

Worldly Threads: *Japonse Rokken* and Self-Fashioning in Dutch-American Portraiture

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Abstract

This article examines the layered history of *Japonse rokken*, European silk production, and self-fashioning in Dutch-American portraiture. First imported from Japan and subsequently copied by European tailors, *Japonse rokken* became popular in the Dutch Republic as the Dutch East India Company developed an exclusive trade relationship with Japan. By the early eighteenth century, European weavers had begun producing silks, referred to as *indiennes*, with dynamic patterns inspired by Asian design motifs. On both sides of the Atlantic, elite Dutchmen fashioned themselves in these silk robes: a ca. 1700-1705 patroon portrait, for example, presents New York merchant Isaac de Peyster (1662-1728) wearing a *Japonse rok* cut from an *indienne*. While the Dutch community in early New York has been considered peripheral to the Dutch Republic, I argue that in adopting a garment styled after Japanese robes, tailored from silk woven in Europe, and painted in a Hudson Valley style, the Dutch-American elite signalled their ability to access, understand, and participate in intellectual and mercantile networks that spanned from Asia to Europe to the Americas.

Keywords: *Japonse rok*, *indienne* silk, patroon portrait, Isaac de Peyster, Dutch America, self-fashioning

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A ca. 1700 painting of merchant Isaac de Peyster (1662-1728) presents the sitter as a worldly gentleman (fig. 1). While eighteenth-century portraits often used vast estates or sumptuously furnished homes to signal status, De Peyster is surrounded by an impenetrably dark background. All markers of wealth are concentrated in his dress: De Peyster wears a cravat trimmed in fine lace and a patterned silk robe. In contrast to the crisp white kerchief, the silk is richly coloured. The artist captures a flash of red lining in the upturned sleeve, the soft luminous sheen of the textile, and the complex design of potted spindly vegetation in overlapping cartouches. The garment is immediately recognizable as costly and luxurious.

More than a show of affluence, De Peyster uses his distinctive costume and portrait to project the public persona of a well-connected and knowledgeable Dutch-American merchant. The garment he wears is a *Japone rok*, a type of loose-fitting robe modelled after Edo-period *kosode* which connected wearers in the Americas and the Dutch Republic to the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, or *voc*), who had gained exclusive access to trade with Japan.¹ While the pattern on De Peyster's robe drew inspiration from imported Asian design, the textile itself was likely a European drawloom-woven brocaded silk, fashionable amongst the elite in the early eighteenth century.² However, unlike European paintings of wealthy burghers in *rokken*, De Peyster is painted in a flat patron style distinct to Dutch-American portraiture.³ With his choice of dress,

1 Rothstein, 'Silks for the American Market', 150. I am indebted to the late Susan Miller for introducing me to *Japone rokken* and generously sharing her expertise with me. I also thank Dr. Edward S. Cooke, Jr., Dr. Philippe Halbert, and Amanda Faulkner, as well as the anonymous *EMLC* reviewers, for their invaluable feedback. Earlier iterations of this article were presented at the symposia 'In Search for the Global Impact of Asian Aesthetics on American Art and Material Culture' at the University of Delaware, October 2018, and 'Making Worlds (1400-1800)' at UCLA, May 2019.

2 The term 'brocade' here indicates a technique in which a 'supplementary weft [is] introduced into the ground weave to create a more complex pattern': Colenbrander, *When Weaving Flourished*, 190. By the second half of the seventeenth century, both patterned and unpatterned robes appeared in inventories and paintings in the Dutch Republic and New Netherland: Thornton, 'The "Bizarre" Silks', 269; Rothstein, 'Silks for the American Market', 150.

3 Ruby, 'Dutch Art and the Hudson Valley Patron Painters', 46.



Fig. 1 Unidentified artist, Isaac De Peyster, ca. 1700-1705, oil on canvas, 74,9 x 64,1 cm, New York, New York Historical Society.

textile, and portrait style, De Peyster fashions himself not only as one of the New York elite, but also as a businessman who was conversant in both local and transregional trends.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Dutch global networks coalesced around maritime enterprises and intercontinental ports.⁴ Recent scholarship has traced how the Dutch leveraged their possession of foreign luxury objects procured through these connections to express their own ability to navigate the world.⁵ Dutch-American merchants staked their professional lives and social statuses on this worldliness – their knowledge of recent fashions in the Dutch Republic as well as their access to the exclusive trade goods of the East and West India Company (*Westindische Compagnie*, or WIC) linked them to transregional networks. Naturally, their material environments and their projections of identity were populated with objects that reflected these connections.⁶ In the Dutch Republic, both household inventories and paintings of interiors indicate that elite families integrated imported materials, such as Chinese blue-and-white porcelain or Turkish carpets, into their homes.⁷ Objects in portraits were carefully selected to make a statement about the subject's place in the world.

4 Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, 68.

5 Swan, *Rarities of These Lands*, 17.

6 Vanhaelen and Wilson, 'The Erotics of Looking', 14.

7 For more about the localization of 'global' objects, see Gerritsen, 'Domesticating Goods from Overseas'.

This article examines the layered history of De Peyster's dress within his portrait and considers how the Dutch-American elite used markers such as costume, physical appearance, and comportment to signal their (imagined) place within their society.⁸ Even after Peter Stuyvesant (ca. 1610-1672) ceded New Amsterdam to the English in 1664, merchants across the Atlantic used their access to Dutch fashions to project an identity which incorporated a strong Dutch heritage. While not necessarily always an accurate reflection of the sitters' material circumstances – it is impossible to verify if De Peyster, for example, actually owned a *rok* since neither the garment nor a probate inventory survives – portraits nevertheless reveal much about the subjects' self-perception and aspirations. In his portrait, De Peyster situates himself as central and knowledgeable in an elite Dutch network, rather than relegated to a colonial periphery. By adopting a garment fashioned after Japanese robes, cut from silk woven in Europe, and painted in a patroom style, Dutch-American merchants and civic leaders signalled their ability to access, understand, and navigate intellectual and mercantile networks across the globe.

Japanese Robes

How did *japone rokken* enter the material and visual lexicon of Dutch dress and portraiture? The lustrous colours of the robes stood in stark contrast to the heavy black silks, wools, and satins – occasionally stitched with gold and silver brocade thread – that characterized portraiture before the 1650s.⁹ Derived from Spanish fashion, black clothing was considered understated yet dignified, providing contrast to the rosy tone of the sitter's skin and enhancing their appearance in life and in portraiture.¹⁰ In the first half of the seventeenth century, wealthy burghers often chose to be depicted in dark garments, with a bright white ruff framing their face. As the VOC began to trade in Asian textiles, however, colourful silks came into fashion in the Dutch Republic. *Japone rokken*, in particular, reflected the favourable trade relationship the VOC had developed with Japan when the robes first entered the Dutch Republic as diplomatic gifts.¹¹

In Japan, the VOC functioned both as a multinational corporation and as a political representative of the Dutch Republic.¹² Inhabiting the role of loyal vassal to the Tokugawa Shogunate, Company officials travelled almost annually to Edo to present themselves as representatives from the 'king of Holland' – a fictionalized representation of Stadtholder Johan Maurits (1604-1652) created in the absence of an actual monarch – and exchange

8 For a discussion on self-fashioning and public identity formation, see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Other scholars who have examined portraiture, material culture, and self-fashioning in colonial North America include Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk*; Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*; Breen, 'The Meaning of "Likeness"'.

