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Research MA Thesis History



Credit to the Nation

*Dutch Business in
the Qing Empire, 1863-1903*

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cover image	Anonymous British traveller, <i>Stad en havengezicht van een Chinese stad</i> [View on a Chinese city and port], album and print, ca. 1879--1890, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, rijksmuseum.nl .
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Abstract

After the opening of relations in 1863, Dutch commercial activity in the Qing Empire remained small until the century's end, with the establishment of the Holland-China-Handelscompagnie, NHM Shanghai agency, and Java-China-Japanlijn in 1903 as clear signs of acceleration. Scholars have long assumed this sudden development of interest was the result of business conditions. However, government involvement in the latter two businesses and popular allusions to private enterprise in the Qing Empire as a national interest give reason to reassess this claim with attention for the international political conditions of growing mercantilism and commercial competition in the context of informal empire.

The global rise of mercantilism between 1870 and 1900 is generally considered to have had a negligible impact in Dutch politics. However, trends connected to mercantilism through the *Methodenstreit* in economic science like social liberalism, imperialism, and nationalism have become widely recognised as defining features of Dutch politics and society in this period, though not always without considerable and long-standing historiographical controversy. Taking a "visions of empire" approach developed to address such anomalies in Dutch imperial history and the national historical self-image with a broader definition of and *longue durée* approach to intellectual history, this project studies the interaction of public and private interests in Dutch commercial expansion as expressed in the personal writings of involved consuls and professionals. Important trends include the rise of nationalism and imperialism in Liberal and Calvinist politics, Dutch economic and territorial expansion in Asia, and the state's relationship to private enterprise, addressed in works on Dutch political, economic, and cultural history in this period by Van Dongen, Kuitenbrouwer, Bossenbroek, and Van Zanden and Van Riel.

The most important participants in the commercial expansion include shipping, trade, colonial agriculture, marine construction, and petroleum, each responding to more and less concrete threats of foreign competition. Broad interest from these sectors first emerged in the late 1880s, earlier than is commonly assumed. Its appeal built on a Liberal nationalist sentiment of commercial competitiveness overseas, particularly in sectors with a perceived national heritage, which responded to growing European industrial activity and imperialist competition in the Qing Empire. Driving the subsequent commercial expansion in the 1890s and early 1900s was a small group of entrepreneurs in colonial shipping and agriculture who applied the same narrative to present their businesses as serving a political interest, a method they had used successfully in the East Indies. As Liberal nationalism made way for a broader narrative of ethical imperialism, so these businesses, as credit to the nation, were incorporated in the idea of the small state's moral guidance in global politics. The combined pressure of nationalist opinion and business' political influence helped bring about government's shift to subsidies and consular support in the Qing Empire, which was of considerable influence on the growth of the Dutch business presence there.

Acknowledgments

It was a sunny day in June when I first attended a seminar at the History department of Utrecht University. At a matching event for prospective students we discussed the Cuban missile crisis. The seminar was the first of many: before you lies the final act of over six years spent at Utrecht as a Bachelor's and Master's student. It is also very much the product of that time, combining insights from many of the subjects I dove into, like the history of the nation-state, modern China, and Dutch history overseas.

Teaching the class that day in June was Jeroen Koch – somewhat removed from his usual field of study, as I now know. With his supervision of this project, too, it appears my time as a student here has come full circle. In a study with a broad thematic scope, I have benefited greatly from Jeroen's expertise. In particular, it helped me understand the topics where my knowledge was lacking, like the history of Dutch parliament in the late nineteenth century. In that light, my gratitude also goes out to Keetie Sluyterman, who gave her opinion at many stages of this research project, and Naomi Woltring and the students in the program's thesis lab.

More generally, many of the faculty and fellow students in the Research Master's program and during my exchange to Waseda responded to early ideas and designs for this project; they also made the program an inspiring and unforgettable experience. As tutor, Rachel Gillett helped me navigate the world of research with great enthusiasm. Unfortunately, the enduring COVID-19 lockdown has limited all our goodbyes to the digital sphere. While stuck at home, I was lucky to have a large desk and considerate flatmates. Without "home," most of all, none of this would have been possible. Finally, therefore, my thanks go out to my parents, who never stopped supporting me in my studies and encouraging me to go where my interests led.

Introduction

As I yet told you, where the more modest place the Netherlands occupies among the great powers is concerned, though it occupies it with honour, I definitely hope we can make our will felt. Personally, however, I can only contribute through my position in "het Buitenland." As you know, I am presently burdened with the Society's presidency. [...] But I could hardly refuse and thus I will have to find solace in giving a more or less considerable portion of my time to "the common interest." [...] And it is my firm belief that the "far East," China in particular, must be the principal terrain of our activity. That we find such a strong, hardworking, and distinctly sympathetic as well as able partner in You has been to me – why should I not be frank – an encouragement to, now as president, get to work more actively.

G.M. Boissevain to F.M. Knobel, April 13, 1898.

If the staff which assists our Minister of Foreign Affairs comprised men like those on the board of het "Buitenland," then without a doubt we would be a long way further than we are now.

Knobel to Boissevain, May 26, 1898.¹

In 1898, Frits Knobel and Gideon Boissevain lived worlds apart. One was an ambitious *pâtissier*'s son who made it to consul general in Beijing; the other continued a family tradition as banker and economist in Amsterdam and earned his stripes as a protagonist in the renaissance of the country's financial sector in the 1860s and 70s. The two men found each other as kindred spirits, sharing a vision for their country whose inhabitants spread out further and further into the world. This world shaped their acquaintance. When Knobel visited the Netherlands, they discussed their views and ideas in offices in Amsterdam or The Hague; Dutchmen travelling professionally between Europe, the Dutch East Indies, and East Asia carried their best wishes and the latest impressions of life on the other side of the globe; using telegraph communication, they relayed urgent messages almost instantly. But most of their correspondence was written in letters, carried overseas in a month and a half by the quickest intercontinental steamship lines.

These letters discussed opportunities for young Dutch men – preferably those with good education, knowledge of etiquette, professional experience, and proficiency in the *linguae francae* of the international world of Western business – to find work in the Chinese treaty ports. Boissevain's Vereeniging "het Buitenland" made such efforts with Dutch consuls around the world and while it was Knobel's professional duty, as consul general and resident minister to the Qing Empire, to promote the national commercial interest, none of Het Buitenland's collaborations were as fruitful as with him. The reason has much to do

¹ Both letters in National Archives, The Hague (hereafter: NL-HaNA), Dutch Legation in China (Peking, Chungking, Nanking), entry number 2.05.90, inventory number 38.

with their shared view on the "common interest," promoting commerce as the locus of the Netherlands asserting its position "among the great powers."

In doing so, the two men diverted considerably from the official line of the Foreign Ministry. After all, the Netherlands maintained a well-known policy of neutrality which reached a dubious peak around this time when The Hague hosted its first Peace Conference in 1899. Though Dutch neutrality was marked rather more by pragmatism than idealism – shifting between more and less aggressive stances in foreign policy based on what government expected the European Great Powers, especially Great Britain and later Germany, would allow – consecutive Foreign Ministers had preached abstention, rather than assertiveness, in the Qing Empire.² Knobel's comments on the Foreign Ministry and references like Boissevain's to international politics indicate that this policy of political neutrality was coming under increased pressure from the proponents of more active support for Dutch commercial interests in foreign policy.

Several well-known government decisions show this argument did not remain confined to the fringes of policy. In 1898, Colonial Minister J.T. Cremer prevented a panic in the colonial petroleum industry by taking the uncommon step of pledging to support the companies from a potential takeover by their powerful American competitor Standard Oil. In 1903, the government sponsored the establishment of the Java-China-Japan Lijn (JCJL) shipping service with a loan of 3.75 million guilders, a number unseen in then recent memory for a company not providing a direct service to the state. It is the goal of this project to offer an insight into how this reorientation of policy and commerce took place, and how the Qing Empire, as the "principal terrain" for Dutch commerce, catalysed this process.

The Netherlands never played more than a minor role in the world of Chinese business; even in the first half of the twentieth century, when Philips and Unilever, future mainstays of the Dutch economy, started selling to Chinese consumers in the 1920s and 1930s respectively and the Dutch company Havenwerken became a market leader in harbour construction.³ Still, the year 1903 carries significance as a point of acceleration. In his 2001 dissertation on Dutch business in China, Frans-Paul van der Putten argues the establishment in that year of the Shanghai agency of the colonial bank *Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij* (Netherlands Trading Society, NHM), after an absence from the Empire of more than half a century, and the *Holland-China Handelscompagnie*, created in the merger of two Dutch trading houses, would prove important rallying points for Dutch commerce.⁴ Thus, a coher-

² See M. Kuitenbrouwer, *The Netherlands and the Rise of Modern Imperialism: Colonies and Foreign Policy, 1870--1902*, trans. H. Beyer (New York: Berg, 1991). Originally published in Dutch in 1985.

³ J. Osterhammel, "Semi-Colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China: Towards a Framework of Analysis," in *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, ed. W.J. Mommsen (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 300--302. For a comprehensive overview of the Dutch business presence in China in the early twentieth century, see F.-P. van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour and Political Risk: Dutch Companies in China, 1903--1941* (Leiden: CNWS, 2001).

⁴ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 33--34.

ent Dutch business presence in the Qing Empire first saw the light of day, and coherence was indeed one of its driving forces. The NHM owned over seventy-five per cent of the JCJL's shares, meaning both companies worked for a mutual benefit.⁵

Scholars have struggled to determine why Dutch commerce in the Qing Empire did not develop sooner after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1863 with the Treaty of Tianjin. Both Van der Putten and Leonard Blussé, an authority on Sino-Dutch exchange, point to I.J. Brugmans' suggestion, made in 1952, that until the century's end, Dutch industry was unable to compete with its more developed foreign counterparts and capital exports were absorbed mostly by the development of private initiative in the East Indies from the 1870s onwards.⁶ However, where Van der Putten already pointed out the NHM relied on the government's collection of Boxer Indemnity funds as part of its business, the JCJL loan especially suggests it was a shift in the Dutch state's economic policy under whose influence the scales tipped in favour of Dutch commercial expansion in the Qing Empire around the turn of the century.⁷ Knobel's and Boissevain's exchange on the "national interest" gives reason to examine how this disputed shift came to be.

Mercantilism

After the significant liberalisation of global trade between 1840 and 1870, the late nineteenth century, particularly the years of global economic crisis from 1873 until 1896, represent a period during which the majority of Western states turned to protective measures. With this so-called mercantilism, the political economy of the early modern European state made an apparent return, with states turning to economy and trade to leverage political goals like economic growth or international dominance.⁸

Nineteenth-century mercantilism had its intellectual equivalent in the *Methodenstreit* in economic science between the (German) historical school and (Austrian) mathematical school, a conflict revolving mostly around the former's criticism of (neo)classical economics' deductive methodology and indifference to social analysis which strongly impacted politics across the West. Though not unequivocally in favour of raising import barriers, the historical school saw a strong need for government intervention to combat pressing societal problems accompanying the century's massive wave of industrialisation, particularly in the

⁵ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 44--45; I.J. Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaانvaart* (Amsterdam: De Boer, 1952), 53.

