The increasing capacity of multi-chambered kilns soon allowed porcelain workers to fire up to fifty thousand pieces at one time.³⁷ The massive porcelain enterprise in Jingdezhen was flexible and adaptive enough to meet

Figure 6. Octagonal coffee pot with hunting and mythological scenes, porcelain, China, ca. 1700, 29.6 cm x 8.1 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.3182>



the increasing demand and diversifying preferences of European consumers. Porcelain's functionality as shipping ballast and its mass production model contributed to its relatively low cost and appreciable profit margins, which translated to middle-class affordability. Unlike porcelain, Sawasa was not a viable candidate for mass manufacture due to the complexity of the metal-working processes and the high value of its raw materials. As made-to-order products excluded from mass production, Sawasa objects were not attractive commodities for wholesale trade.

Yet, mass manufacture was not the only route to commercial success in Europe, as witnessed with the labor-intensive Japanese lacquerware. Lacquerware was a novel Asian manufactured commodity that, despite its allure in Europe, remained relatively rare and inaccessible to the middling classes. Asian lacquerwares, like Sawasa objects, were known for their quality craftsmanship and visual beauty. Pieces arrived in Europe in limited numbers primarily via private transactions and as gifts. Asian lacquering of surfaces is an ancient process, and fine lacquered objects were appreciated throughout

Figure 7. Box with Joan van Hoon's coat of arms, wood and lacquer, Japan, ca. 1700-1710, 13 cm x 7.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COL-LECT.337483>



Figure 8. Decorative dish with Joan Huydecoper van Maarseveen's coat of arms, wood and lacquer, Japan, ca. 1650-1660, 34.4cm x 3 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COL-LECT.262979>



Asia. What was recognized as “lacquerware” in the early modern period can be identified by its Japanese or Chinese provenance, glossy surface, wooden substrate, pan-Asian decorative schemes, and, more often than not, a limited, high-contrast color palette. The contrasting color combination of gold against a black-lacquered background is visually analogous to that of Sawasa (fig. 8 and 9). The chief difference lies in their base materials: lacquerware has a wooden substrate while Sawasa consists of precious and semi-precious metals. However, the substrate itself does not alter the lacquering process. Like *shakudō* production, lacquering is a highly specific, precise, and manual endeavor, thus disqualifying lacquerware from mass manufacture. Once the

toxic sap is harvested from a specific species of tree, itself a painstaking process, each of the several layers of lacquer took many days to dry before artists could begin their intricate designs.³⁸ Sawasa objects were coated in at least two coats of lacquer as a finishing. Although Sawasa was a class of export products, the argument that their lacquered finish is a marker of lesser quality does not fit as neatly as De Bruijn and Kist suggest.

Despite its time-consuming production, Europe imported Japanese lacquerwares in respectable numbers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although almost exclusively through private transactions. Many of these objects survive in museum collections today. Although lacquerware was officially traded by the VOC in the seventeenth century, it was struck from the list of approved Japanese goods when manufacturers raised their prices around 1700.³⁹ From this point forward, lacquerware was only privately traded. Lacquered objects, like Sawasa ware, also appeared in gift registers as tribute to powerful Asian sovereigns and in household inventories of Dutch statesmen.⁴⁰ Two such lacquered objects are branded with Dutch coats of arms belonging to Company officials: a lacquered box (fig. 7) owned

by Governor-General Joan van Hoorn (1653-1711) and a decorative dish (fig. 8) belonging to VOC Director and six-time mayor of Amsterdam Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen (1599-1661). A small number of Japanese workshops specialized in fulfilling orders like these and devising new designs for foreign clientele. Special orders from Europe and the Dutch elite in the East Indies requested certain colors of lacquer, design motifs, and coats of arms. On the VOC's annual trip to the capital of Japan, lacquer artisans presented Dutch agents with sample pieces from which the merchants could select for serial production. Long lapses of time often passed between orders, production, and the final sale of the lacquered object.⁴¹ Dutch merchants and the Japanese shogunate established this commercial framework for lacquerware as early as the 1650s. I posit this same framework was a workable, but unrealized, solution for the Sawasa trade.