9 Stone, *From Cloth to Clothing*, 265.

10 Stone, *From Cloth to Clothing*, 265.

11 Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks (eds.), *Asia in Amsterdam*, 195.

12 Goor, 'A Hybrid State'. After establishing formal trade relations in 1609, the VOC maintained a factory in Japan, first in Hirado (between 1609 and 1641) and later on the island of Deshima, in Nagasaki harbor: Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*, 10, 12.

diplomatic correspondences and gifts with the shogun.¹³ After the Dutch supported the shogun in suppressing a Catholic Japanese rebellion in 1637, Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604-1651) expelled the Portuguese and other Catholic nations from Japan, leaving the VOC with exclusive trade access.¹⁴ For the next two hundred years, the VOC controlled the flow of many of the luxury products of Japan, including silk, porcelain, lacquerware, and other artisanal goods to Europe.¹⁵

The robes that became known as *Japone rokken* were based on *kosode*, a type of loose-fitting silk robe with a complex history in Japan. The predecessor to modern *kimono* dress, the *kosode* had narrower sleeves and a wider body and was initially considered an undergarment in the sixth century. By the sixteenth century, however, the robe had become accepted as outerwear for all genders and classes.¹⁶ In his observations on Japanese culture and customs, the Jesuit missionary and interpreter João Rodrigues (1561/62-1633/34) explained that there were several types of *kosode*, including *awase*, a lined garment used for colder weather in the spring and autumn, in addition to another heavier version 'padded with flock-silk and [...] worn by the nobles in the winter, while those of the common folk are padded with cotton-waste'.¹⁷ By the time the Dutch began trading with Japan, *kosode* for the upper classes had become elaborately decorated, tailored from patterned silks, and padded with cotton or silk wadding.

The shogun often presented luxurious *kosode* as part of diplomatic gift exchanges. François Caron's 1636 *Beschrijvinghe van het Machtigh Coninckryck Japan* mentioned the court visit of a daimyō (a feudal lord) who received 'two hundred beautiful padded silk Japan robes' from the crown prince in addition to 'one hundred pieces of precious padded silk robes' from the shogun.¹⁸ The shogun adapted this custom for the VOC embassy as well. Engelbert Kaempfer, who travelled with the VOC to Kyoto in the 1690s, described a gift that included 123 robes from the shogun and his court.¹⁹ The Dutch embassy treated the costly robes with great care: after transporting them back to Deshima, the garments were aired to prevent moisture damage, wrapped in linen and oiled paper, and packed in rush baskets for the voyage to Europe.²⁰ Once in the Dutch Republic, the robes might be distributed to other Company officials, used as gifts by the Heren XVII, or sold at public auction.²¹

13 Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) established a centralized administration in Japan in 1603 which also came to dictate the terms of European access to Japanese goods, only allowing the Dutch to trade directly and limiting their presence to the factory on Deshima for the majority of the year: Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*, 33.

14 Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*, 121-131.

15 Hond and Fitzki, *A Narrow Bridge*, 17.

16 Stinchecum et al., *Kosode*, 24; *Kosode Dress*, iii.

17 According to Rodrigues, *kosode* only refer to garments made of silk, while those 'woven of linen or cotton' were called *nunoko*. Unlined summer garments were called *katabira*. Michael Cooper's translation of Rodrigues's *Historia da Igreja do Japão*, written originally in 1620-21, is based on a copy made in Macao in the 1740s, now at the library of the Ajuda Palace, Lisbon: *João Rodrigues's Account*, xiii, 180.

18 Caron, *Beschrijvinghe van het Machtigh Coninckryck Japan*, 55: '200. Gevulde schoone Iapanse zijde rocken', '100. Stuck gevulde kostelijcke zijde rocken'. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

19 *Kaempfer's Japan*, 368; Lubberhuizen-Van Gelder, 'Japonsche Rocken', 143.

20 Lubberhuizen-Van Gelder, 'Japonsche Rocken', 144; Breukink-Peeze, 'Japanese Robes', 55.

21 Breukink-Peeze, 'Japanese Robes', 55-56.

While few imported seventeenth-century Japanese *kosode* remain, records show that they were highly valued in the Dutch Republic. Merchants wrote letters to VOC officials specifically requesting the delivery of *Japone rokken*: in 1641, Antonio van Diemen sent a letter from Batavia to Deshima, the VOC headquarters in Japan, requesting ‘forty-eight pieces, in different colours and all padded with silk’.²² A newly wealthy merchant class, often with personal ties to Company officials in Japan or to the growing silk industry in the Dutch Republic, favoured *Japone rokken* for their comfort and beauty. The robes provided warmth in the cold northern winters and their exclusivity made them visual indicators of affluence and influence.

Despite a few late-seventeenth century attempts to curtail the consumption of silk with sumptuary laws, the Dutch elite continued to seek out robes and silks.²³ The popularity of *Japone rokken* can be seen throughout the second half of the seventeenth century in Dutch newspaper advertisements. Notices seeking the return of stolen household items regularly listed *Japone rokken* alongside gold, silver, and gemstones.²⁴ Advertisements for estate sales would also highlight *rokken*: a 1697 sale organized by Dirck Masuur included a ‘gold embroidered *Keyzers Japone rok*’, with the term *Keyser* implying that the gown came from an imperial gift rather than commercial commission.²⁵ In 1673, the probate inventory of Bartelt Jansz. Bruijnvis, a merchant and owner of an East Indies store in Amsterdam, showed that he had forty-four *Japone rokken* made from various Asian textiles, seven of which were meant for children.²⁶ An advertisement for the sale of Bruijnvis’s estate in March 1674 named ‘*Japone Rokken, and many other rarities*’ on offer.²⁷

As the garment’s popularity grew, the term *Japone rok* also expanded to generally indicate a style of loose robe. Authentic *kosode* from Japan remained rare: only fifty silk robes figured amongst the thousands of chests and porcelain objects the VOC imported in 1708.²⁸ Because it was difficult to acquire an imported robe, tailors in Europe began fashioning their own *Japone rokken*, either with locally-produced textiles or bolts of silk and bales of wadding imported by the VOC. A 1664 VOC document lists ‘2332 pieces of Japanese silk wadding for robes’.²⁹ In Amsterdam, garment maker Pieter Spies advertised in 1665 that he specialized in making *Japone rokken*.³⁰ While documents occasionally singled out

22 Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks (eds.), *Asia in Amsterdam*, 195.