⁶ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 19; Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaانvaart*, 17; L.L. Blussé, "Theory and Practice of Railroad Building in China: The Cannibalization of the Lung-Hai Railroad, 1920--1925," *Journal of the Japan-Netherlands Institute* 6 (1996): 34.

⁷ F.-P. van der Putten, "Small Powers and Imperialism: The Netherlands in China, 1885--1905," *Itinerario* 20, no. 1 (1996): 123--127.

⁸ P.R. Rössner, "Heckscher Reloaded? Mercantilism, the State, and Europe's Transition to Industrialization, 1600--1900," review essay, *The Historical Journal*, 58, no. 2 (2015): 663--678; S. Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1--10.

living and working conditions of the urban poor and the decline of agriculture. Gustav Schmoller, its most well-known ambassador, supported tariffs as a pragmatic means to protect agriculture and nurture infant industries and technological development for future growth, as long as the impact on food prices remained within bounds.⁹

As such, the Methodenstreit ties into wider conflict over the foundations of society known as the crisis of liberalism, with strong connections to the cultural *fin-de-siècle*, where liberalism's promise of universal prosperity was confronted with unpopular social and environmental developments.¹⁰ The rise of *social* liberalism was one of its most tangible outcomes. The introduction of social legislation out of a concern for the well-being and unity of the population became quite widely carried ideas among Liberals, responding as much to the ideological crisis itself as to the threat of the growing influence of Socialist and Social Democratic opposition calling for anything from a more interventionist state to the end of capitalism across Western Europe.¹¹

With its focus on community and the nation as society's bedrock, opposing liberalism's faith in the individual and *laissez faire*, the influence of historical economics is strongly tied to the rise of nationalism and imperialism.¹² In the early 1900s, Max Weber, another of historical economics' well-known proponents, argued domestic stability required national prosperity, which itself depended on military and political prowess on the global stage. On the other hand, mercantilism is associated with the informal influence of business, which had a financial stake in the protection of the economy. Typical examples of these developments are Bismarck's right-wing coalition of landed aristocracy and industrial capitalism in Germany, leading the turn to mercantilism in Western Europe, and strong support in the U.S. for private enterprise and large businesses. Enormous spending on national defence did not preclude these countries from significant commitments to social policies to constrain industry's negative side-effects, funded partly with higher tariff rates. Even in free-trading Britain, the Methodenstreit led to a rehabilitation of the history of mercantilism and allowed politicians like Joseph Chamberlain to put the role of the state firmly on the political agenda.¹³

⁹ E. Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany, 1864--1894* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3--4; 200--201.

¹⁰ I. de Haan, "Third Ways Out of the Crisis of Liberalism: Moderation and Radicalism in Germany, 1880--1950," in *The Politics of Moderation in Modern European History*, ed. De Haan and M. Lok (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 133--134.

¹¹ S. Stuurman, *Wacht op onze daden: Het liberalisme en de vernieuwing van de Nederlandse staat* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1992), 309. Ideologies as school of thought and political affiliation are distinguished here through the capitalisation of the latter, e.g. Liberal or Catholic. The Anti-Revolutionary Party, also known as Christian-Historicals, are referred to as Calvinists.

¹² G.M. Koot, "Historical Economics and the Revival of Mercantilism Thought in Britain, 1870--1920," in *Mercantilist Economics*, ed. L. Magnusson (New York: Springer, 1993), 189--194.

¹³ E. Fawcett, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 162--167; 193--196; Koot, "Historical Economics," 188--189.

That mercantilism is used here to describe a broad range of phenomena across temporal contexts represents the concept's notorious lack of definition. This mirrors in particular its status in contemporary mainstream economics as a catch-all counterpart to neoclassicism, grouping tariff policy together as premodern, irrational, and counterfactual. Historical economics thus became an anachronism – a remainder of the early modern state. However, this dichotomy of *laissez faire* with mercantilism, interventionism, *dirigism*, etc., like its connection to the Enlightenment, has in recent years been pointed out to be an exaggeration. The presumed (moral) superiority of free trade rather resembles the Methodenstreit as it played out in Great Britain, where free traders underestimated government's role in infrastructure and business regulation as alternative forms of intervention and dismissed historical economics despite broad acknowledgment of mercantilism's value for economic development for competitors like Germany, or, historically, even for Britain itself.¹⁴ Typical contemporary examples include the U.S. trade war with the People's Republic of China (PRC), one of the Trump administration's more controversial policies which nonetheless gained widespread domestic and international support, while in the Netherlands, government's relationship to business strikingly became the topic of discussion after the third Rutte cabinet proposed to abolish the Dutch dividend tax in 2018, a measure commonly interpreted as placating the large Dutch-British companies Unilever and Royal Dutch Shell with no direct inducement because of their importance for employment and the national GDP.¹⁵ They show trade policy remains a part of the political tool box.

The point here is not so much to come to a reappraisal of mercantilism or historical economics, otherwise exhaustively researched topics. Market reform towards free trade, however, has become a strongly normative aspect of political modernity.¹⁶ That this narrative largely ignores this history of mercantilism stands in contrast to most histories of modernity, which attach great importance to the nineteenth century as the era of governance and a scientific and political "conquest" of nature, most typically in the field of infrastructure.¹⁷ Its study may benefit from the great interest intellectual historians and Hu-

¹⁴ Rössner, "Heckscher Reloaded," 665--677; L. Magnusson, "Introduction," in *Mercantilist Economics*, 2--3; Reinert, *Translating Empire*, 2; Koot, "Historical Economics," 187--191.

¹⁵ J. Graafland, "Afschaffing dividendbelasting kent geen goede argumenten," *Trouw*, Aug. 29, 2018.

¹⁶ P. Knight, "Introduction: Fictions of Finance," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 6, no. 1 (2013): 3; H.-J. Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London: Anthem, 2002).

¹⁷ A. van der Woud, *Een nieuwe wereld: Het ontstaan van het moderne Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007), 11--13; R. Fredona and S.A. Reinert, "Introduction: History and Political Economy," in Fredona and Reinert, eds., *New Perspectives on the History of Political Economy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), xix; Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder*.

manities scholars more generally have shown in re-examining political economy and the history of capitalism following the financial crisis of 2007.¹⁸

The entire 1848--1914 era in Dutch economic policy is typically characterised as the "liberal period" of government abstention.¹⁹ Following the international trend, two decades of Liberal government after the 1848 revolution oversaw the far-ranging retraction of state interference from the national economy and while the majority of neighbouring countries subsequently turned to mercantilist measures, the Netherlands remained remarkably open.²⁰ The country retained an average aggregate tariff under two per cent – lower than any of its neighbours – and even abolished its patent law, leaving what has been described as Europe's most liberal economy.²¹ In general, it benefited the country's open economy and maintained the liberal political ideals of the 1848 constitution while also responding to lingering dismay with King Willem I's (r. 1813--1840) failed interventionist politics in the pre-democratic era.²² That calls to raise tariffs emerged in the midst of the crisis is generally considered as inevitable as their dismissal due to the clash with liberal principles and feared effect on food prices.²³ Not least in academic institutions, the mathematical school remained dominant, with future prime minister N.G. Pierson as one of its leading proponents.²⁴

Paradoxically, Pierson's 1897--1901 cabinet and its program of legislation on housing, labour conditions, education, public health, and insurance are known as the culmination of a period of lively social liberalism. Liberal governments since 1848 had never shown much hesitation to intervene in sectors of the economy which had proven unviable on the free market, on the crucial condition that they carried importance for the "common interest" – a rather flexible term. One of these interests was economic development, justifying investment in infrastructure, postal services, telegraph connections, a network of chambers of commerce, and a central bank. Influenced by the likes of Schmoller, Bismarck, and the

¹⁸ Rössner, "Heckscher Reloaded," 663--665; S. Rockman, "What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?," review of *Capitalism takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* by M. Zakim and G.J. Kornblith, *Journal of the Early Republic*, 34, no. 3 (2014).

¹⁹ For instance described as such in J.L. van Zanden, "The Netherlands: The History of an Empty Box?," in *European Industrial Policy: The Twentieth-Century Experience*, ed. J. Foreman-Peck and G. Federico (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁰ P.A. Gourevitch, "International Trade, Domestic Coalitions, and Liberty: Comparative Responses to the Crisis of 1873--1896," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8, no. 2 (1977).

²¹ Van Zanden, "Empty Box," 177; J.L. van Zanden and A. van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914: Staat, instituties en economische ontwikkeling* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2000), 336.

²² Van Zanden, "Empty Box," 177--178; Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder*, 43--45; I.J. Brugmans, *Paardenkracht en mensenmacht. Sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Nederland, 1795--1914* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 214--226.

²³ Brugmans, *Paardenkracht en mensenmacht*, 290; 387.

²⁴ A. Heertje, "Nicolaas Gerard Pierson," in *Van liberalisten tot instrumentalisten: Anderhalve eeuw economisch denken in Nederland*, eds. A.J. Vermaat, J.J. Klant, and J.R. Zuidema (Leiden: Stenfert Kroese, 1987).

(comparatively small) rise of socialism, intervention and social policies did become the subject of change and more heated discussion, also visible in the doubling of consulates between 1870 and 1900.²⁵ Cremer's intervention on behalf of Royal Dutch might, for example, be classified under the infant industry header. Nonetheless, historiography offers little antecedent based on which these developments may be understood as part of the industrial policy of the late nineteenth century Dutch state.

The China Question

Since the Opium Wars (1839--60), foreign presence was forced on the seclusionist Qing Empire in a system of "unequal treaties" institutionalised with Most-Favoured Nation clauses. This gave Western businesses the opportunity to start trading in designated treaty ports, but anti-foreign sentiment and the absence of a legal framework protecting transactions and property made for a volatile situation. In the last decade of the century, intra-European political developments and imperial rivalries exacerbated by the Berlin Conference (1884--85) and globalisation of trade gave rise to the "China Question," or the problem of the widely predicted disintegration and colonisation of the Qing Empire. It caused the Western powers and Japan to vie for influence and begin staking out territorial claims especially after Chinese defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894--95), which they saw as evidence of the Qing Empire's weakness and the superiority of European technology used by Japan. While Great Britain and Russia, competed for control over Central Asia, Germany, France, and Japan were also looking to gain territory. Meanwhile, the U.S. promoted a continuation of peace and free trade known as the "Open Door," even though its own economy was highly protected. Tensions peaked in 1899 with the anti-foreign Yihetuan ("Boxer") Uprising and the subsequent invasion by the Eight-Nation Alliance made up of the aforementioned empires and the U.S., Italy, and Austria-Hungary. Afterwards, the situation of foreign influence and territorial concessions in China was confirmed as the new status quo with the signing of the Boxer Protocol (1901), though Anglo-Russian tensions did not settle until around 1905.²⁶

²⁵ S. Dudink, *Deugdzaam liberalisme: Sociaal-liberalisme in Nederland, 1870--1901* (Amsterdam: IISH, 1997), 9; 251--256; H de Vries, "Nederlandse economen over de ondernemende overheid, 1850--1940" (lecture, Leiden University, Nov. 4, 1994), 11--20; Van der Woud, *Een nieuwe wereld*, 109; Stuurman, *Wacht op onze daden*, 304--317; J. Jonker and K. Sluyterman, *At Home on the World Markets: Dutch International Trading Companies from the 16th Century to the Present* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 181; A.J. Vermaat, "M.W.F. Treub: Sociaal econoom tussen theorie en toepassing," in Vermaat, *Van liberalisten tot instrumentalisten*. For data on government spending, see R.H. van der Voort, *Overheidsbeleid en overheidsfinanciën in Nederland, 1850--1913* (PhD diss., Free University of Amsterdam, 1994).