Lacquerware and Sawasa were aesthetically kindred Asian luxury goods that fulfilled the tastes and expectations of European consumers. However, lacquerware entered Europe at rates exponentially greater than Sawasa. The resounding difference is the two commodities' material composition. Due to the unequal values of wood and precious metals, I deduce that at least one factor contributing to Sawasa's stunted consumption, perhaps the most obvious, was its prohibitive cost.

Questions of Difficulties: Price, Fashion, and Luxury

No discussion of global consumption and trade would be complete without engaging price points and the relative attainability for the general consumer, especially as luxury commodities possessed the ability to affect fashion and taste. Set against Chinese porcelain and Japanese lacquerware, Sawasa's comparative rarity and lack of market success point to the plausibility of a cost that was simply inaccessible to the vast majority of consumers. Unlike the former material commodities, whose respective statuses as luxury goods remain debatable, one can safely assume the luxury designation of Sawasa.⁴² Arjun Appadurai explains that the "luxury register" of commodities, that boundary that separates the mundane from the sumptuous, is shifting and subjective.⁴³ However, the solid semi-precious and precious metals from which Sawasa ware was made carry a historically stable luxury register. Indeed, the ancient use of copper, silver, and gold as coinage—literal, physical capital—validates the enduring tandem of market value and (semi)precious metals.

Sawasa, porcelain, and lacquerware were all embraced by the elite first, not for their exchange value alone, but as objects that carried associations of a civilized lifestyle and the ritualistic ingestion of trending comestibles. Robert Dunn argues that the act of consumption links market value with "the

satisfaction of material need and want to the production of meaning, identity, and a sense of place and social membership.”⁴⁴ The elite class wanted to dine and sip their tea, coffee, and chocolate in luxury, stay ahead of the fashion curve, and be seen doing so. These early-adopting elite consumers are what Grant McCracken calls “cultural influencers.”⁴⁵ Holding privileged power to affect taste, these influencers transferred meaning from the constituted, cultural world to the material object, and through acts of ritual, exchange, and possession, meaning transferred from the object to the consumer. What meaning, then, did Sawasa gain or lack that caused it to remain a rarity? The answer might have to do with its lofty price tag, which outweighed its desired qualities of craftsmanship, durability, Asian origin, European shapes, and in-fashion decoration.

Willem van Outhoorn again provides insight into the issue of European taste. When his granddaughter, Pieterella, failed to comment on two treasured Japanese folding screens he sent her, the rather cross letter that followed expressed two concerns. First, there was the risk of loss or damage on the long sea voyage, and sometimes precious cargo was subject to confiscation or high clearance costs upon arrival in the Dutch Republic, so his granddaughter’s silence on the matter induced some anxiety. Intriguingly, his second concern related to current trends in the Dutch Republic:

[Van Outhoorn] wanted to know whether these screens were still valued by friends in the fatherland and if they were considered beautiful and special. Tastes and fashions change, and this was the reason that he had refrained from sending her a pair of Japanese lacquer chests. He had been told they were less appreciated nowadays.⁴⁶

Van Outhoorn’s attentiveness to changing tastes speaks to more than his earnest commitment to his granddaughter keeping up with latest fashion. It demonstrates that consumers, both those in the colonies and in the Dutch Republic, were sensitive to the commodities currently trending in a rapidly globalizing market economy. Objects of fashion, like Pieterella’s new Japanese screens, were initially imbued with signs that indicated elite status. Many people that Pieterella came in contact with probably could not afford such an item, nor did they have the necessary connections to acquire it. Once desire was initiated and established by elite tastemakers, fashionable commodities in seventeenth-century Europe often accrued a broader consumer audience.