23 In 1672, Sir Willem Temple praised a newly-enacted sumptuary law that, he believed, would protect the foundational industry and simplicity of Dutch society: Stone-Ferrier, *Images of Textiles*, 219.

24 *Amsterdamse Courant*, 21 April 1685: ‘Een geele syde Japone rok’; *Amsterdamse Courant*, 12 September 1686: ‘Een nieuwe Japone Rok’; *Amsterdamse Courant*, 9 February 1696: ‘1 Syde Oost Indische Japone rok’.

25 *Amsterdamse Courant*, 13 August 1697: ‘een met goud geborduurde Keyzers Japone Rok’. Other examples include a sale at the house of Barent Groendijck in Amsterdam (*Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant*, 10 January 1697) and another sale at the home of the widow Wylen Huybert Schanternel (*Amsterdamse Courant*, 24 April 1688).

26 Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks (eds.), *Asia in Amsterdam*, 195.

27 *Oprechte Haerlemse Saterdagse Courant*, 3 March 1674.

28 Breukink-Peeze, ‘Japanese Robes’, 55.

29 Cited in Lubberhuizen-van Gelder, ‘Japone Rocken’, 146: ‘2332 pieces de wattes de soye du Japon pour des robes’.

30 Spies went on to be a cotton salesman and later the owner of an East Indies shop: *Asia to Amsterdam*, 138. He also repeated the assertion that he was a ‘Japonserocmaecker’ in his 1670 marriage record to Aagje Daelders: Amsterdam, Stadsarchief, Ondertrouw 495, fol. 366, 11 October 1670.

imported robes that were particularly important or luxurious, such as the *Keysers rok* in Mansuur's sale, the point of origin of a *rok* had become less important. By the end of the seventeenth century, *Japone rok* referred to any robe, usually silk, tailored in Japan or Europe in the style of *kosode*.

Merchants exported robes called *Japone rokken* to the Americas as well. By the 1640s, probate inventories in New Netherland included objects like 'one reddish morning gown, not lined', referring to men's dressing gowns fashioned after *Japone rokken*.³¹ At his death in 1685, the shop inventory of Dutch barber and surgeon Jacob de Lange listed 'one Japons Coate lining with redd say' worth one pound and fifteen shillings as well as 'one blew silke Japons mens gowne' and 'one ditto redd', each worth two pounds and ten shillings. In comparison, 'three callico mens Coates' are worth only sixteen shillings all together.³² Dutchmen on both sides of the Atlantic valued *Japone rokken* highly, integrating the robe into their daily dress habits.

As they were adopted into elite wardrobes, *Japone rokken* began to appear in portraits as an assertion of the sitter's style and taste. Such paintings could be aspirational: the English diarist Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) noted in 1666 that he had a portrait painted by John Hayls (1600-1679) where he dressed in an 'Indian gowne' which he had 'hired to be drawn in'.³³ Patrons sought the skills of artists who could convey the value and fashionability of their garment. Artist Michiel van Musscher (1645-1705) made the *rok* one of his hallmarks, depicting himself in a robe in two of his self-portraits. In his 1679 *Self-portrait in the Studio*, Van Musscher draws back a detailed tapestry to reveal himself in a studio space dressed in a cranberry-coloured *rok* with a matching velvet beret (fig. 2). The table in front of him is crowded with objects: Serlio's book on perspective, a double pegbox lute, a plaster of the *Borghese Warrior*, and an intricately knotted carpet.³⁴ His studio is an intimate space, replete with indications of his craftsmanship. Plaster casts alluded to his process for practising drawing; along the right edge of the painting, the tapestry folds to reveal the loose threads that only form a coherent design on its surface. Furthermore, Van Musscher depicts himself withholding the image he is in the process of rendering, turning the blank back of the canvas to the viewer. The painting, with its references to his work, shows the artist crafting his professional identity.

Van Musscher intentionally dresses his self-portrait to emphasize his ability to paint *Japone rokken*. Although he did in fact own a 'purple satin *Japone rok*', the artist was unlikely to wear such a valuable article of clothing for the messy activity of painting.³⁵ In

31 From the inventory of the personal effects of the late Vrowtje Ides, 15 April 1641. The original inventory was lost in a 1911 fire and only the translation remains extant: *Register of the Provincial Secretary*, 1, 325. Other inventories would often list vague descriptors like '1 morning Gownd' that may likewise describe a men's robe: Albany, NY, New York State Archives (hereafter NYS), Probates, Inventories and Accounts, Box 1, Inventory of the Estate of Capt. George Bradshaw, 20 January 1693.

32 NYS, Probates, Inventories and Accounts, Box 1, Inventory of Jacob de Lange, 26 May 1685. De Lange's profession is mentioned in Blackburn and Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria*, 231. Say was a type of thin twilled fabric, typically made of wool: Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy*, 353.

33 Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 30 March 1666; Lubberhuizen-Van Gelder, 'Japonsche Rocken', 143.

34 Gerhardt and Griep-Quint, *Michiel van Musscher*, 14.

35 'Een paerse sautijne Japone Rock', cited in Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy*, 351.



Fig. 2 Michiel van Musscher, Self-Portrait in the Studio, 1679, oil on wood, 57 x 46,5 cm, Rotterdam, Museum Rotterdam.

addition to situating himself among his fashionable patrons, Van Musscher's self-portrait served as an advertisement for his skills. The artist turns towards the viewer as if to study them for his painting, placing them in the position of subject (and potential

client).³⁶ Considered a *fijnschilder*, Musscher practised a style that prioritized conveying intricate textures and eradicating visible brushstrokes – a style that suited the depiction of smooth and shiny silks.³⁷ Van Musscher carefully renders his unpatterned robe to highlight the glow and softness of the fabric along the ruffled sleeves. The inclusion of the robe, alongside the tangle of objects in the foreground, allowed Van Musscher to demonstrate his ability to paint a range of textures, conveying the tactility of material through visual cues. His self-portrait suggests to his audience that he could successfully represent the nuances of their material wealth, real or exaggerated.

For Dutch leaders, *Japone rokken* in portraiture became a symbol of prosperity, intellectualism, and sophistication.³⁸ For example, Van Musscher's 1686 portrait of Johannes Hudde (1628-1704), a director of the VOC and burgomaster of Amsterdam, shows Hudde surrounded by tokens of his status (fig. 3). A carpet, probably from Kashmir or Lahore, is draped on his desk.³⁹ Scattered across the carpet, papers allude to Hudde's work and involvement in government and trade: the books refer to civil laws, the folded letter addresses the burgomasters of Amsterdam, and the document hanging over the table edge is a deed of conveyance for a ship.⁴⁰ Most notably, Hudde wears a *Japone rok* with a complex floral textile that was likely imported from China, then tailored in Amsterdam.⁴¹ Van Musscher captures the plushness and luminosity of the navy-blue robe in paint, contrasting it with Hudde's white starched collar, shirt tassels, and dark shirt. The robe had shifted from a luxury item to a garment that, while still linked to commercial success and imperial ambition, was used in refined leisure and studious work.