²⁶ T.G. Otte, *The China Question: Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1895--1905* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 326--337; M.-W. Palen, "The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism, 1890--1913," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 1 (2015).

Industrial interests played an especially significant role. Since in the eyes of the imperial powers, Qing sovereignty over China – at least for the time being – precluded a scramble for territory, competition focused on obtaining commercial concessions in mining, railways, and other fields. Because they yielded financial gain, political influence and intelligence, and increased amounts of orders for domestic industries, such concessions were sources of political leverage and economic growth for the imperial metropolises and furthermore promised future claims on Chinese territory and natural resources.²⁷ Here, the protection of national industries thus served imperialist competition. Axiomatically, it contributed to Western pressure on China to industrialise and welcome foreign business and capital.

The Dutch proclaimed their support for the Eight-Nation Alliance but did not participate in the invasion, thus staying as far away as was deemed politically justifiable to the other treaty powers. They only took part in joint peace negotiations after realising that alone, they might not have had the leverage to secure reparation payments at all.²⁸ The contrast between the considerable liberties the Netherlands took in peacetime by aligning with the treaty powers in their infringement on Qing sovereignty – which, arguably, was more an idea than reality at this time – and the aloofness or even apathy in the face of conflict is typical of Dutch imperialism as argued by Maarten Kuitenbrouwer in his landmark study of 1985.

In general, he writes, Dutch expansion was motivated by the wider imperialist trends of *preemption*, or staking out claims to the decreasing area of uncolonised territory, along lines of *contiguity* or geographic proximity as described by Raymond F. Betts. By competing in this global search for sources of political leverage and economic growth without stepping on the toes of the far stronger powers – particularly Great Britain and Germany, later joined by the U.S. and Japan – the Dutch looked to sustain their control over the East Indies in the context of a *de facto* British protectorate.²⁹ Following Frans van Dongen's paradigmatic 1966 framing of Dutch China policy as caught between neutrality and imperialism, then, "[e]ventually, neutrality got the better of imperialism."³⁰ Notably, not the Qing Empire but the Western powers were the true subject of Dutch neutrality here.

Visions of Empire

Considering Knobel and Boissevain's support for Dutch commerce carried forth the spirit of colonial and international policy objectives, we can understand how the increasingly austere implementation of neutrality in the face of conflict caused them and the Foreign Ministry to

²⁷ S.X. Wu, *Empires of Coal: Fueling China's Entry into the Modern World Order, 1860--1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 98; Otte, *The China Question*, 2.

²⁸ F. van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme: De Nederlands-Chinese betrekkingen van 1863 tot 1901* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1966), 305--309.

²⁹ R.F. Betts, *The False Dawn: European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 81--83. Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 236--243; 328--349.

³⁰ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*; Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 242.

come to a head over conflicting views on the "national interest." As such, nationalism, business interests, and political ideology stand out as forces through which the Methodenstreit was pulled from the scholarly into the political sphere. Ultimately, the single political objective was to build social cohesion at home by improving popular welfare and defending the international stature of the nation in the spheres of economy and empire, by which this discussion struck at the root of the Dutch liberal state in the nineteenth century.

This project seeks to understand this interplay of forces by building on a recent call to study "visions of empire" in Dutch intellectual history. By establishing a *longue durée* history of hegemonical and counterhegemonical thinking about Dutch empire, René Koekkoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard, and Arthur Weststeijn propose the "visions" debate could help to overcome long-standing separations: of imperial *metropole* and colonial *periphery* in intellectual history, of East and West and modern and early modern in the history of empire, and, ultimately, of a history of decidedly imperial practice with a political, historiographical, and public view on Dutch colonial rule as exceptional and even benevolent, a supposed *Sonderweg* in the history of European empire which comes to expression in societal tension over multiculturalism and the national past.³¹ In particular, this study's interest in nationalism and political ideology builds on newfound attention to political economy's correlation with empire and the focus on commercial motives in the Dutch imperial self-image, which Weststeijn and Cátia Antunes point out originated from the exaggeration, for political purposes, of the differentiating impact Dutch republicanism and reliance on chartered companies had on long-distance trade and colonialism in the seventeenth century.³²

On these two topics, however, the intervention has thus far failed to impact the historiography of Dutch imperialism in the late nineteenth century. Because of the aggressive territorial expansion of imperial powers, this period has traditionally received ample attention, which may explain why it is now somewhat overlooked. With the "coinciding" rise of nationalism – the wording understates interconnections, particularly the importance of empire and the Dutch Golden Age – however, it is a crucial period for understanding the "processes of simultaneous remembering, forgetting and [...] self-representation" through which a Dutch self-image was constructed.³³ Whereas historians stress commercial motives for Dutch imperialism did not diminish in importance, political economy and commercial actors

³¹ A. Schrikker, "Visions of Dutch Empire: Introduction," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 132, no. 2 (2017); R. Koekkoek, A-I. Richard, and A. Weststeijn, "Visions of Dutch Empire: Towards a Long-Term Global Perspective," *ibid.*; S. Legêne, "The European Character of the Intellectual History of Dutch Empire," *ibid.*; Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn, "Introduction: Intellectual History in Imperial Practice," in *The Dutch Empire between Ideas and Practice, 1600--2000*, eds. Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

³² C. Antunes, "Birthing Empire," in Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn, *The Dutch Empire*; Weststeijn, "Empire of Riches," *ibid.*

³³ Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn, "Visions of Dutch Empire," 93–95; M. Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst: Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996).

are eclipsed in historiography by the co-occurring expansion of colonial state and society and the appearance of the development of the colonial population as an objective in colonial policy, the well-known *civilising mission*, particularly its moral and cultural components.³⁴ The technocratic ideal and the ideology of the engineer have, for instance, been studied extensively, benefitting from a wider definition of culture as the beliefs, assumptions, and conventions underlying all social and political relations popularised in the *cultural turn*.³⁵

Until now, the effect on the study of Dutch colonial and global entrepreneurship in this era has therefore been limited.³⁶ By studying visions of empire, this project critically reflects on historiographies of empire, business, economy and political thought. Though it shares the idea of the constructed nature of reality and political lens on economic developments with the institutional economics dominant in Dutch economic historiography, such studies choose to see businessmen and politicians as purely self-interested parties, *a priori* leaving little room for the study of ideas. Similar views can be found in common interpretations of mercantilism in continental Europe in this period, arguing tariff measures were most of all a method for pragmatic rulers like Bismarck to forge political coalitions and, thereby, stay in power.³⁷ That they remained mostly in the realm of discussion and ideology and had a relatively small direct impact on policy may be the reason why the mercantilist tendencies discussed here have long gone under the radar.

As the idea of European progress through Enlightenment and natural science took hold over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Western views of China typically shifted from a significant degree of admiration for an alternate but equally complex civilisation to disdain for its perceived stagnation. This notion gained strength through the determinist ideas of social darwinism, as scholars started looking for explanations for Chinese "backwardness" in sociology – e.g. "Oriental despotism" – or genetics and race, a research agenda which would always accentuate difference over similarity. As such, some saw the outcome of the Opium Wars as evidence of white superiority. Others, like Karl Marx, saw

³⁴ See, for instance, M. Bloembergen and R. Raben, eds., *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief: Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië, 1890--1950* (Leiden: KITLV, 2009), or more recently Raben, "Colonial Distances: Dutch Intellectual Images of Global Trade and Conquest in the Postcolonial Age," in Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn, *The Dutch Empire*, 224. Bloembergen, *De koloniale vertoning: Nederland en Indië op de wereldtentoonstellingen, 1890--1950* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2002) is an exception.

³⁵ J.A.A. van Doorn, *De laatste eeuw van Indië. Ontwikkeling en ondergang van een koloniaal project* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1994); S. Moon, *Technology and Ethical Idealism: A History of Development in the Netherlands East Indies* (Leiden: CNWS, 2007); R. Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

³⁶ Exceptions are Van Doorn's *Laatste eeuw*, which precedes much of the cultural historical work on colonial history, and chapter 21 in R. Aerts, *De letterheren: Liberale cultuur in de negentiende eeuw; Het tijdschrift "De Gids"* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1997). For colonial labour relations, see the work of Ulbe Bosma and Matthias van Rossum.

³⁷ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 21--22; Gourevitch, "International Trade."

capitalism as a typically European civilisational stage and therefore inaccurately marked the Qing Empire as not capitalist.³⁸ It exemplifies how European views of Chinese society, including those discussed in this study, were usually obscured by Western standards. They do, however, mirror the ideas of the beholder, like how the dominant view on the Chinese subpopulation in the East Indies as "parasites" on society reflects a Dutch self-image of benevolent colonial rule.³⁹

Much work will remain to be done to understand the development of Dutch entrepreneurial and commercial visions of empire in an equally long term. Mindful of the plea not to overestimate the years from 1789 to 1815 as a historical watershed, there are obvious new factors at play in the nineteenth century, including the institution of parliamentary democracy, emergence of the managerial corporation, the further integration of empire in the (international) politics of the state, and the diminishing importance of seaborne trade as a defining aspect of Dutch empire. Those conditions form a starting point to this study. A focus on commercial actors' interaction with the Dutch state and the importance of nationalist self-identification are the primary reasons to choose to study visions of empire from a national rather than transnational perspective here.⁴⁰

The Qing Empire occupies a unique position in this world of the late nineteenth century due to the state of informal imperialism, with borders and economy held open by (the threat of) force from foreign powers.⁴¹ It was industrialising, but only to a minor extent; it was non-Western, though there was a Western presence. Though it was by far alone, arguably, none had the Qing Empire's capitalist appeal as "land of four hundred million customers."⁴² More than in Western states, where diplomacy held more authority, commercial actors were the main vehicle for personal and political international contact. This judgment may also serve as a hypothesis: that the context of the Qing Empire opens a window on the role of commerce in Dutch visions between free trade and imperialism.

Through political ideology, nationalism, and the private search for profit, how was the Netherlands' commercial approach of the Qing Empire between 1863 and 1903 shaped by conflict over the responsibility of the state in economic policy? This is the question this study ultimately seeks to answer. Three subquestions reflect the importance profit, national identity, and political ideology can be expected to have had for the motivation and justification of individual and collective Dutch actions towards the Qing Empire based on the dis-

³⁸ G. Blue and T. Brook, "Introduction," in *China and Historical Capitalism: Genealogies of Sinological Knowledge*, ed. Brook and Blue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 1--5; Blue, "China and Western Social Thought in the Modern Period," *ibid.*, 57--109.

³⁹ Van Doorn, *Laatste eeuw*, 154--155. This is not to say the historical value of European historical eye witness accounts is exclusively as *mirrors*. Jürgen Osterhammel evaluates this problem in *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 10--16.