Foreign imports first entering Europe were expensive and difficult to procure, but the processes of import-substitution soon developed for Asian commodities and contributed to overall affordability. Using estate inventories from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly in the Dutch Republic and England, scholars suggest dominant trends in consumer behavior: the desire for greater comfort and the desire for less durable, ‘made-to-last’ products.⁴⁷ Maxine Berg clarifies this paradigm as a shift away from

household self-sufficiency and toward a dependency on market-supplied goods, especially at the level of modest income.⁴⁸ Berg argues that porcelain and lacquerware be deemed “semi-luxuries;” those objects that possessed the merits of usefulness, civility, and fineness, but were affordable enough to be obtainable to non-elite classes, even if these commodities required saving up for.⁴⁹ Affordability was soon achieved on a much wider scale as the increasing demand for porcelain and lacquer inspired imitative industries in Europe.⁵⁰ Indeed, almost instantly upon the first arrival of Chinese porcelain in Europe, producers began the quest to devise and supply an affordable domestic alternative.⁵¹ Based on the scant number of known Sawasa objects and its highly specialized production process, it is clear no such industry developed around Sawasa in Europe.

Paramount to price, McCracken reminds that consumer goods carry significance that exceeds their utility and commercial value, a significance that rests primarily in the commodity’s ability to convey cultural meaning.⁵² Although cost was undoubtedly a hurdle that prevented Sawasa’s wider market success, price alone could not prevent the European desire and fanaticism for certain Asian manufactured goods. Porcelain and lacquerware testify to this. What are we to make of Sawasa ware, then? It is clear that while Sawasa ware had many attributes desired by European consumers, its fate was sealed by its lack of a ‘brand name.’

What’s in a name? “Sawasa” and Its Many Subversions

Considering these particular factors involved in early modern global trade and consumption, it seems Sawasa demonstrates the importance of a simple feature it lacked: a fixed name. The shifting nomenclature of Sawasa warrants a deliberation on the effect and power of an object’s name, especially within the domain of early modern global trade. The name “Sawasa” itself was not a stable term until this export product gained attention from and was thus named by the Rijksmuseum in the late twentieth century. The Japanese copper-gold alloy *shakudō* from which Sawasa ware was forged contributed to the etymological confusion. The word “Sawasa” exhibits dual origins in Dutch and Japanese, and the various spellings that appear in the archive (*souatsche*, *sowaas*, *savas*, *savats*, *sawas*, *souassa*, *suassa*, *siowassa*, *souasse*) derive from the Japanese verb *sawasu*, meaning “to apply a thin coat of black lacquer to prevent the surface from becoming shiny.”⁵³ Hearing the foreign terms *shakudō* and *sawasu* at various Asian trade outposts, Dutch agents likely attempted to phonetically reproduce what they heard, and subsequently misspelled and combined them in a century of “babel-like confusion,” to use De Bruijn and Kist’s phrase.⁵⁴

Confined to private trade, the many versions of the term “Sawasa” are only found in personal documents and in household inventories of wealthy estates in Batavia and abroad. To name just three of these inventories, those of Governors-General Gustaaf Willem Baron van Imhoff (1705-1750), Joan van Hoorn, and Willem van Outhoorn, all list discrete quantities of Sawasa. Although their estate documents attempt to sort and name these objects accurately, the spellings of “Sawasa” are inconsistent. In fact, discrepancies often occur within a single document. Van Imhoff’s estate mentions “savas” as a standalone noun, and “savasse” or “souasse” swords, sword mounts, jewelry, and buttons.⁵⁵ Van Hoorn’s inventory uses the same terms with the added denotation of “sawas.” All of these related terms are listed under the category “Jewellery and small items.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, Van Hoorn’s Sawasa objects are separately categorized by Tonkin and Japanese provenances with the Japanese pieces carrying a higher monetary value. Also sorted according to Tonkinese or Japanese origin, Van Outhoorn’s estate lists the following under “Silverwork”: “a Japanese trouser-lace...with souas mounting,” “a chints coat with tonkinese buttons,” and “four tonkinese boxes.”⁵⁷