It became a convention to depict men wearing *Japone rokken* in their study or in the midst of intellectual pursuits. Marieke de Winkel has suggested that Japanese-styled robes were in fact a fashionable update on the *tabbard*, a fur-lined robe originating in the fifteenth century which was associated with scholars working in their libraries.⁴² *Japone rokken* became so popular amongst students that Leiden University forbade attending church 'in habitu asiatico'; Johann Beckmann, a German traveller to the University of Groningen, noted in 1762 that a 'Professor Schroeder, like all Dutch theologians, lectured in his dressing-gown, and many of his students also appeared in this dress'.⁴³ Likewise, Hudde and other leaders of Amsterdam adopted imported Japanese *kosode* and subsequent Dutch *Japone rokken* as a symbol of their own erudition. Before the robe became

36 Gerhardt and Griep-Quint, *Michiel van Musscher*, 13.

37 Van Musscher began his career focusing on genre painting, but became one of the most popular portraitists in Amsterdam by the last two decades of the seventeenth century. His instructors, particularly Martinus Saeghmolen, Abraham van den Tempel, and Gabriel Metsu, were all considered *fijnschilders*: Gerhardt and Griep-Quint, *Michiel van Musscher*, 6; Stone-Ferrier, *Images of Textiles*, 164.

38 Joanna Woodall has argued that by the second half of the seventeenth century, elite identities depended less on noble blood – and thus less on emulating noble dress – than on an acknowledgment of 'interior' virtues such as 'intelligence, genius, and constancy' evident in more individualized dress: Woodall, 'Sovereign Bodies', 96.

39 Stone-Ferrier, *Images of Textiles*, 212.

40 The letter is inscribed 'Aan de Ed. Gr. Agtbaere Heeren Burgermeesteren der Stadt Amsterdam': Bikker, 'An Amsterdam Couple Reunited', 48.

41 Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks (eds.), *Asia in Amsterdam*, 195.

42 Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy*, 50.

43 Cited in Lubberhuizen-Van Gelder, 'Japonsche Rocken', 150; Breukink-Peeze, 'Japanese Robes', 59.



Fig. 3 Michiel van Musscher, Johannes Hudde, 1686, oil on canvas, 57 x 49 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

more widespread, Van Musscher already styled Hudde's painting as a scholar's portrait, staging the sitter as if he had been caught at work.⁴⁴ In addition to his civic roles, Hudde was known for his academic interest in Cartesian mathematics, water management, and optics, even contributing to the development of the microscope.⁴⁵ The *Japonse rok* encapsulated Hudde's connections to the VOC, his status as the current burgomaster of Amsterdam, and his place in a scholarly community.

⁴⁴ Bikker, 'An Amsterdam Couple Reunited', 43.

⁴⁵ Bikker, 'An Amsterdam Couple Reunited', 47.

European Silk Designs 'of a Rather Wild Taste'

While the form of De Peyster's robe specifically referenced Japanese *kosode*, the pattern on the textile stemmed from a fashion for decorative motifs based more broadly on designs from Asia. By the eighteenth century, more heavily ornamented silks had come into vogue. While most of the sixty robes 'with the best silk wadding, thicker than ordinary' from a 1645 shipment from Japan were constructed with solid-coloured silks, later eighteenth-century examples mentioned silks 'with a design' over base colours of 'parrot green', 'celadon', and 'pearl white'.⁴⁶ Silk manufacturers in Europe took inspiration from imported textiles. In 1683, the Lyon designer Jacques-Charles Dutilleu claimed that weavers in the Dutch Republic were 'clumsily copying our [French] designs and also designs of fabrics brought from the East Indies of a rather wild taste'.⁴⁷ Rather than directly transcribing entire designs, European pattern-makers combined motifs from different cultures and added their own fantastical inventions to develop a distinct style that appealed to local consumers. Such 'wild' brocaded textiles were characterized by saturated colours, asymmetrical motifs (typically stylized plants and architectural elements), and often gold or silver thread.⁴⁸

Eighteenth-century designers, weavers, and merchants came to refer to this orientalizing style as *persiennes* or, more often, *indiennes*. In 1720, a Dutch notary recorded textile manufacturer Jan van Mekerens's commission of 'two fabrics of white ground with gold and silver flowers and silk of various colors in the *indienne* style' from an Amsterdam weaver, while another manufacturer from the Roeters family declared that they had sold two pieces with a 'citron ground of flowers in the *indienne* style of diverse colors all silk'. In the third Duc de Richelieu's sample book of early eighteenth-century fabrics, a section of 'fabrics from Holland 1736' includes several patterned silks designated as *indiennes*.⁴⁹ The term *indienne* did not designate 'from the Indies', but rather encompassed a broad range of European textile design that took elements from Japanese, Indian, Persian, and other Asian ornament.⁵⁰ De Peyster's robe, with its flowered abstract shapes, exemplified an early design in the *indienne* style.

As evident with *indiennes*, the development of silk weaving in the Dutch Republic depended on the trade of raw silk from the Levant, Persia, India, and Bengal, as well as indirectly from China.⁵¹ This dependence persisted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth

⁴⁶ Cited in Lubberhuizen-Van Gelder, 'Japonsche Rocken', 145: 'tsaemen 60 stux rocken, die alle met de beste zijden watten, dicker als ordinarij' (1645); '1 st. papegaaie groen, met een werkje, m. carmosijn gevoert', '1 st. celadon m. een werkje, met carmosijn gevoert', and '1 st. paarl wit met een werkje, jonquille gevoert' (1765).

⁴⁷ Cited in Rothstein, 'Dutch Silks', 156.

⁴⁸ Thornton, 'The "Bizarre" Silks', 269.

⁴⁹ Richelieu's sample book is cited in Rothstein, 'Dutch Silks', 152: 'Deux pieces Estoffes fond blanc a fleurs or et argent et soye de diverse couleurs a L'indienne'; 'Fond satin citron a fleurs a l'indienne de diverse couleurs tout soye'.

⁵⁰ In 1953, Vilhelm Sloman coined the term 'bizarre silk' to refer to orientalizing textiles woven in the Dutch Republic, France, and Britain. Silks from this period are now often referred to as 'bizarre silks' after Sloman: Thornton, 'The "Bizarre" Silks', 269. I have opted to use the period term *indienne*, identified by Sjoukje Colenbrander and Clare Browne, which refers to silks with orientalizing patterns, typically 9/8 ells wide and woven in Amsterdam. For an in-depth discussion of *indienne* textiles and the history of the term, see Colenbrander and Browne, 'Indiennes'.