⁴⁰ See Legêne's criticism in "European Character."

⁴¹ Osterhammel, "Semi-Colonialism," 297; 307.

⁴² Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 2.

cussion above. How did Dutch companies and individuals expect to make a profit, in the short or long term, after entering the Chinese market? What did involved actors see as national identity and the national interest with relation to Dutch commercial activity in China? Finally, how did developments in the different political views on economic policy come to be expressed in China policy and consular practice?

Sources

The Dutch commercial approach of the Qing Empire was shaped in the hands of only a small group of people: Dutch professionals and consuls working in the Qing Empire and politicians involved with China policy – usually the experts on foreign and colonial affairs. In the Dutch landscape, each of them was an expert in their own right on Chinese affairs and carried a specific baggage made up of political, professional, and socio-economic affiliation. In general, the number of Dutchmen working in the Qing Empire was small throughout the nineteenth century. In 1898, a point when the Empire's popularity in the Netherlands was already growing, there were sixty-five, with most of them working in the commercial or technical side of treaty port trade, in Dutch consulates, or part of the Catholic mission.⁴³ Counting families of the non-celibate, the total number of Dutch nationals in the Qing Empire may have approached a hundred at this time.

Among them were many prolific writers. First and foremost, they all used letters to share news, inform about life at home, or discuss work matters with each other or with family, acquaintances, and work relations living in the Netherlands or abroad. The consular service in particular relied quite heavily on reporting. Sharing updates on recent activities, news, and analysis of diplomatic developments in the Qing Empire and advising on policy issues were core elements of the consul general's duties towards the Foreign Ministry and relied on the hand-written mail report as its most important medium. Those keen to share their impressions of life far away from home published travel accounts in journals, newspapers, or book form. Often, the writers presented themselves as professionals (e.g. consuls, engineers) and reflected upon the state of their work field in the Qing Empire to a general audience. Some also targeted professional audiences with scholarly work or publications in professional journals. The more politically engaged would at times submit commentaries on Dutch China policy to journals or newspapers. With their "expert" takes on Chinese affairs, such articles could have considerable influence in domestic public debate, where knowledge of Far Eastern matters was generally scarce.

Together, these writings form the better part of the source corpus of correspondence, private and professional, and publications of the representatives of Dutch commerce in the Qing Empire between 1863 and 1903. As such, the study presents a collage of sorts of the Dutchmen involved in Sino-Dutch commerce in the studied period as "intermediate thinkers

⁴³ See the list in NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 39.

of empire," including investors and board members of a handful of Dutch companies seated in Amsterdam or The Hague with direct investments in the Empire.⁴⁴ The diversity of forms and audiences makes this a rather varied collection of perspectives on the role of Dutch commerce from a pool of authors equally interesting for their differences – director or engineer, Calvinist or Liberal, born rich or born poor – as for the commonalities in their identities as Dutch men in the Qing Empire.

Here, this precludes scholars and missionaries, whose work was of great influence on Dutch images of China but had less of a direct impact on policy and commerce. Willem Vissering's 1877 dissertation *On Chinese Currency* is nonetheless worth mentioning for the interest it showed in money and banking in Chinese history. Vissering's perspective on the subject as showing China's previously advanced but stagnant civilisation makes the study a textbook example of nineteenth-century European political Orientalism.⁴⁵ His younger brother Gerard continued the work by advising the government of the Republic of China on monetary reform in the early 1910s, building on his expertise on global and Asian finance as (former) president of the colonial Javasche Bank and Dutch central bank.⁴⁶

The lockdown of public life in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic was an important factor in this choice of sources. In a field of studies so reliant on public institutions or the hospitality of private parties, the resulting limits on source availability were considerable and demanded constant adaptation. Likewise, access to scholarly literature was not optimal. Two moments were of particular significance: while the closure of public archives during the early stages of research called for a broadening of scope based on the limited availability of sources, their reopening, long after the initial stage of source collection was completed, required selectiveness in the great amount of relevant archival material now once more available. Fundamentally, the study therefore relies on sources in book form or those published in source collections, like the engineer Johannis de Rijke's selected correspondence, and parts of online collections such as the online database for Dutch newspapers and journals Delpher.⁴⁷ As a result, contributing original source material was not the primary focus of this project.

These sources are used here to study the ideas, practice, and ideas *in practice* of Dutch activity in the Qing Empire.⁴⁸ They aid the reconstruction of bilateral relations over the four

⁴⁴ Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn, "Intellectual History," 2.

⁴⁵ W. Vissering, *On Chinese Currency: Coin and Paper Money* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1877), 12. See also Brook and Blue, *China and Historical Capitalism*.

⁴⁶ G. Vissering, *On Chinese Currency: Preliminary Remarks on the Monetary and Banking Reform in China*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1912--1914). Their father Simon was a leading economist and Financial Minister in his own right.

⁴⁷ L.A. van Gasteren et al., eds., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling. Berichten van Nederlandse watermannen, 1872--1903* (Amsterdam: Euro Book, 2000); Kamibayashi Y., *Johannis de Rijke: De ingenieur die de Japanse rivieren weer tot leven bracht*, trans. and ed. N. de Vroomen and P. de Vroomen (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1999).

⁴⁸ Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn, "Intellectual History," 2.

decades under scrutiny, which further relies on a study of parliamentary proceedings and secondary sources, and are used to assess how Dutch professionals envisioned these relations and the role of commerce in it. Crucial aspects of the sources are therefore how Dutch professionals in the Qing Empire described their own identity – Dutch, European, or otherwise – in relation to a Chinese identity, how they validated their work to the public, and other ways their work reflects cultural or political assumptions. Concepts like industry, engineering, technology, mineral resources, and man's relation with nature particularly stand out as typical markers of discourse on "modern" management of economy and society after Western example. The famous general in the Aceh War (1873--1914), J.B. van Heutsz, for instance, saw private exploitation by Western enterprise as a crucial part of Aceh's economic development and social uplift, justifying conquest.⁴⁹

In general, the East Indies play an important role in this history. They give the Netherlands its identity as a colonial power, are a prime object of developmentalist ideology and the investment of capital, inform the country's position in the imperial power struggle, and have a much larger stake in the development of bilateral trade than the metropole due to their proximity to the Qing Empire. The study of Dutchness and Dutch actors here conducted, however, refers to these concepts in their nineteenth-century metropolitan definition, separating the "Dutch" from non-Dutch population in the metropole and colonies along lines of genealogy and ethnicity, even though the ideas and policies discussed inevitably have a pervasive effect on colonial society as a whole. This also means the ethnic Chinese subpopulation of the East Indies, a crucial source of entrepreneurship in the colonies and trade with the Qing Empire, is left out of consideration.⁵⁰

Chapter Outline

The first of the four chapters in this thesis explores the study's central historiographic themes of liberal (utopian) internationalist and the development of economic policy, political ideology, business, empire, and nationalism in the Netherlands. Subsequent chapters follow a chronological order, each zooming in on a number of cases of Dutch activity in the Qing Empire. Chapter two covers the early years from 1863 until the mid-1880s during which the Dutch presence in the Qing Empire is limited to individuals active as merchants or in foreign employment and the Dutch consular service, too, consisted of only a handful of individuals spread out over the treaty ports. The work of consul general J.H. Ferguson and the design of a dredging plan for the port of Shanghai by De Rijke and G.A. Escher, both engineers in Japanese employ, are the main cases.

⁴⁹ P. van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1969), 218; V. van de Loo, *Uit naam van de majesteit: Het leven van J.B. van Heutsz, 1851--1924* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2020), 122--125.

⁵⁰ See A. Claver, *Dutch Commerce and Chinese Merchants in Java: Colonial Relationships in Trade and Finance, 1800--1942* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) for a comprehensive account of economic contact between the East Indies and the Qing Empire in this period.

Chapter three discusses the first Dutch business ventures into the Qing Empire during the mid-1880s to mid-1890s. Royal Dutch started selling kerosene in the Empire, India and Siam starting in 1894 while colonial plantations and industry collaborated to gain a more beneficial position in the labour trade. The establishment and work of the Society for the Promotion of Dutch Engineering Works Abroad is the topic of the chapter's second half. This organisation of engineers, politicians, bankers, and entrepreneurs in marine construction attempted to gain commissions for Dutch marine construction. Strikingly, attitudes to Dutch China policy differ greatly among the separate businesses, even though each was competing for market share in the Qing Empire and the world.

Because of this study's reliance on Dutchmen active in public debate and those whose letters were considered important enough to collect and publish, many of its protagonists are among the better-known personalities in the historiography on Sino-Dutch contact.⁵¹ De Rijke has gained some fame for his successful engineering career spent mostly in Japan.⁵² Ferguson and Knobel are well-known as the first Dutch consuls general to Beijing, due in part to the considerable controversy surrounding some of their actions. Several authors note the existence of the Society for Promotion's failed 1891 proposal for Yellow River flood control, while Royal Dutch' activity in the Empire is discussed in several multi-volume works on the oil company's history.⁵³

Finally, the fourth chapter discusses the remaining years until right after the turn of the century, when foreign voices predicting the end of the Qing Empire and subsequent partition of China grew the loudest and the number of Dutch businesses in the Qing Empire started to grow significantly. This chapter starts out discussing Knobel's ideas on the growth of Dutch business and his efforts for *Het Buitenland*, followed by the establishment of the JCJL and the NHM Shanghai agency. Together, these sources show the variety of Dutch interests in the Qing Empire as well as concluding the study of its evolution over the near forty-year period discussed here.

⁵¹ See in particular Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*; L.L. Blussé and F.-J. van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders: Geschiedenis van de Nederlands-Chinese betrekkingen, 1600--2007* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2008), 159--200.

⁵² See also K. Sizoo, *Johannis and Hendrik de Rijke: Two Dutch Engineers in the Yangtze Delta, 1875-1919* (Shanghai: Consulate General of the Netherlands, 2001).

⁵³ D.A. Pietz, *The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 80--81; J. Jonker and J.L. van Zanden, *From Challenger to Joint Industry Leader, 1890--1939*, vol. 1 of *A History of Royal Dutch Shell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); F.C. Gerretson, *Geschiedenis der "Koninklijke"*, 5 vols. (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1932--1971).

Chapter 1. Holland's Calling

Our position at the peace conferences is weakened if the hotels in The Hague are poor and expensive and if our street children are rude; just as it is strengthened by every Dutch dredger in East Asia, by every prize for Dutch manufacture, by every award for a Dutch orchestra, by every little Dutch tube of liquid helium.

C. van Vollenhoven, 1910.¹

The Netherlands and the Dutch have a strong reputation as an idealist, headstrong nation – abroad, but certainly also at home. In absence of power, they choose to lead by example. Such was also the legal professor Cornelis van Vollenhoven's (1874--1933) message when he petitioned for the Netherlands to embrace its new role as center of international law in a pamphlet published in literary journal *De Gids* in 1910 and, more successfully, 1913. He named it "Holland's calling." When the country hosted the first International Peace Conference of 1899, similar opinions had been very rare.² In the fragment quoted above, Van Vollenhoven effortlessly extended the idea of Dutch guidance to the fields of technology, culture, morality, and, strikingly, dredging in the Far East. In the Qing Empire, a Dutch company was just then completing its first commission. Clearly, its work spoke to the nationalist imagination.