“Sawasa” and its many variations are absent in European inventories, but De Bruijn and Kist convincingly argue that Sawasa ware was likely demarcated by a wider range of terms exclusively filed under “Curiosities.” As a rule, these objects are signified by their provenance or appearance. Sawasa ware in the Dutch Republic was typically referred to as “Tonkinese chisel work” or “Cochin China work.”⁵⁸ The estate auction catalog of VOC Director of Bengal, Jan Albert Sichterman (1692-1764), lists twenty-nine objects “artfully worked black with gold and with raised chiseled relief” under the heading “Beautifully worked Japanese composition.”⁵⁹ These wares appear under a range of categories in additional estate auction catalogs of former VOC employees: “Japanese metalwork,” “Gold and fancy goods,” “Curiosities,” “Silverwork,” and “Chinese copper and other curiosities.”⁶⁰ Due to collectors’ ignorance of these objects and wide-ranging descriptions, it is possible that Sawasa ware was also categorized as lacquered, enameled, or gilt objects in inventories. In fact, the Rijksmuseum’s catalog entry for its *Tonkinservies* states that it is “partly black enameled.”⁶¹ For these reasons, I align with De Bruijn and Kist’s supposition that the slippery and fragmented denotation of this commodity is a key explanation as to why these objects and knowledge about them did not spread far outside of Batavian circles.⁶² The fact of the denotive inconsistencies supports my argument that a reliable signifier was at least one of the prerequisites to commercial success during this period. In fact, the first appearance in the written record of a word similar to “Sawasa” was in Graswinckel’s letter with which this paper began. The lack of standard naming is also a result of the lack of demand. Sawasa’s unstable nomenclature was therefore both cause and effect of its limited consumer base. On the contrary, the widespread and coveted Chinese porcelain came to be literally conflated with its site of production: porcelain became “China.” Likewise, later European copies

of Japanese lacquerware became “Japanware,” and the associated process used by artisans as “japanning.” No matter Sawasa’s luxury status or price tag, its lack of a stable signifier stifled its market potential.

Although the precise conditions in Europe with which Sawasa was met cannot be known with certainty, the great variance in its denomination indicates a semiotic slippage that further stunted its opportunity to gain a consumer base. The Dutch elite expats and VOC employees brought or sent Sawasa ware back to Europe in slow, irregular rivulets. It can be surmised that a fixed name would have been necessary to discuss this novel materiality, incorporate it consumer lifestyles, and foster domestic demand. A brief engagement with Saussurean semiotics tells us that the linguistic sign does not effectively link a thing and a name. Rather, the sign links an abstract concept, the signification, with a sound pattern, the signifier.⁶³ A linguistic sign then achieves its goal if, when uttered aloud, its signification is roused in the listener upon hearing the signifier. Although Saussure claims that a sign itself is arbitrary, it is nevertheless useless in its ability to signify if its associated sound pattern is persistently in flux. Because Sawasa ware was a foreign export commodity crafted using foreign processes, its significance required an articulation and translation in Europe that, on the one hand, did not occur and, on the other, could not occur in its denotative condition. That is, a name in constant linguistic variation pushed Sawasa ware to the margins.

Starting with the Japanese verb *sawasu*, Dutch listeners ignorant of the eastern tonal language attempted to designate a term which failed to attain the consistency required to turn general unconsciousness into general awareness. Neither its various disordered spellings nor its inexact compound-word descriptions succeeded as linguistic signs throughout the Sawasa’s tangled history. Without the repetition and circulation of a sound pattern that carried a stable meaning, Sawasa’s intricate production process, unique material properties, and cultural significance could not be known, let alone desired. The failure of Sawasa to attract a consumer audience attests to the necessity of a name, a sign which acts as an anchor in a sea of linguistic fragmentation, cultural fluidity, and global commercialism.