⁵¹ Stone, *From Cloth to Clothing*, 257.

centuries since Dutch attempts to develop a self-sufficient silk farming industry in Europe and in New Netherland remained unsuccessful.⁵² A failed 1657 WIC venture in silkworm farming in New Netherland acknowledged that, in addition to a climate that proved unsuitable for mulberry trees to sustain the worms, colonists lacked the necessary expertise to maintain the operation. The exchanges between the WIC and the Council of New Netherland noted that ‘instruction to manage silk worms cannot be easily written; it ought to be done by people who have done such or seen it done’ and that unwinding silk ‘requires special experience’.⁵³ Instead, imported raw silks continued to supplement the growing silk weaving industry in Haarlem and Amsterdam, which was protected by a 1664 States-General ordinance that limited the import of finished silk products without restricting unprocessed materials.⁵⁴ Dutch weavers used the high quality imported silk threads, which could better withstand the strain of the loom, as the foundational warp of their textiles.⁵⁵

Although more limited, imported finished silks gave craftspeople in Amsterdam a chance to study Japanese textile patterns and originate a Dutch interpretation of *indienne* silk designs.⁵⁶ Even without direct access to Japanese pattern books like Hishikawa Moronobu’s (1618–1694) *Contemporary Kosode Patterns*, Dutch weavers could mimic and rework motifs they encountered in garments. Such silks, whether imported as a tailored robe or a bolt, were admired for their complex dyeing techniques. According to Rodrigues,

the art of the dyers is also highly developed and widely practised among [the Japanese], for they not only dye *lengths* of silk, cotton, and linen with various colours, but they are also wont to dye them and then add various roses and flowers of different colours on to the background of whatever colour. There are people who are very skilled in this art, especially with regard to silk robes.⁵⁷

An early eighteenth-century *rok* with a design of rice sheaves and flower sprigs demonstrates this method of dyeing (fig. 4). To achieve the multiple colours and overlapping elements that obscures the repeats, Japanese craftspeople printed the pattern using mulberry leaf stencils, steamed rice flower, and bran resists.⁵⁸ While asymmetrical diagonals and floral motifs seen in import material became hallmarks of *indienne* designs,

52 The English were attempting similar endeavours in Virginia: Stuyvesant, *Correspondence*, 158.

53 NYSA, New Netherland Council, Dutch Colonial Administrative Correspondence 12, No. 57, Instructions for managing silkworms, 1657: ‘Instructie om de sijde wormen te regeren can niet wel geschreven worden, dient gedaen door personen die sulcx meer gedaen ofte gesien hebben’; ‘waer toe een sonderlinge ervarenheit sijn wil’. A translation appears in Stuyvesant, *Correspondence*, 132–133.

54 Lemire and Riello, ‘East and West’, 898; Stone-Ferrier, *Images of Textiles*, 216.

55 Rothstein, ‘Silk in European and American Trade before 1783’, 1.

56 Miller, ‘Europe Looks East’, 170.

57 João Rodrigues’s *Account*, 328. This method is known as the *katagami* technique: Hond and Fitzki, *A Narrow Bridge*, 125. Since Japanese sericulture was decimated after the Sengoku period, the VOC may have imported the raw silk from China. Kaempfer mentions that ‘raw silk from China, Tunkin, Bengal, and Persia’ was an important VOC import to Japan and that ‘among the imported goods, the Japanese like nothing better than raw silk’: Kaempfer’s *Japan*, 209; Kennedy, *Japanese Costume*, 28.

58 As noted by the Rijksmuseum, the garment has some anomalies that suggest European construction: the sleeves have been altered to be narrower and more fitted rather than wide like in *kosode*. In addition, the tailor has not pattern-matched the sleeves and the collar to the body: Hond and Fitzki, *A Narrow Bridge*, 125.



Fig. 4 Japan/Dutch Republic, Japanese rok, ca. 1700-1750, silk, 156 x 37 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

European weavers never attempted to adopt Japanese pattern-making methods. Instead, their designs reflect the influence of a range of Asian sources, including Chinese ceramics, Japanese lacquer, and Indian cotton chintz (as early as 1684, the VOC placed orders for Japanese-style gowns to be made from cotton in India).⁵⁹ Without resist dyeing techniques, the weaving of *indiennes* – notably more complex than the plain or two-toned silks of the early Dutch silk industry – had to be carefully planned in order to reproduce these ‘wild’ motifs.

Designing the patterns themselves required great skill. A design that puts uneven strain upon the warp could cause puckering; not curving shapes sharply enough, or curving them too sharply would result in a flawed appearance.⁶⁰ As patterns and craftspeople circulated within Europe, they developed methods for weaving increasingly dynamic and complex motifs.⁶¹ By the early eighteenth century, the silks used in constructing *Japone rokken* might have been imported from Asia, but were just as likely to be woven in the Dutch Republic, France, or England, as migrating weavers transmitted technologies and imagery across centres of textile production. Dutch weavers typically used a similar technique to the French *points rentrés*, introduced by the Lyon entrepreneur Jean Revel, which made it possible to dovetail shades of brocading thread to render naturalistic motifs more three-dimensionally. In turn, Netherlandish and Walloon weavers fleeing Spanish rule introduced new fabric blends to Norwich and brought their knowledge of weaving

⁵⁹ Hartkamp-Jonxis, *Sits*, 57; Lemire and Riello, ‘East and West’, 893; Miller, ‘Europe Looks East’, 163, 170.

⁶⁰ Lazaro, ‘Fashion and Frugality’, 62.

⁶¹ For a thorough analysis of the silk weaving industry in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Haarlem and Amsterdam and the development of patterned silks, see Colenbrader, *When Weaving Flourished*.



Fig. 5 Textile, late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, silk and metallic thread, New York, Cooper-Hewitt Museum.



Fig. 6 Detail of fig. 5.

indienne silks to Spitalfields.⁶² Patterned silks coming out of these sites therefore shared similarities in technique and design.

In addition, all European *indienne* silks were usually brocaded, in which the pattern is made with a supplementary, non-structural weft, giving the appearance of embroidery. For example, a silk – likely woven in the Dutch Republic because of its width – features a turbaned man in a boat, a chariot with leafy sails, and willow trees sprouting from displaced architectural elements (fig. 5).⁶³ Like the Japanese silk with sheaves of rice, the pattern is spaced in offset diagonals, suggesting movement. The design is almost surreal: a figure rows a boat on waterways that blend into a garden landscape (fig. 6). From a distance, the motif reads as olive-green abstract shapes on a gold background; the strange scale and discordant colours of the eccentric silk pattern challenged viewers to decipher the figural design upon closer looking.