Van Vollenhoven's combination of international politics, overseas commerce, and Dutch moral authority in a single nationalist narrative reflects an earlier trend in the same journal, starting in the 1870s, when its coverage of the outside, particularly the non-European world took a distinct imperialist turn. Well-connected contributors like P.N. Muller, Charles Boissevain – Gideon Boissevain's first cousin – and Balthasar Heldring called for support to private enterprise and lauded the aggressive expansion of Dutch control in the East Indies. Their "imperialism motivated by entrepreneurship and national prestige," as the historian Remieg Aerts describes in his study of the journal, reflects the coming together of commerce, nationalism, and empire as discussed in the introduction. This chapter discusses how this development fits into the history of business, politics, and nationalism, and how it fits Dutch economic and China policy in the nineteenth century.

¹ C. van Vollenhoven, "Roeping van Holland," *De Gids* 74, no. 4 (1910): 201. Translation adapted from G. Somsen, "'Holland's Calling': Dutch Scientists' Self-fashioning as International Mediators," in *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe: Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War*, eds. R. Lettevall, Somsen, and S. Widmalm (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2012), 49.

² P. Corduener, "Risée van de wereld of land van Grotius? De synthese tussen nationalisme en internationalisme in het Nederlandse *fin de siècle*," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 125, no. 2 (2012): 205--211.

Liberal Dreams

In essence, law, free trade, and engineering were liberal dreams. There has been renewed appreciation in recent years for the Concert of Europe, the post-Napoleonic order introduced at the Congress of Vienna (1814--1815) which established a century of relative stability in Europe – not outside it – with a collection of treaties, redrawn boundaries, and a shared commitment to the balance of power.³ As a conservative restoration returning power into the hands of monarchs and secretive aristocratic diplomacy, however, it was a source of disillusionment for Europeans who had grown accustomed to the idea of political reform towards individual equality and government by the people after the French Revolution of 1789.⁴ Competing nineteenth-century ideas of utopian internationalism all imagined different, supposedly more just methods of governing Europe and the world in harmony and peace.

Most alternatives shared the idea that war was the product of the conservative order's lust for power, whereas humanity, when left to its own devices, was naturally peace-loving. As a result, they sought most of all for innovative state mechanisms reflecting and channeling the general tendencies of society. Free trade was one such mechanism which entrusted the well-being of the nation to the natural flow of things and the individual pursuit of profit. The English Radical and free trade advocate Richard Cobden defended state relations based on bilateral commercial treaties as a simpler, more democratic alternative to the Concert and with his campaign against the Corn Laws played a leading role in the British turn to free trade around 1850.⁵ Though not as closely involved with the day-to-day of international policy and state legislation, scientific internationalism built on similar values. Henri de Saint-Simon (1760--1825), one of its most recognisable figures, imagined a future of Europe as a single political entity with one monarch and one parliament, thus creating peace through unity. As an effort to promote the free flow of (economic) contact between East and West, the Suez Canal, constructed between 1859 and 1869 on the initiative of the French consul-turned-entrepreneur F.M. de Lesseps, embodied the same ideal of global harmony and relied on the work of engineers to do so. It was helped by the *crédit mobilier* banking movement of the 1850s, which put Saint-Simon's ideals into practice by investing in infrastructure. A working people was a peaceful one, it seemed to say.⁶

The Netherlands had seen several of the innovative liberal economic principles applied under the "merchant king" Willem I (r. 1813--1840), who sought to unify the young king-

³ See, for instance, B. de Graaf, I. de Haan, and B. Vick, eds., *Securing Europe after Napoleon: 1815 and the New European Security Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁴ M. Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 5.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 38--43.

⁶ Mazower, *Governing the World*, 96--104; J.W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848--1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 73--74.

dom's Northern and Southern halves through active social and economic policy.⁷ The monarch had great enthusiasm for the construction of roads and canals, while the General Netherlands Society for the Patronage of Industry or *Société Générale* he established in 1822 was the first successful example in Europe of a bank set up for the nurturing of industry through investment. It is commonly seen as a forerunner to the *crédit mobilier*. Likewise, Willem took the initiative for the establishment of the NHM and, as founder and shareholder, had great influence on its course. While the aim of the king's active industrial policy was to rebuild and modernise the national economy and bring the Netherlands to a higher stature – he liked to see the NHM as a modern successor to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) – the use of private enterprise conveniently gave him more formal control over policy than the monarch's constitutional position normally allowed.⁸

It meant the trade with China was once again privatised. Alternating between direct trade in Guangzhou and indirect trade in Batavia and other trading outposts across South East Asia, the VOC had exchanged Chinese tea, silk, and porcelain in a myriad of shapes for European goods like cloth, glass, and art, spices obtained elsewhere, and money until its dissolution in 1798, when the trade passed to the hands of the state.⁹ Due to the national government's discontent with the state of Sino-Dutch trade, however, responsibility for the Dutch representation in Guangzhou alternated between the NHM, the national government, and the East Indies colonial government until the opening of relations in 1863.¹⁰

The royal family's share and influence in the NHM gradually declined after Willem's death in 1843.¹¹ With the new constitution of 1848, moreover, power in the Netherlands shifted further from the monarch to parliament, where a Liberal majority now preached the gospel of non-intervention and cut on government spending to recover from the state of debt the king had left behind. Companies he helped establish were privatised, though colonial policy and the NHM form a notable exception. By 1870, the "liberal programme" had

⁷ J. Laureyssens, "Willem I, de Société Générale en het economisch beleid," in *Staats- en Natievorming in Willem I's Koninkrijk (1815--1830)*, eds. C.A. Tamse and E. Witte (Brussel: VUBPress, 1992), 207.

⁸ T. de Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij, 1824--1964* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), 37--44; A. Schrauwers, "'Regenten' (Gentlemanly) Capitalism: Saint-Simonian Technocracy and the Emergence of the 'Industrialist Great Club' in the Mid-nineteenth Century Netherlands," *Enterprise & Society* 11, no. 4 (2010): 754; Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 109--148; J.P.M. Koch, *Oranje in revolutie & oorlog: Een Europese geschiedenis, 1772--1890* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2018), 161--167.

⁹ Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 28--29; 43. Transliterations of Chinese geographical names may differ for various reasons. For coherence, I have chosen to use the contemporary Hanyu Pinyin system throughout this study.

¹⁰ L.L. Blussé, "Dutch Consular Representation on the Southeast Coast of China during the Nineteenth Century," in *Sailing to the Pearl River. Dutch Enterprise in South China 1600-2000*, eds. Cai H. and Blussé (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Publishing House, 2004), 62--71; Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 131; 159--161.

¹¹ De Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij*, 30.

largely been completed. Subsidies were abolished by and large and revenue from tariffs reached the lowest point of the century.¹² To an extent, François Guizot's "enrichissez-vous" characterises this period halfway through the nineteenth century when, more than ever, states practiced the liberal belief in private initiative for the development of industry, infrastructure, and overall progress. In the Netherlands, calls arose for government to retract from the colonial economy as it had at home, and stimulate the exploitation of natural resources and previously unused land – particularly the East Indies' so-called Outer Provinces.¹³

Empire

The wave of privatisations as well as the emergence of limited companies especially from the 1860s onwards led to the proliferation of boards and emergence of the multiple director as a social and political phenomenon. Close ties within the business world were encouraged, for instance by the *crédit mobilier* movement's call for the collaboration of industry and finance. In the Netherlands, merchants were especially active, reflecting trade's relative dominance in the Dutch economy. Whereas the phenomenon of a strongly interconnected national business world with an elite of some two hundred influential multiple directors carried over into the contemporary world, their ties to social, cultural, and political institutions are distinct for the late nineteenth century, when many local and national representatives for the large cities were either bankers or entrepreneurs. Almost inevitably, many of the investors who play a role in this history of Dutch commerce in China, such as Cremer, Boissevain, De Marez Oyens, and Mees, were members of this business elite, elite families, or both.¹⁴

Several authors have argued this small, well-connected financial elite had both means and motive to influence colonial policy. Interpreting the applicability of Cain and Hopkins' *gentlemanly capitalism* model to the Dutch context, Maarten Kuitenbrouwer pointed out the substantial profits on capital investments in newly colonised areas to argue a system of Dutch "*regenten*" *capitalism* influenced Dutch expansion in the East Indies.¹⁵ Jan Luiten van Zanden and Arthur van Riel expanded this idea to national economic policy in their institutional economics approach to the nineteenth-century Dutch economy. Both approaches

¹² Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 147; 216; 221; 232; 312.

¹³ W. Coster, *Baron op klompen: Mr. B.W.A.E. baron Sloet tot Oldhuis, 1807--1884; Aan de hefboom tot welvaart* (Wageningen: NAHI, 2008), 279.

¹⁴ Schrauwers, "Regenten Capitalism," 763; H. Schijf, *Netwerken van een financieel-economische elite. Personële verbindingen in het Nederlandse bedrijfsleven aan het eind van de negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Spinhuis, 1993), 16, 172--175; Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 385; M. Kuitenbrouwer and H. Schijf, "The Dutch Colonial Business Elite at the Turn of the Century," *Itinerario* 22, no. 1 (1998): 68.

¹⁵ M. Kuitenbrouwer, "Drie omwentelingen in de historiografie van het imperialisme: Engeland en Nederland," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 107 (1994): 581--583.

see the ministry of Cremer – who was considered a spokesperson for colonial business in parliament and filled board positions in numerous colonial businesses, particularly shipping, during his career – as epitomising this phenomenon. Van Zanden and Van Riel associate the influence of business especially with Liberal politics. Starting in the 1850s, the evolution of the services sector and its desire to exploit opportunities for Dutch capital in the East Indies were of considerable influence, they argue, on the gradual dismantling of the increasingly controversial *cultivation system* in favour of the stimulation of private exploitation as the state's model of colonial revenue and economic development from 1870 onwards.¹⁶

The confessional electoral victory in 1901, made possible by an expansion of suffrage in the 1890s, ended this so-called liberal period in colonial rule. With the *ethical policies* seeking the moral and material uplifting of the colonial population, a Dutch answer to the civilising mission, colonial politics under the new Kuyper cabinet for the first time formally pursued more than economic gain alone. However, the political influence of colonial business did not come to a halt. Though it looked to end the excesses of colonial business, Western enterprise was encouraged under the ethical policies for its contribution to the growth of employment and per capita GDP. In general, the colonial state answered more to the wishes of business than was the case in the metropole, intervening or retreating from the economy as desired, while support for social legislation was much weaker.¹⁷

The vagueness of the policies' ethical header and applicability both to secular and Christian morality brought Liberals and Calvinists together under a single umbrella while allowing them to pursue their own objectives. The ethical argument was very similar to the internationalist national identity discussed at this chapter's outset. Van Vollenhoven was an adamant ethicist as well as a former assistant to Cremer, who praised him as the best example of his efforts to attract young men who shared his political convictions to the Colonial Ministry.¹⁸ Liberalism, Calvinism, business, and law thus all joined forces in the improvement of the livelihoods of the colonial population on their own terms. Colonial engineers, on whose technocratic, utopian narrative of the preceding half century the ethical policies built, were conspicuously absent among the most prominent ethicists. It shows the movement was more administrative than scientific. It applied the idea of social liberalism to colonial politics and thereby justified Dutch rule as morally superior based on liberalism as Van Vollenhoven later would. Thus, the ethical policies not only served an ideological purpose, but also the pragmatic justification of the Netherlands' rule over its colonies.¹⁹

¹⁶ Kuitenbrouwer and Schijf, "Colonial Business Elite," 73; Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 394--401; Kuitenbrouwer, "Drie omwentelingen," 583.