Sawasa ware, rare both in its own period of manufacture as well as the present day, eventually fell out of favor in the Dutch colonies and its production dwindled in the mid-eighteenth century. References to “Sawasa,” “Tonkinware,” and the like disappeared from written sources around that time. Without the investigative work of Rudolph Cederstrom, the first person to suggest the link between these striking black and gold objects with a Japanese provenance, our current awareness of Sawasa, rudimentary as it may be, would not be possible.⁶⁴ I have explored a variety of threads which contributed to the fabric of early modern consumption and international trade: the logistics of maritime shipping, private trade networks and trial markets, cost and profitability, domestic imitation industries, associations of status, fashion, and taste, mass manufacturing, and, finally, a fixed name. Beyond the scope of the present paper, but fertile ground for supplementary research,

are deeper deliberations on consumer demand and the semiotic relationship between nomenclature and material culture. Echoing De Bruijn and Kist, the perturbing question of specific Sawasa production centers outside of Japan remains unsolved. Even the designation of *Tonkinservies*, or “Tonkin crockery,” is a mystery. To date, only circumstantial evidence suggests that Sawasa manufacture occurred in Tonkin (North Vietnam), Cochin China (South Vietnam), or Canton. Future research might also envelop Sawasa more deeply in scholarly conversations of early modern European taste.

Due to factors that remain speculative, Sawasa was not a product of official VOC trade. These wares may have been tested in private trade networks, as many Asian commodities were, but failed to achieve demand outside of elite Dutch circles in the East Indies. Whether it was primarily its slow production, failure to appeal to European taste, or high cost, Sawasa ware did not enjoy the same level of consumer awareness and desire as porcelain and lacquerware. Limited to private transactions and lacking a name to which a wider consumer market could relate and attach meaning, Sawasa was destined to obscurity. This unique product negates the notion that all Asian manufactured goods had an inevitable market in early modern Europe. Sawasa ware therefore complicates the process of globalization. For globalization has never been monolithic, but the compounded effect of uneven and complex cultural interactions, materialities, practices of taste-making, and consumer behavior. As demonstrated through this investigation of Sawasa ware, analyzing less desired trade goods holds the potential to enrich our understanding of why and to what degree foreign commodities were wanted by early modern consumers. Tracing the pathways of unpopular trade goods has the power to illuminate the difficulties they experienced along the way. To embrace the difficulties of historical analysis is to embrace failure, and Sawasa ware is a case study of failure. Sawasa is one example of an unsuccessful commodity that enjoyed brief moments of attention amid the tumult of novel commodities traversing the globe. There must be more.

Notes

- 1 Municipal archives Delft, Family records of van der Burch Inv. 141, last will of Dirk Graswinckel (1631-1697). 12 December 1695.
- 2 Guangzhou, China, northern Vietnam, and Jakarta, Indonesia, respectively.
- 3 Rodrigue, Jean-Paul. “Dutch East India Company, Trade Network, 18th Century.” Source: www.transportgeography.org/contents/chapter1/emergence-of-mechanized-transportation-systems/dutch-east-india-company-trade-network/
- 4 Here I use the term “globalizing” with caution in observance of Jan de Vries’ delineation of “soft” globalization (which he theorizes characterized the early modern period) from “hard” globalization. See Jan de Vries, “The limits of globalization in the early modern world,” *The Economic History Review* 63, no. 3 (2010): 713-715.
- 5 I choose to reference the Dutch East India Company by its more common abbreviation, VOC, an acronym of Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie.
- 6 For an extended critique of this view as it relates to Chinese porcelain, see Stacey Pierson, “The Movement of Chinese Ceramics: Appropriation in Global History,” *Journal of World History* 23, no. 1 (2012): 9–39.
- 7 Max de Bruijn and Bas Kist, *Sawasa: Japanese export art in black and gold, 1650-1800*. (Amsterdam; Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1998). The exhibition was curated by Bas Kist while he and Max de Bruijn co-edited the accompanying catalog.
- 8 In the archive, Sawasa is referred to by several different spellings based on the Japanese verb, *sawasu*, as well as by many compound-word descriptions: souatsche, sowaas, savas, sawas, souassa, suassa, Tonkinese chisel work, Japanese metalwork, and so on.
- 9 The changing view of private trade and how it operated in practice has been extensively discussed in the last two decades. For example, see Meike von Brescius, *Private Enterprise and the China Trade: Merchants and Markets in Europe, 1700–1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), especially chapter three; Jan van Campen and Titus Eliëns (eds), *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2014); Maxine Berg, et. al (eds), *Goods from the East 1600-1800: Trading Eurasia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan,