⁶² Dutch weavers introduced mixing linen and silk with combing wools to create dress fabrics such as ‘alapeen, anterne, bombazine, darnex, drugget, frizadoe, grogram, hair camlet, and poplin’: Montgomery, *Textiles in America*, xv.

⁶³ Sjoukje Colenbrander and Clare Browne have suggested that looking closely at how silks were woven could help identify its place of manufacture. Dutch weavers followed Chinese examples and wove wider bolts of silks that measure approximately 78 cm within its selvages, the finished borders of a woven textile that prevents fraying. In contrast, Lyon silks of the period had regulations that determined their width (typically about 40 to 45 cm) and are characterized by cramped patterns, a tidy style, and two repeats instead of one in width. See Colenbrander and Browne, ‘Indiennes’, 127; Rothstein, ‘Dutch Silks’, 168; Miller, ‘Europe Looks East’, 171.

Similarly, English designers such as James Leman combined floral and architectural elements in their drawings for silks. Leman acknowledged the Dutch influence on his work: in a drawing planned for a brocaded silk, he inscribed the back, 'London March 26th 1711. This pattern was taken from a Dutch stuff'.⁶⁴ Leman produced an album of 104 patterns dated to 23 October, 1707 (although he continued designing into the 1730s). A drawing characteristic of his work shows a background of bold, flat yellow arches, bricks, and diagonal runners with geometric borders (fig. 7). Rather than attempting to build perspectival space, the architectural elements never cohere into a structure. Instead, Leman overlays the arches and fields of yellow with bright pink flowers and serrated leaves; the flowers weave in and out of the architecture, drooping down or turning upwards, so that the design can repeat infinitely and be read from multiple orientations. In de Peyster's robe, the proliferation of plants and vaguely architectural diaper-patterning recall Leman's style.⁶⁵

By the turn of the eighteenth century, embroidered and brocaded patterned silks were highly fashionable and manufacturers made a broad range of designs available for tailors to fashion into *Japonse rokken*. A late seventeenth-century *rok* features a pattern that mimics the fluid design of Japanese silks (fig. 8). Gold vines terminating in large leaves and blooms reminiscent of chintz flowers spread out across the textile. While the pattern mismatches along its seams are less obvious on this gown, it is still composed of several distinct sections in the sleeves. Like its Japanese counterparts, the repeats of the complex pattern are difficult to distinguish. Now faded to a bronze colour, the textile was once a deep purple that vividly offset the gold flowers. Such design executed with gold-wrapped thread would have been expensive and time-consuming to produce, and the finished garment possibly belonged to a nobleman or wealthy civic leader.⁶⁶

As the elite took up this style of dress, patterned robes began appearing more frequently in portraits of rich burghers. Caspar Netscher (1639-1684) depicted Steven Wolters (1651-?), for example, in a silk robe decorated with dancers, perhaps Safavid, and interspersed with large flowers (fig. 9). The tailor carefully oriented the fabric so that the pattern is legible, with the figures upright, when Wolters wears the robe. Netscher painted Wolters with his right arm lightly resting by his side to show off the dancing couple on his sleeve. He delicately rendered the highlights on the silvery silk, contrasting the reflective textile with the more muted white of Wolters's inner shirt and lace scarf. Wolters, like Isaac de Peyster before him, appears in front of a relatively dark and shadowy background, allowing the garment alone to convey Wolters's status.

64 Rothstein, 'Dutch Silks', 156.

65 Thornton, 'The "Bizarre" Silks', 269; Rothstein, 'Silks for the American Market', 150.

66 The robe may have belonged to King William III of England (1650-1702), who bought several *Japonse rokken* from Sir Solomon de Medina (1650-1730). According to Wardle, however, that claim is unsubstantiated. In 1689-90 William paid De Medina £52.8.0 'for a rich Embroidered gown & Five yards of Fine Indian Stuff Stript with gold and silver to line another gowne two bundles of Fine Jappan Wadd for the same gown and Five yards of fine Callico to Stitch the wadd upon and for the Fashion'. A 1691-92 bill from Thomas Sutton and George Noble includes charges 'For a rich Jappan gowne Sarcenet to Cover the Wadd on both sides and quilting the Wadd and for making the gown' valued at £21 and 'For a peice [sic] of Rich Atlas Indian Scarlet Crape to Line it, Making the Gown, a Silk Wadd and four Yards of Cherry Colour Lutestring and for lining the Gown' valued at £27.25.0. See Wardle, *For Our Royal Person*, 63.



Fig. 7 James Leman, Design, 1707, pencil, pen and ink, watercolour and bodycolour on laid paper, 65,4 x 26,7 cm, London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 8 The Netherlands, Rok, ca. 1675-1702, silk, 154 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.



Fig. 9 Caspar Netscher, Portrait of Steven Wolters, 1683, oil on canvas, 53 x 44 cm, Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum (on loan from the Van de Poll-Wolters-Quina Stichting).

Besides circulating within Europe, patterned silks were also re-exported to Dutch- and Anglo-American territories.⁶⁷ Unlike English settlers who spun and wove in their homes, colonists in New Netherland relied more heavily on imported textiles.⁶⁸ Prioritizing resource extraction, Willem Usselinx, a founder of the WIC, suggested in 1608 that

⁶⁷ In 1699 England banned the import of Indian and East Indian silks. A few years later, in 1702, French customs also forbade the import of Chinese silks, but neither country prohibited Dutch silks: Colenbrander and Browne, 'Indiennes', 128. In August of 1715, the Weavers Company of London complained in a petition to the Lords of the Treasury that 'great quantities of foreign [European] wrought silks and other woven goods are imported contrary to law and sold in England [...] to the "great injury" of the trade', cited in Rothstein, 'Dutch Silks', 153. Because most silk imported to New Netherland first passed through Amsterdam or London and have since been tailored, it has been difficult to determine the exact origin of any specific silk: Rothstein, 'Dutch Silks', 157.

⁶⁸ Zimmerman, *The Women of the House*, 97.

'it would be better if no industries were permitted, and the colonies supplied only raw materials to patria',⁶⁹ The *Provisional Regulations* of 1624 also forbade Dutch colonists from participating in crafts related to trade, like weaving and dyeing which would transform textiles into trade goods.⁷⁰ These decisions encouraged Dutch colonists to consume silks from Europe, both in the form of tailored garments and custom-ordered uncut bolts.⁷¹ Across the Atlantic, the demand for silk made silk merchants some of the richest inhabitants of the Dutch Republic and New Netherland.⁷²

Generally, silk textiles comprised the costliest garments in colonial probate inventories.⁷³ A 1669 inventory listed a 'Blew Silke petticote' as worth six pounds, but a 'Blacked Grogrum [Grosgrain] Petticote' at just 1 pound 10 shillings.⁷⁴ A patterned chequered silk petticoat from a 1700 inventory was worth two pounds, twice as much as a crepe petticoat.⁷⁵ Colonists might also order bolts of silk with a specific purpose in mind: a 1651 New Amsterdam inventory included 'as much black silk and green lining as needed for a robe' and another 1675 inventory had 'three yards & ½ of red silk quilted at 6 s. [shillings per] yd', suggesting that a *Japone rok* could be tailored in the Americas.⁷⁶ In contrast to the Dutch, Anglo-American colonists adopted the fashion for dressing gowns later, in a style more comparable to cotton chintz robes.⁷⁷ After the English took control of New York, dressing in *Japone rokken* cut from *indienne* patterned silks continued to distinguish the Dutch-American elite from their British-American peers.