¹⁷ E. Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten: Vijf studies in koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonésische Archipel, 1877--1942* (Utrecht: HES, 1981), 177; 191; 201.

¹⁸ NL-HaNA, Collection 318 Jhr. C.H.A. van der Wijck, 2.21.183.98, inv.no. 3, Cremer to Governor-general C.H.A. van der Wijck, Nov. 16, 1898.

¹⁹ Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten*, 178--179; 194--200; 208; Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 401; Van Doorn, *Laatste eeuw*, 149--151.

Several historians have described this phenomenon as *ethical imperialism*. Strikingly, Kuitenbrouwer argued it applied more to colonial than foreign politics around 1900.²⁰

China Policy

The growing importance of private enterprise in colonial politics is reflected in the Netherlands' three China policy objectives articulated most frequently in parliament in the studied time period. They remained mostly unchanged since the opening of diplomatic relations in 1863. The first, increasing trade, targeted both the Dutch colonies and metropole. Due to their proximity, China was an important partner to the East Indies for imports like rice and potential exports such as sugar while at home, demand for tea and spices saw few developments but the export of textiles gave a sense of what increasing Chinese demand for manufactures could mean for Dutch industries. The second objective, encouraging the migration of Chinese labourers to the East Indies, reflected the sudden reliance on indentured workers as the main source of cheap labour in the Dutch colonies after the abolition of slavery in the East (1860) and West Indies (1863). The "trade" in Chinese labourers at dedicated markets in the Straits Settlements was essential to several sectors in colonial agriculture and industries and the competitiveness of their products on the international market, such as the successful tobacco plantations on Western Sumatra.

In several ways, the labour trade is related to the third policy objective of minimising the Chinese mainland's formal and informal influence on Chinese subjects in the East Indies. The pressure to assess the living and working conditions of Chinese subjects abroad increased from the mid-1870s onwards as a result of scandals in other European colonies.²¹ On top of that came the emperor's challenge, through concepts like *ius sanguinis*, of the Netherlands' authority over the ethnic Chinese subpopulation of the East Indies. The colonial government perceived family ties to the mainland, trade, and secret societies as further threats to its jurisdiction. To prevent the Qing government from gathering intelligence, organising workers, or staging political protest, the establishment of a Chinese diplomatic presence in the East Indies was therefore to be prevented at all costs. This ambiguity, a severe strain on the possibility of developing diplomatic relations based on reciprocity and the mutual recognition of sovereignty, caused parliament to object against the appointment of an ambassador, as the Great Powers had, as the Netherlands' top representative to the Qing Empire in 1872 in favour of a consul general.²² As a result, and especially on emigration issues, room for manoeuvre in diplomatic contact was limited.

²⁰ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 322--323.

²¹ F. de Goey, *Consuls and the Institutions of Global Capitalism, 1783--1914* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 80--81.

²² A similar discussion had already taken place in the 1830s. Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 159.

Eventually, these objectives became core to the emerging conflict of neutrality and imperialism in Dutch China policy, which was more than a schematic joust in the mind of the Foreign Minister or on the cabinet's drawing board. The leaders of state had always preached neutrality and W.H. de Beaufort, who steered the Dutch response to the Yihetuan Uprising as Foreign Minister in the Pierson cabinet, was especially cautious. In 1897, he warned Knobel that Dutch business alliances or shared concessions with foreign parties in China could be perceived as signs of partiality.²³ Neutrality thereby stood in the way of the Dutch commercial policy objective in a time when the "competition" was especially active. Great Powers aside, the commercial success of lesser powers like Belgium and Denmark was particularly a nuisance to many in the Netherlands.

With their notorious proposals from 1896 and 1898 for the Dutch annexation of Shantou, a treaty port in the Southern Province of Guangdong, Knobel and other Dutch officials in the Qing Empire also played a leading role among the dissident voices who advocated Dutch participation in the partition of China, where Dutch imperialism is manifest in clearer terms. Answering a long-standing wish of colonial planters and industrialists, private initiative together with German consular support had established a steady outflow of indentured labourers to the East Indies in Shantou in the late 1880s, circumventing the influential Straits markets. Knobel's annexation proposals aimed to protect the supply of labour to the colonies and cut out German influence in case the foreign powers divided China between them. De Beaufort and his predecessor J. Röell rejected the proposals out of hand but once again, Knobel's conflict with the Foreign Ministry reflects his more aggressive interpretation of national policy. Though the proposals were submitted in secret, similar ideas were voiced publicly by the likes of Calvinist party leader Abraham Kuyper in parliament (though cautiously) and shipping director Ernst Heldring, the aforementioned Balthasar Heldring's son, as one of several like-minded contributors to the Liberal newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad*.²⁴

Strikingly, this loose coalition of businessmen, government officials, Liberals, and Calvinists speaking out in favour of Dutch colonialism on Chinese soil was central to the development of Dutch business in China in the following years. While during the Liberal Pierson cabinet, Colonial Minister Cremer took the initiative for the JCJL's establishment, it was the finalisation of this policy under the Kuyper cabinet in 1902 which especially drew surprise.²⁵ Whereas it might be explained as an example of Kuyper's notorious opportunism, there is no historiographical evidence to show the cabinet supported the JCJL loan to appease the Liberal opposition, for instance, out of respect for the Queen's demand not to deviate from the existing line in colonial and foreign policy, or because the state of the

²³ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 199--200.

²⁴ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 240--243; Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 210--215.

²⁵ Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaانvaart*, 45.

colonial economy it inherited left it no other choice.²⁶ Ernst Heldring has been pointed out as a crucial figure in the growth of the Dutch business presence in China due to his position on the JCJL's board of directors and influence through his father, the company's president at the time, on the NHM.²⁷ Their efforts stand out not only for the rather sudden shift to state support for private enterprise but also for the connection to territorial expansion and defiance of political neutrality, for which diplomats and politicians in particular would have known the Netherlands by any means did not have the military or political leverage.

An Enlightened Nation

While many in the Liberal press and public more generally remained supporters of neutrality and abstention, others made a nationalist turn and criticised the government's colonial policy in favour of a more unilaterally economic view. Some supported the idea of annexing Shantou wholeheartedly. Among those were the Royal Dutch Geographic Society, a distinct "colonial lobby," and Charles Boissevain, who wrote a powerful editorial as *Algemeen Handelsblad*'s editor-in-chief.²⁸ They epitomise what Aerts, in his study of *De Gids*, called imperialism motivated by entrepreneurship and national prestige, which took hold from 1870 onwards.

Economic arguments and criticism of state exploitation had always been foundational to critiques of colonial politics in *De Gids*, a popular platform for Liberal social and political commentary. Around 1870, however, ethical and humanitarian motivations were gradually replaced with a focus on economic exploitation and productivity as core civilisational values. As a discourse of international, imperial competition gained ground, the protection and economic efficiency of the colonies gradually became core objectives and contributing authors started arguing for state support to business and the exploitation of mineral resources in the colonies. Initially, their focus on efficiency had mostly been a response to the inevitable detriments of the centralisation of colonial decision-making towards The Hague, strikingly a product of Liberal reform. Economic crisis exacerbated the perceived need to generate income and employment opportunities abroad, a motivation also recognisable in historical economics, while social darwinism popularised the articulation of (economic) difference in terms of cultural and racial superiority. Others have also pointed to the growing

²⁶ See the historiography on the Kuyper cabinet, e.g. R. Kuiper, *Zelfbeeld en wereldbeeld: Antirevolutionairen en het buitenland, 1848--1905* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1992); D.Th. Kuiper and G.J. Schutte, eds., *Het kabinet-Kuyper, 1901--1905* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2001).

²⁷ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 28--34.

²⁸ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 242; P. van der Velde, "The Royal Dutch Geographical Society and the Dutch East Indies, 1873--1914: From Colonial Lobby to Colonial Hobby," in *Geography and Imperialism, 1820--1940*, ed. M. Bell, R. Butlin, and M. Hefferman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

independence of the domestic and colonial press and growth of the commercial printing industry as factors influencing public debate.²⁹

It was the rise of nationalism upon which this Dutch imperialism finally came to its complete and unreserved expression.³⁰ Like so many fields, it represented a break in the Liberal tradition. J.R. Thorbecke, the quintessential man of 1848 in Dutch politics, had adhered to a sense of *nationality* where national strength and the viability of the nation-state derived from a collective essence which could develop in interplay with a Liberal state but should *not* be imposed from above, nor was it necessarily historical. Right around the time of Renan's 1882 "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," however, many Liberals made a shift to nationalism, a generational gap largely aligned with the rise of the so-called Young Liberals. They are remembered mostly for the proposal to establish state schools and use Dutch history to actively fashion an "enlightened nation," thus giving a new interpretation to Liberal politics now its mission for constitutional reform had largely been completed.³¹ The Liberals' internal divisions were soon eclipsed by fierce opposition from parliament's Catholics and the Calvinist Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), which sought to counteract the further secularisation of public life and promote the political self-determination of the neocalvinist subpopulation.³² Conflict between confessionals and Liberals over state education gripped parliament for decades to come.

The new outlook on the outside world is paraphrased in the famous words of the writer Lodewijk van Deyssel as a "march of nations," a historical development not simply towards national greatness but to being the greatest nation of all. As a unifying mechanism, it was very much a response to liberalism's crisis and the feared rise of the Left. The discourse built on the history of the Dutch Golden Age as the site of a national identity subject to preservation and development, exemplified in architecture and appreciation for seventeenth-century art. Colonial possessions and VOC, too, were part of this widely praised heritage. They were foregrounded particularly in response to conflict in South Africa and the East Indies, with the Lombok War (1894) and Boer War (1899--1902) as pivotal moments showing Dutch nationalism and colonial expansion pushed each other to new heights. It was also the point when "imperialism motivated by entrepreneurship and national prestige" came of age. In the 1890s, the Dutch nation seemed stronger than ever. The Dutch South-African Association (NZAV), whose mission to build a railway in Transvaal with Dutch fund-

²⁹ Aerts, *De letterheren*, 425--448; Raben, "'A New Dutch Imperial History? Perambulations in a Prospective Field,'" *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128, no. 1 (2013), 20; Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 187.

³⁰ Aerts, *De letterheren*, 445.

³¹ H. te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbefef: Liberalisme en nationalisme in Nederland, 1870--1918* (PhD diss., University of Groningen, 1992), 19--30.