2015); Tamara H. Bentley (ed), *Picturing Commerce in and from the East Asian Maritime Circuits, 1550-1800* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

- 10 Repoussé is the process of creating a low-relief design by hammering the reverse side of a metal object. A related technique, embossing, accomplishes a similar effect by hammering the front side and sinking the metal. Chasing and repoussé are often used in conjunction on the same piece.
- 11 For example, see porcelain jug (fig. 6) and lacquered box (fig. 7) in this essay. Cherry blossoms and trees, pagodas, dragons, cranes, and women wearing kimonos are especially common in the decorative schemes of Chinese export wares of all kinds, particularly porcelain and lacquerware. Idyllic landscapes, mountainscapes, and riverscapes became increasingly formulaic as centuries of trade unfolded. In 1635 and again in 1637, the VOC insisted on ornament that was explicitly Chinese in character, observing that makers should omit Dutch-style decoration entirely, because it is “not considered strange or rare.” Christiaan J.A. Jörg, “Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century,” *The Porcelains of Jingdezhen: Colloquies on Art & Archaeology in Asia No. 16*, ed. Rosemary E. Scott, 183-205 (London: Percival David Foundation, 1993), 186, 188n13.
- 12 The homogenization of the “East” in the early modern European imagination has become somewhat of a truism in scholarship from the last three decades. For some interesting discussions in more recent publications, see Anne Gerritson and Stephen McDowall, “Material Culture and the Other: European Encounters with Chinese Porcelain, ca. 1650-1800,” *Journal of World History* 23, no. 1 (2012): 87-113; Ellen C. Huang, “From the Imperial Court to the International Art Market: Jingdezhen Porcelain Production as Global Visual Culture,” *Journal of World History* 23, no. 1 (2012): 115-45; and Berg, et al, eds. *Goods from the East, 1600–1800: Trading Eurasia*, 2015.
- 13 Hachiro Oguchi, “Japanese *Shakudō*, Its History, Properties and Production from Gold-Containing Alloys,” *GoldBull* 16, no. 4 (1983): 125.
- 14 Assuming De Bruijn and Kist are correct in their hypothesis that concurrent centers of Sawasa manufacture existed, this means such centers would have arisen after 1700.
- 15 This text is titled *Soken Kishoi* (1781); Oguchi, “Japanese *Shakudō*,” 125. A deliberation on the private, privileged knowledge of *shakudō* production is worthy of consideration, but beyond the scope of the present paper.
- 16 Hallebeek identified pieces created using lost wax techniques as well as appliqué. The outward effect is nearly indiscernible. Peter Hallebeek, “Scientific analysis of metal alloys and surface layers of *Sawasa* objects,” *Sawasa*:

Japanese export art in black and gold, 1650-1800, ed. Max De Bruijn and Bas Kist (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1998): 34.