69 In New Netherland, the fur trade and tobacco culture served export purposes and few craftsmen catered to the local market rather than produce surplus for export: Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, 68; Jacobs, *New Netherland*, 233.

70 Jacobs, *New Netherland*, 233.

71 The bulk of textiles shipped to New Netherland remained 'woolen cloth, originating from Amsterdam, Leiden, and Kampen, Duffel' and 'a coarse woolen cloth with a thick nap [...] intended for the fur trade' with indigenous Americans: Jacobs, *New Netherland*, 250. In English-American inventories, for example, it was unusual to find heavier, complex weaves like brocades and damasks, even into the mid-eighteenth century: Lazaro, 'Fashion and Frugality', 60-61.

72 Stone, *From Cloth to Clothing*, 261-262.

73 Silks were similarly valuable in the English world. Sarah White's 1719 inventory in Hatfield, Massachusetts, listed 'her most expensive garment as a silk prunella (silk and worsted with brocaded patterning) mantua at £3' in comparison with her wool gown and wool mantua, each worth £1: Lazaro, 'Fashion and Frugality', 61.

74 NYSA, Probates, Inventories and Accounts, Box 2, Inventory of Elisabeth Partridge, 28 October 1669.

75 NYSA, Probates, Inventories and Accounts, Box 4, Inventory of Sara and Cornelis Jacobs, 25 August 1700.

76 NYSA, Probates, Inventories and Accounts, Box 2, Inventory of Jan Jansen Damen, 6 July 1651: 'soo veel swart sey floret met groene voeringh daer toe ten rock'. The total value of the red silk was 1:1:00, see NYSA, Probates, Inventories and Accounts, Box 2, Inventory of Sam Morre, 16 September 1675.

77 In places such as Virginia, these robes were more often called banyans, after a Southeast Asian style of dress, and likely made with calicos and chintzes directly imported from India. Such robes continued to be fashionable into the late eighteenth century. In September of 1768, the lawyer and member of the Virginia House of Burgesses Robert Carter Nicholas ordered a gown from England, specifying 'a grave Narrow Striped Callimancoe large Wrapping [sic] Gown for a large Man to be sent by the very first Opportunity lined with thin green Bayes'. Likewise, in July 1774 tutor Philip Vickers Fithian complained that in Virginia, 'the wind itself seems to be heated' and that he needed to dress 'in a thin Waist-Coat, & a loose, light linen Gown': Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 110-112.

Patroon Portraiture in New York

Japone rokken in Dutch-American portraiture gestured to their wearers' prominence as local leaders as well as their involvement in transregional networks, even after New Amsterdam became New York. In addition to their role as merchants, the De Peysters were important in colonial politics. To even be nominated for civic positions, traders had to have strong connections to overseas capital.⁷⁸ Johannes de Peyster (1626-1685), Isaac's father, served as *schepen* of New Amsterdam five times between 1653 and 1655 and, after the transition to English rule, was alderman of New York City three times between 1665-1671.⁷⁹ From 1691 to 1694, Isaac's elder brother Abraham de Peyster was mayor of New York and subsequently acting governor in 1700. Successful navigation of the new political system required descendants of prominent New Amsterdammers to be linguistically and culturally bilingual.⁸⁰ Even as the elite of New York began to model their material and social lives after English gentry – particularly in terms of the fashion and luxury goods that populated their Georgian-style homes – Dutch people continued to speak Dutch, attend a distinct Dutch Reformed Church, and refer to themselves as members of a 'Dutch nation'.⁸¹ Older immigrants, like Isaac's mother Cornelia de Peyster, might 'understand some English words [...] but [...] could not understand a whole discourse'. Members of the younger generation, however, began to learn English. In 1703, Johannes de Peyster reported in a Dutch letter to his brother that 'English comes more fluently and easier to [his nine-year old son, Johannes Jr.] than Dutch'.⁸² The family understood that they needed to establish ties with the English community in New York to retain their social standing – the visual signifiers of status in Isaac's portrait, while referencing current fashions in the Dutch Republic, would have been understood by both his Dutch and English peers.

Although they recognized a need to navigate a multicultural society, the Dutch-American community also maintained distinct customs. Dutch colonists had their own network of artists, now known as patroon painters, named for the Dutch landowners who employed them. With few conventionally-trained artists immigrating to the Americas, sign-painters, house-painters, and other craftsmen developed a style that drew on European portrait traditions, using standard poses and settings, but with less emphasis on modelling and shading.⁸³ Mary Black has identified seven portraitists who were especially sought after by Dutch burghers between 1690 and 1750: Evert, Gerrit, and Gerardus Duyckinck, John Watson, Nehemiah Partridge, Pieter Vanderlyn, and John Heaten.⁸⁴ De

78 Maika, 'Commerce and Community', 326.

79 Johannes de Peyster was also considered for burgomaster between 1657 and 1664 but ultimately not selected: Maika, 'Commerce and Community', 336, 338, 352; 'De Peyster, Johannes'.

80 Wim Klooster has argued that as a pluralistic society developed, even though 'there was no attempt to impose English culture' on them, the Dutch in New York found themselves 'becoming more aware of their ethnic background' and 'redefining themselves in juxtaposition to English-speaking groups': Klooster, 'The Place of New Netherland'; Krohn, Miller, and De Filippis, *Dutch New York, Between East and West*, 60.

81 Goodfriend, *Who Should Rule at Home?*, 3, 19.

82 Cited in Goodfriend, *Who Should Rule at Home?*, 51, 55.

83 Bloch and Tusler, *The Dutch and America*, 37; Benson (ed.), *The America of 1750*, II, 343.

84 Benson (ed.), *The America of 1750*, II, 343.



Fig. 10 Attributed to Evert Duyckinck III, Colonel Gerardus Beekman, M.D., ca. 1710-1720, oil on linen, 76,5 x 63,5 cm, New York, New York Historical Society.

Peyster dressed in European fashion but turned to a painter from the Dutch-American community for his portrait, situating his self-depiction in the colonies.