³² N.C.F. van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland: Van oude orde naar moderniteit, 1750--1900* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 39; J.P.M. Koch, *Abraham Kuypers: een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006), 119; 171--176.

ing in the 1880s partly succeeded, and Vereeniging "het Buitenland" show nationalism's potential impact on business. Both appealed to ethnic kinship to organise business and investment along national lines for the political benefit.³³

Business Nationalism

Aerts' description of Dutch business-oriented imperialism shares a lot of characteristics with the model of regenten capitalism first outlined by Kuitenbrouwer. Their most significant differences lie in the rise of nationalism and shift to a "modern" imperialist ideology in line with European trends in the same era. This suggests a great deal of continuity in the entire period under review, in which nationalism, colonial expansion, political ideology, and the Dutch business sector were indeed mutually constitutive forces. Disentangling them can nonetheless be difficult: who influenced whom, who pursued which goals, and how representative were they for Dutch nationalism and imperialism as a whole?

Relevant business histories have commonly characterised appeals to the national interest as regular business decisions motivated by the search for profit. This approach fits particularly well with the increasing number of companies in the late nineteenth century separating ownership from management, for which profit is the most important measure of success.³⁴ Of course, the prospect of profits was the great motivator behind the Dutch commercial interest in the Qing Empire. Though it was facing a period of political and economic crises while Western Europe was undergoing exponential growth and in 1900 had an estimated GDP per capita some six times lower than the Netherlands, its reputation as "land of four hundred million customers" could motivate businesses to risk a venture into the fraught Chinese market in anticipation of future riches, especially when the foreign competition was already making such moves.³⁵

Framing businesses as guardians of the national interest could help to secure valuable political and diplomatic support. Such backing was indispensable in the case of large industrial concessions such as mines or railways while in other branches of the Chinese economy, diplomatic support could simply help to keep up with the foreign competition. The potential benefit for the national good laid *within* their profits, through the growth and competitiveness of Dutch industries and the trickling down of profits into other sectors of the domestic economy. This shows the fuzziness of the phenomenon under scrutiny here. If

³³ Van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland*, 39; 564--566; 582; P.B.M. Blaas, *Geschiedenis en nostalgie: De historiografie van een kleine natie met een groot verleden* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000), 52--55; Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 273--277; Te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbef*, 142--159; Aerts, *De letterheren*, 445.

³⁴ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 377--387.

³⁵ j. Bolt, M. Timmer, and J.L. van Zanden, "GDP per capita since 1820," in *How was Life? Global Well-being since 1820*, eds. Van Zanden et al. (Paris: OECD, 2015), 67. Similar European ideas of China as an untapped market go back to the 13th century. Blue and Brook, "Introduction," 1.

there is a national benefit to the work of Dutch businesses abroad, it only follows after they have made a financial gain of their own and perhaps used a considerable subsidy in the process. In his study of the NHM's history, for instance, Ton de Graaf argues the company was, in some cases, motivated by the national interest around 1900 – much more so than competing Dutch banks – but does not analyse how this dynamic evolved over time or how the company balanced national interest and profitability. In the conclusions, the author chooses to focus on more tangible stakeholders such as the royal family, shareholders, supervisory board, and managing board, arguing references to the national interest were ultimately made for their personal (financial) gain.³⁶ Perhaps due to poor clarity of definition, "nationalism" as a political and cultural concept thus seems hard to reconcile with the field of business history.

A notable exception is J.N.F.M. à Campo's study of the Royal Packet Navigation Company (Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, KPM), another beneficiary of a substantial subsidy. The author argues the company, due to its subsidy and service to government, is best understood as combining commercial and political motives. It has many similarities to, for instance, the JCJL: inspired by sentiments of economic and political expansionism, it was established with a government subsidy in 1888 to bring inter-island shipping in the East Indies back from English into Dutch hands.³⁷ Furthermore, there is great overlap between the boards of the KPM and JCJL and the members of Het Buitenland, while between 1891 and 1897, Cremer functioned as the KPM's president. Kuitenbrouwer describes its monopolisation of inter-island shipping in the East Indies with the government's approval as an instance of preemptive political expansion applied to business.³⁸ Nonetheless, À Campo, too, remains unimpressed by the growing popularity of appeals to the national interest for companies like the JCJL. As the close of the century saw a wave of nationalism come over Dutch politics, he argues, the incentive to try and convince parliament with nationalist arguments simply grew.³⁹

On the political side, there is a consensus that some of the motives for the expansion of colonial rule in the East Indies were economic: first, accommodating interest from the private sector in territories outside of *de facto* Dutch control and, second, making way for taxable economic activity.⁴⁰ The networks regenten capitalism describes certainly fall under the

³⁶ De Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij*, 30; 425--427; 435. Other relevant histories of Dutch business in China also consider political motivations as external to corporate decisions. See Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*; K. Sluyterman and B. Bouwens, *Verdiept verleden: Een eeuw Koninklijke Boskalis Westminster en de Nederlandse baggerindustrie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 56--59.

³⁷ J.N.F.M. à Campo, *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij: Stoomvaart en staatsvorming in de Indonesische archipel, 1888--1914* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1992), 59.

³⁸ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 346.

³⁹ À Campo, *KPM*, 103.

⁴⁰ J.T. Lindblad, "Economic Aspects of the Dutch Expansion in Indonesia, 1870--1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1989): 23--24.

former motive. In his study of Dutch (imperial) nationalism, Martin Bossenbroek points out the Deli Company, Cremer's former employer, and Royal Dutch as typical examples, pioneering commercial expansion within Sumatra and subsequently demanding political and military support through close connections to government which were sustained as Kuyper took the helm. However, he notes, these companies were exceptions to the rule.⁴¹ Economic expansion was only a sporadic objective in colonial politics as a whole and only tangibly influenced decision-making around military expeditions in two or three cases, where they were never entirely separated from bureaucratic motives.⁴²

Instead, most recent scholars have focused on the imperial *center*, not the colonial *periphery*, as the motor of Dutch imperialism. Often, nationalism takes center stage. Following Niek van Sas, Bossenbroek argues the Dutch case fits well with Ernest Gellner's famed industrialisation thesis describing nationalism as carried by a societal forefront inspired by the rise of industry and subsequent need to compete across borders. The waves of identification with conflict in South Africa and the East Indies which defined Dutch nationalism, Bossenbroek writes, were kindled by both Liberals and Calvinists with the imperialist objective of expanding Dutch economic, political, and cultural influence in the world. Likewise, the competitiveness of Dutch business was more of a concern to parliament than business. Though regenten capitalists contributed, this imperialism's most vocal proponents were military officers, scientists, the queens Emma and Wilhelmina, and Liberal and Calvinist politicians and opinion leaders.⁴³ We may certainly count Charles Boissevain among the latter group. It suggests that for Dutch imperialists, ideology and self-interest often went hand in hand.

Conclusion

Examples like Knobel's Shantou annexation proposal and calls for state support to colonial business in *De Gids* show once again how pressure on the Dutch state to take a more active role in foreign and colonial politics increased between 1870 and 1900. This development mirrors the rise of historical economics discussed in the introduction, particularly in its replacement of classical liberalism and utopian internationalism with a combination of imperialism, nationalism, and mercantilism. Whereas there is always an argument to be made for Dutch political exceptionalism, parallels with the political history of neighbouring states where social liberalism was accompanied by mercantilist tendencies should therefore not be too easily dismissed. That Dutch political neutrality and dependence on British protec-

⁴¹ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 114--115; 346; 355.

⁴² Locher-Scholten, "Dutch Expansion," 102--104.

⁴³ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 12; 99--100; 350--357; Van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland*, 22--24.

torate made it impossible for ruling parties to assert a nationalist narrative and the Dutch economy remained very open compared to its neighbours does not mean the sentiments were not there. Meanwhile, doubts about the Dutch nation-state's right to exist may have disappeared by 1900, but fear of German aggression and especially loss of colonial dominion in turn were greater than they had ever been before.⁴⁴

Several trends impacted upon this development. First, the global rise of empire and international competition, which Bossenbroek argues parliament was especially susceptible to. The second trend of promoting Dutch prestige abroad was, instead, spearheaded by a broader societal elite of Liberals and Calvinists. The third trend, of a popular nationalist sentiment, created a platform for both. Following Gellner, they all stand in connection to industrialisation, which overarches developments like the competition across borders, the intensified search for natural resources, the emergence of the managerial corporation, and the increased importance of business and the *multiple director* as social phenomena.

Social legislation, the ethical policies, and Van Vollenhoven's national identity to a degree all show the incorporation of government intervention, imperialism, and nationalism in policy and ideology by the Liberal-Calvinist coalition. "Holland's calling," as such, represents more than just a national identity. It stands for the ethical imperialist mission articulated in Dutch politics mostly after 1900, building on Christianisation and the Liberal ideals of freedom, peace, and prosperity, to uplift and civilise both at home and abroad. The connected idea of the moral superiority of the nation served national cohesion and created leverage in international and imperial politics.

Within this frame, overseas business could secure political support by accentuating its importance to the economy and national prestige using directors' informal influence with government as regenten capitalists, or, eventually, a nationalist narrative to gain popular support. Nonetheless, Bossenbroek argues, their overall role in the emergence of Dutch nationalism and imperialism was small. Strikingly, though, many of the men involved in the expansion of Dutch business towards the Qing Empire, like Cremer or Heldring, are indeed known as typical entrepreneurial imperialists. With Kuyper, their coalition resembles that of the ethical imperialism. Thus, a challenge remains to understand the Qing Empire's role in Dutch imperialism, though some of the main motivating trends, such as financial gain, national prestige, and Christianisation, are clear.

⁴⁴ Cf. Te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef*, 156; 180; 184; 236; 273.

Chapter 2. An Age of Individuals

When Sino-Dutch diplomatic relations were opened in 1863, the Qing Empire's treaty ports were already hosts to lively communities of foreigners, whose bunds, wharves, roads, and trading houses had transformed the waterfronts. They spoke a pidgin of English and Chinese and attempted to bring "home" to China in the form of racecourses, newspapers, and European food. Shortly before, with the more well-known 1858 Treaty of Tianjin which brought a temporary stop to the Second Opium War (1856--1860), this system had been expanded to include cities all along the Chinese coast, from Haikou on the island of Hainan in the far South to Niuzhuang on the Liaodong Peninsula in the very North. Significantly, the incorporation of Tianjin and three ports up the river Yangzi as well as freedom of movement (with the right documents) brought foreigners upcountry and close to the seat of power in heretofore unseen numbers – even to Beijing itself, where MFN beneficiaries now had the right to establish a legation.¹

Though some Dutchmen found employ in the ports, for the first ten years, their numbers remained small. In the 1870s, two men entered upon this stage who would go on to leave significant marks on the development of Dutch business in China. Both were ardently dedicated to the development of their respective fields but outsiders within their professional communities. Many career diplomats were members of Dutch nobility who possessed the political networks and financial means to sustain a generally costly diplomatic career, but not Jan Helenus Ferguson (1826--1908), the first Dutch consul general and resident minister to the Qing Empire. Ferguson grew up in the Dutch West Indies and made his career in the colonial administration. His widely read works on international law, of which he was a dedicated student, earned him a membership of the renowned Institut de Droit International in 1888.²

Johannis de Rijke (1842--1913) was born into a family of dikeworkers and had his work in marine construction laid out for him. Even though he showed talent, his lack of formal training stood in the way of a career at home and recognition from the increasingly dynamic and global engineering profession. Together with his colleague George Arnold Escher (1843--1939), he travelled to Osaka in 1873 for what would prove a long and successful career in Japanese public works. Their stop in Shanghai set them on a course of surveys and proposals that would eventually see De Rijke lead the reform works on the nearby river Huangpu between 1906 and 1910. With this most coveted of early marine engineering

¹ R. Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832--1914* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), EPUB e-book, chap. 6.