- 17 Oguchi, “Japanese *Shakudō*,” 126, 128-29.
- 18 For a lengthier discussion, see De Bruijn and Kist, *Sawasa*, 21. Oddly, the Rijksmuseum’s website currently attributes the surface treatment of *Tonkinservies* incorrectly as enameling, much as Graswinckel did with his new tobacco box.
- 19 De Bruijn and Kist, *Sawasa*, 9, 30.
- 20 Bea Brommer, *To my dear Pieter nelletje: Grandfather and granddaughter in VOC time, 1710-1720*, Leiden: Brill, 2015: 81; When merchant ships, especially Chinese junks, arrived in Batavia with new merchandise, nearly half the colony’s population turned out to admire and purchase, but Company employees, particularly high-ranking officials like van Outhoorn, always had first pick from the lot.
- 21 Brommer, *To my dear Pieter nelletje*, 96-97, fig. 89 & 90.
- 22 Brommer, *To my dear Pieter nelletje*, 28.
- 23 De Bruijn and Kist also suggest that Japanese trade caps and exclusions on certain commodities may have also played a part, although no official documentation mentions this in relation to *Sawasa*; *Sawasa*, 26.
- 24 Leonard Blussé, “The Batavia connection: the Chinese junks and their merchants.” In *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. by Jan van Campen and Eliëns, Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2014: 104.
- 25 T. Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company as recorded in the dagh-registers of Batavia Castle, those of Hirado and Deshima, and other contemporary papers 1602-1682* (Leiden: Brill, 1971): 16.
- 26 Brommer, *To my dear Pieter nelletje*, 71.
- 27 Brommer, *To my dear Pieter nelletje*, 13.
- 28 Sgourev and Van Lent offer a detailed analysis of VOC records demonstrating that the VOC maintained a remarkably even-keeled approach to private trade in the eighteenth century, and these provisions were financially motivated based on the profits in Asian trade; see Stoyan V. Sgourev and Wim van Lent, “Balancing Permission and Prohibition: Private Trade and Adaptation at the VOC,” *Social Forces* 93, no. 3 (2014): 944-948.

- 29 De Bruijn and Kist, Sawasa, 26.
- 30 Jan De Vries, “Understanding Eurasian Trade in the Era of the Trading Companies,” *Goods from the East, 1600-1800: Trading Eurasia*, ed. Maxine Berg, et. al (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 15-16.
- 31 Sgourev and Van Lent, “Balancing Permission and Prohibition,” 936-937.
- 32 Meike von Brescius, “Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners, and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe,” *Goods from the East, 1600-1800: Trading Asia*, ed. Maxine Berg, et. al (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 173-74; Von Brescius, *Private Enterprise*, 92-94. Although Von Brescius focuses on trade between Britain and Canton, she specifically cites the VOC in her discussions of private trade ‘testing.’
- 33 Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company*, 37; Robert Finlay, “The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History.” *Journal of World History* 9, no. 2 (1998): 171. Starting in the 1630s, new shapes were requested nearly every trading season, which testifies to the Chinese manufacturers’ adaptability and sensitivity to consumer needs.
- 34 Pierson, “Chinese porcelain,” 282; Maxine Berg, “Asian Luxuries and the Making of the European Consumer Revolution,” *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 239.
- 35 For example, see Jan van Campen and Titus Eliëns (eds), *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2014); Maxine Berg, et. al (eds), *Goods from the East 1600-1800: Trading Eurasia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Tamara H. Bentley (ed), *Picturing Commerce in and from the East Asian Maritime Circuits, 1550-1800* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).
- 36 Berg, “Asian Luxuries,” 237. European trade bans in China meant that no direct (legal) trade occurred between the Dutch Republic and China during the seventeenth century. Thus, it is nearly inconceivable how so much Chinese porcelain traveled back to Amsterdam under these circumstances. These quantities, despite the lack of sanctioned trade, speak to the enormous commercial volume of illicit trade during this period. See Martine Gosselink, “The Dutch East India Company in Asia,” *Asia in Amsterdam: The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age*, ed. Karina H. Corrigan, et. al (London: Yale University Press, 2015): 24.
- 37 Berg, “Asian Luxuries,” 237.