Several patroon-style portraits dating between 1680 and 1730 notably featured subjects wearing *Japonse rokken* and *indienne* patterned silks. As in the Dutch Republic, the patroon sitters wearing *Japonse rokken* were often men with ties to trade who sought to convey a cultured identity legible to elites on both sides of the Atlantic. Before artists began to model their paintings after English mezzotints, earlier patroon painters looked directly to paintings from the Dutch Republic, including elements like the *Japonse rok*.⁸⁵ Evert Duyckinck painted Colonel Gerardus Beekman, a doctor and an elder of Flatbush Church and the son of WIC commissary Wilhelmus Beeckman, wearing a *Japonse rok* (fig. 10).⁸⁶ Beekman's warm brown robe has its sleeves and collar turned to expose the lining. Although his robe does not appear as luminous as the ones painted by Van Musscher or Netscher, the highlights on the saturated textile suggests the shininess of silk. Likewise, the contrasting teal lining, as well as the absence of a seam across the shoulder, all follow the standard construction of *Japonse rokken*.

⁸⁵ Ruby, 'Dutch Art and the Hudson Valley Patroon Painters', 46.

⁸⁶ Krohn, Miller, and De Filippis, *Dutch New York, Between East and West*, 213-215.



Fig. 11 Attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, *Portrait of a Man*, ca. 1690, oil on panel, 76,2 x 61 cm, San Marino, The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens.

Other portraits, such as Gerrit Duyckinck's painting of an unidentified man, feature the sitter in a patterned silk (fig. 11). The robe has a damask floral design in a slightly lighter tone, made more evident by the light that the fabric reflects as it folds. The gown is lined in a contrasting plain bronze silk. The portraits of these Dutch men in Europe and in New York often followed the same formula: a three-quarter profile pose, colourful gowns over cravats and professional costumes, and a dark background. Because these conventions create a shared visual vocabulary, peers viewing the paintings immediately understood that the sitter is posed for refined leisure or scholarly work. Despite the distinct style of portraitists in New Netherland, the rendering of *Japone rok* among the Dutch American-community continued to signal



Fig. 12 Michiel van Musscher, Pierre de Peyster, 1683, oil on canvas, 58,4 x 51,4 cm, New York, National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York.

worldly curiosity, material prosperity, and elite status in a local and international political-mercantile network.

The De Peysters traversed the Atlantic regularly to manage their business concerns. In 1684, Isaac's brother Abraham (1657-1728) visited Amsterdam, where he married his second cousin Catharina (1665-before 1734). When the couple moved back to New York, they brought with them a 1683 Van Musscher portrait of Pierre de Peyster (1639-1710), Catharina's father, wearing a *Japonse rok* (fig. 12).⁸⁷ Pierre's robe is deep-purple and full length, with voluminous sleeves gathered in a puffy bundle to show off the frothy lace at his wrists. The robe drapes over Pierre's knees and spills beyond the edge of the painting, creating the impression of an abundance of precious silk. With careful modelling and shading, Van Musscher suggests that warm fluffy padding lined the interior of the robe,

⁸⁷ Ruby, 'Dutch Art and the Hudson Valley Patroon Painters', 37.

particularly along the exposed red lining around the collar. The silk is unornamented, but the *fijnschilder* sculpts its folds with high shine and vibrant colour to convey the textile's opulence.

In both Isaac and Pierre de Peyster's portraits, all traces of wealth reside in the textiles. The expansive and comfortable robe, the white lace spouting from his neck and sleeves, and the intricate Turkish carpet draped over the table indicate that Pierre was a man who could afford fashionable luxuries sourced from around the world. A lifted curtain and terrestrial globe are barely visible in a dimly-lit background, drawing little focus from the range of imported and expensive fabrics. Van Musscher barely models his sitter's body. De Peyster is a thoughtful face and a pair of relaxed hands, deftly painted to suggest blood, bone, and sinew, but otherwise shrouded – almost a mannequin modelling the materials that communicate his importance.

The De Peyster family would have been familiar with *rokken* in their material surroundings. Elizabeth Bancker, who named her son-in law Johannes de Peyster (1666-1711, Isaac's brother) one of her heirs, listed a 'black-gray man's gown', distinct from a 'colorful woman's gown', in her 1694 inventory.⁸⁸ In addition, Abraham and Catharina de Peyster displayed the portrait of Pierre in the large sitting room of their Queen Street (now Pearl Street) home, prominently visible to all their guests.⁸⁹ Perhaps Pierre's portrait inspired Isaac's commission. Just before Isaac sat for this portrait, Johannes had returned from a trip to Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and London.⁹⁰ Often, orders for silks were specially placed through the merchants who travelled from America to Europe, allowing them a level of influence over the exact design of the silk and early access to the latest styles.⁹¹ Johannes may have reported the fashion in Europe to his brother, or even brought back a bolt of silk for him.

Conclusion

Costume and dress, especially in the contested space of colonial New York, was political and deliberate. Portraits were not simply commissioned for private enjoyment, they were a public expression of identity, indicating personal alliances with political centres in Europe and authority in the colonies. As Dutch burghers dressed in exoticizing finery to demonstrate their wealth and status, Dutch-American patroons kept up with European conventions rather than express any explicit desire to establish an solely American identity. For the De Peysters – and other Dutch families in New York City and the Hudson Valley – the *Japone rok* marked them as community leaders, while also connecting them to their heritage, homeland, and broader networks beyond the Atlantic.

⁸⁸ Johannes de Peyster married Anna Bancker. NYSA, Probates, Inventories and Accounts, Box 1, Inventory of Elizabeth Bancker, 19 July 1693: 'Swarte gryze mansrock', 'gecolleurde vrouwerock'.

⁸⁹ Belknap, *The De Peyster Genealogy*, 6.

⁹⁰ Rothstein, 'Silks for the American Market', 95.

⁹¹ Lazaro, 'Fashion and Frugality', 62.

More than objects of exclusive, personalized luxury, the *rok* represented a new elite circle, with membership predicated on access to global information, technologies, and affiliations. In New York, the popularity of *Japonse rokken* situated Dutch-Americans as equally active participants in transregional networks. The cut of Isaac's garment, co-opted from Japanese dress traditions, expresses his status as a stakeholder in a Dutch trading empire; the *indienne* patterned silk, woven in Europe, displays an awareness of Dutch fashion trends and situates him in an elite merchant community; and the style of painting – visually distinct from Musscher's depiction of Pierre de Peyster – grounds him in colonial America. Although terms like *Japonse rok* and *indienne* had become amorphous, they gestured to the origin of these popular garments and to the extensive influence that VOC enterprises have had on Dutch culture. Ultimately, the end of the eighteenth century saw a shift away from patterned silks, as the sheen of exoticism wore off Japanese-inspired patterns and rising tensions between England and its North American colonies interrupted the importation of European goods.⁹² As the garment itself was phased out, robes and *indienne* silks faded from portraits as well. But for a brief period, *Japonse rokken* symbolized worldliness for a merchant class that traversed the Dutch globe, from Japan to the Dutch Republic to the Americas.

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