- 38 High quality lacquer sometimes required up to thirty or more coats. Patricia Frick, et. al. "Introduction," *Production, Distribution and Appreciation: New Aspects of East Asian Lacquer Ware*, ed. Patricia Frick and Annette Kieser (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 1-3.
- 39 Brommer, *To my dear Pietermetje*, 193.
- 40 Cynthia Viallé, "'To Capture Their Favor:' On Gift-Giving by the VOC," *Mediating Netherlandish Art and Material Culture in Asia*, ed. Michael North, et. al (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014): 293-294.
- 41 Anton Schweizer, "The Elector's Japan: Reading Export Lacquer in Baroque Germany," *Production, Distribution and Appreciation: New Aspects of East Asian Lacquer Ware*, ed. Patricia Frick, et. al (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 125-26, 134.
- 42 For an extended discussion on the debates surrounding the term "luxury" in the early modern European mind, see Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (eds), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), especially the editors' chapter, "The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates," 7-27 and Jan de Vries, "Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age in Theory and Practice," 41-56.
- 43 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value," *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 40.
- 44 Robert G. Dunn, *Identifying Consumption: Subjects and Objects in Consumer Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008): 2.
- 45 Grant McCracken, "Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods," *Journal of Consumer Research* 13, no. 1 (1986): 78-80.
- 46 Brommer, *To my dear Pietermetje*, 82-83.
- 47 De Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, 126-133.
- 48 Maxine Berg, "In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century." *Past and Present* 182 (2004): 92.
- 49 Maxine Berg, "New commodities, luxuries, and their consumers in eighteenth-century England," *Consumers and luxury: consumer culture in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1999): 69.

- 50 For further reading on European imitation industries of Asian manufactured goods, see Maxine Berg, “From Imitation to Invention: Creating Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *The Economic History Review* 55, no. 1 (2002): 1–30.
- 51 Suzanne Lambooy, “Imitation and inspiration: the artistic rivalry between Delft earthenware and Chinese porcelain,” *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. Van Campen and Eliëns, Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2014: 231.
- 52 McCracken, “Culture and Consumption,” 71.
- 53 Interestingly, although lacquer is associated with a glossy surface, a thin enough layer will produce a matte effect on the surface; De Bruijn and Kist, *Sawasa*, 9.
- 54 De Bruijn and Kist, *Sawasa*, 19.
- 55 Inventory of the estate of Gustaaf Willem Baron van Imhoff, Batavia, November 9, 1750, Inv. Nr. 894, Domeinarchieven, Provincial Archives of Noord-Brabant, Nassause.
- 56 Inventory of the estate of Joan van Hoorn, Batavia, 1711, Inv. 5006, p.735, Municipal Archives, Amsterdam.
- 57 Inventory of Willem van Outhoorn, December 1720, Inv. 781, archives Rosendaal, Rijksarchief Arnhem.
- 58 De Bruijn and Kist, *Sawasa*, 28.
- 59 *Catalogus van een fraay Cabinet konstige en playsante Schilderijen etc. [] J.A. Sichterman [to be sold August 20, 1764]*, No. 605-A, Archive Sichterman. Rijksarchief Groningen. Sichterman’s estate specifically lists utensils for the consumption of coffee, tea, and tobacco.
- 60 *Catalogue [] of [] curiosities [] from the inheritance of the gentleman Mr. Wouter Valckenier*, Inv. Unknown, Municipal Archives Amsterdam; Inventory of Roelof Blok, steekarchief Hoorn, notariëel archief Enkhuizen, not. A. van der Willigen, July 10 1776, Inv. 1390; *Catalogue of [] precious curiosities such as Tonquinese chiselled, porcelain [] of the late [] Pieter Cornelis Hasselaar [announced in the Amsterdam Newspaper]*, November 18, 1797, 5672, Lugt Repertorium.
- 61 Rijksmuseum, “Tonkinservies, anonymous, 1700 - 1800,” hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.31603. Accessed August 5, 2023.

- 62 De Bruijn and Kist, *Sawasa*, 30.
- 63 Ferdinand de Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Perry Meisel, et. al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 [1916]): 66.
- 64 De Bruijn and Kist, *Sawasa*, 9.