² A. Eyffinger, "Tobias Asser's Legacy: The Pertinence of the *Institut de Droit International* to The Hague," *Netherlands International Law Review* 66 (2019): 325.

projects in the Qing Empire carried out with foreign methods – the first of its kind in many ways – De Rijke paved the way for the success of Dutch dredging in China in the following decades. This chapter discusses the way commercial and political interests as well as identity and nationalism manifested in the work of the two men in these early years of Dutch business in China.

2.1 The Civilised State

With the situation established in 1863, the Netherlands were comfortably positioned with regards to the Qing Empire, avoiding almost all political and financial commitments while MFN status ensured it could easily change course. Only a consul in Guangzhou and un-salaried consuls in the other treaty ports, generally of other European nationalities, represented the Dutch trade interests in the Qing Empire.

Several issues caused the change in policy leading to Ferguson's appointment in 1872. First, the Qing were unwilling to grant *exequatur* to consuls unless a diplomat acted as guarantor, a reading of the Treaty of Tianjin the Dutch government followed. This had already been the cause of trouble when Dutch nationals in need were unable to find diplomatic protection. Second, for the sectors of shipping and trade, the poor state of Dutch trade with China was reason to call on the state to take a more active stance.³ Thirdly, the Burlingame mission of 1868 had instilled government with a sense that the Qing Empire's foreign relations were entering a new era. As special Qing envoy, the former U.S. minister to China Anson Burlingame had campaigned for the empire's recognition as a member of the international community of states on a tour of the U.S. and Europe which also visited The Hague. He promised Chinese openness to trade, migration, and – with less justification – Christianisation.⁴ Achievements such as free immigration from China to the U.S., though short-lived, and the opening of Qing diplomatic missions in Great Britain and France in 1871 were signs of the mission's great success. Foreign Minister T.M. Roest van Limburg wrote to parliament that "in those laudable attempts, [the Chinese Government] may reasonably solicit an accommodating approach from those [Western] Powers in reciprocity, and expect to be treated correspondingly."⁵ The idea that trade with China would benefit from Dutch participation in this new "diplomatic" era of Chinese politics was upheld by each of the three consecutive Liberal cabinets (1868--1874) involved in the reform of the Dutch representation in China.⁶

³ Reports of the Second Chamber of Parliament (Verslag der handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, hereafter HTK) 1869--1870, 413--422; 1384--1397; HTK 1869--1870, App., 111 Staatsbegrooting, no. 3, Memorie van Toelichting (hereafter: MvT), 1419--1421.

⁴ J.D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), 214--215.

⁵ HTK 1869--1870, App., 111 Staatsbegrooting, no. 3, MvT, 1419.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

However, parliament was far removed from consensus on the state's duties towards trade. The Liberal representative and "diplomat killer" G. Dumbar had great success in those years in getting government to cut back, rather than increase, spending on what he saw as a needlessly expensive diplomatic apparatus for destinations where Dutch trade interests were small. He indicated that export statistics were low and only a handful of Dutch ships sailed to and from the Qing Empire every year to propose an amendment which caused significant delay to the proposed reforms of the China mission. Why the Netherlands needed an embassy when, in general, the promotion of trade was considered to benefit more from a much cheaper consulate also remained a point of contention. Even the Foreign Minister seemed unaware that the volume of trade was significantly larger than the statistics let on, as many exports made their way via German or British ports and were not recorded as trade with China.⁷

Reference to the fast expansion of British and French trade in the Qing Empire was not enough to convince Dumbar, who argued: "wanting to go along with the great gentlemen [has] never been in our benefit."⁸ The Conservative MP W. van Goltstein contested whether the Netherlands should be active in the Qing Empire at all, as trade had caused disturbances in the Qing Empire's peace with several states. Surely, he argued, keeping the peace was Dutch diplomacy's "foremost duty."⁹ Such discussion on whether the Netherlands should follow the imperial powers and be present at all in China and whether the interests of *state* and *trade* were always aligned disappeared almost completely from parliamentary debate on Dutch China policy in the following decades.¹⁰ To satisfy the opposition's demands, Ferguson was appointed as Dutch consul general and *chargé d'affaires* for the Qing Empire.¹¹ Thus, the requirements of the Tianjin Treaty were fulfilled but the Dutch mission in China retained a consular character. Parliament gave the Foreign Minister free choice of a treaty port which fell to Shanghai, ascribed great importance in the future of global trade, where Ferguson arrived in 1873.

Mission

After years in the navy and colonial administration of the Dutch West Indies, Ferguson had taken on his first diplomatic position in 1871. As governor *ad interim*, he was deployed to oversee the handover of Elmina, the last Dutch colonial possession in Africa. In the same year, he published his first work in the field of international law, a treatise on relief for the wounded at sea submitted to a competition issued by the Prussian Red Cross.¹² Particular-

⁷ HTK 1869--1870, 413--422; Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 75.

⁸ HTK 1869--1870, 413.

⁹ HTK 1870--1871, 659.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 614; 659--660.

¹¹ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 55.

¹² J.H. Ferguson, *The Red-Cross Alliance at Sea* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1871).

ly Ferguson's second work, the substantial *Manual of international law for the use of navies, colonies and consulates*, gained him widespread recognition in the field.¹³

International law was a rather new current within utopian internationalism. Two of its most influential representatives, the Red Cross and Institut de Droit International, were founded in 1863 and 1873 respectively. Though it sought more to codify war and international relations than presume to be able to abolish them altogether, international law built on a familiar premise: that it should not reflect monarchical authority, as was the founding conception of national law, but rather the peaceful, universal collective conscience.¹⁴ Coupled with the idea that codification was a sign of civilisational progress, law's universal applicability and its perceived European provenance gave rise to a strongly hierarchical world-view based on the development of law within society. First came the West, then lesser monarchies like the Qing and Ottoman Empires, and finally the "mere humans" of Africa and the Pacific.¹⁵ This made the discipline prone to reinterpretation for the goals of the state. Rather than stimulating peace and mutual recognition in encounters between the West and the rest, the narrative of civilisation versus barbarity became a justification for European imperialism and the use of violence, not least in the Boxer War.¹⁶

In his work, Ferguson similarly described law as the expression of an individual and collective sense of justice and a manifestation of the development of morality, and the state and international law as a population's attempt to manage and institutionalise morality within society.¹⁷ This morality, he described, was typically and exclusively Christian, leading him to see the spread of Christianity as a duty "owed to Civilization" shared by all Western powers. Compared to others in the discipline, his embrace of Christianity was far-reaching but not uncommon.¹⁸ It was with this attitude that Ferguson approached his work in the Qing Empire and strove for its incorporation in the brotherhood of states. He called for cooperation on the part of the treaty powers and saw no point in discord or strife, seeing as

¹³ J.H. Ferguson, *Manual of International Law, for the use of Navies, Colonies and Consulates*, 2 vols. (London: W.B. Whittingham & Co., 1884).

¹⁴ M. Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870--1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 48--51.

¹⁵ Mazower, *Governing the World*, 70--72; Koskenniemi, *Gentle Civilizer*, 55--56; N. Tzouvala, *Capitalism as Civilisation: A History of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 51--52.

¹⁶ See Mazower, *Governing the World*, 42--44; 72--80 for more, also on how this narrative informed the Berlin Conference.

¹⁷ J.H. Ferguson, *The Philosophy of Civilization: A Sociological Study* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1889), 47--48; 66.

¹⁸ Tzouvala, *Capitalism as Civilisation*, 51; 56--57. Weber later also reflected on the significance of China's lack of monotheism for its development. See Blue, "Western Social Thought," 96.

they all shared the civilising duty, "the calling imposed upon each independent and civilised people."¹⁹

This duty expressed itself in more than just the Christian mission. Introducing the Qing Empire to the progress of civilisation inevitably included its opening to foreign influence. To Ferguson, technology was an excellent tool for the spread of reason among the Chinese. "Prove to them that physical science is but the interpretation of Nature as God's work," he wrote, "and their Faith based on conviction shall soar far above Eastern philosophy and Western dogmatism."²⁰ This belief in the power of technology as a vehicle for civilisational progress on a Western basis was typical of Ferguson's work in China. In his professional capacity, he was attentive of political developments on technology and industrialisation. His missives describing the latest developments in Chinese politics and diplomacy to the Dutch Foreign Ministry rarely diverted from new legislation, the military state of affairs, and the behaviour of European states, but the topic of industrialisation was an exception. In 1881, for instance, Ferguson wrote about the interest Prince Gong (1833--1898), a member of the imperial family and head of the influential Grand Council, had shown for railroad technology during one of their official meetings.²¹ His grasp of the situation was accurate: initially as a war mobilisation effort inspired by conflict with Russia over the border in the Empire's Westernmost province of Xinjiang, Prince Gong, Li Hongzhang, and Zuo Zongtang were the main proponents of the "modernisation" of Chinese infrastructure using railroads and telegraph lines within a split Qing government.

Ferguson saw Zuo's establishment of a weaving factory in Gansu province using foreign machinery and employees in 1878 as proof he had an "appreciation for, if not strangers themselves, then Western means, obtained through Western civilisation" and thought these favourable notions of Western civilisation among high-ranking officials would likely prove beneficial for foreign relations.²² In a report from 1885, his legation's secretary Jan Rhein reiterated this outlook in Ferguson's absence, saying further reform of Chinese naval defences and upkeep of channels and rivers around Beijing spelled "great changes in China [...] which will undoubtably contribute much to the advancement of prosperity of the Empire and the population, and meanwhile, with the introduction of Western civilisation, positively influence relations between China and the outside world."²³

¹⁹ NL-HaNA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: B-files, 2.05.38, inv.no. 1326, J.H. Ferguson, "Verslag van den Staatkundigen Toestand van China, ingezonden bij Missive van den Consul-Generaal en Zaakgelastigde," Dec. 28, 1874, 90. See also E. Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism: The European Destruction of the Palace of the Emperor of China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 97--98.

²⁰ Ferguson, *Philosophy*, 309.

²¹ NL-HaNA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Secret Reports and Cabinet Reports, 2.05.19, inv.no. 115, Ferguson to C.Th. van Lynden van Sandenburg, May 14, 1881.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Cabinet Reports, 2.05.19, inv.no. 115, J. Rhein to A.P.C. van Karnebeek, Nov. 14, 1885.

Like technology, trade, "which has so often been described as the pioneer of civilisation," had an important role to play in the "opening of China" Ferguson pursued.²⁴ Whereas his belief in technology was unflinching, however, trade was different. In a contribution from 1894 to the gold standard debate, the author cited criticism from the foreign community on the introduction of the telegraph, Suez Canal, and faster shipping, which had helped to bring about a near elimination of the delay of price changes in silver, gold, and currency to which Shanghai had owed its reputation as a speculating bonanza. "[I]n the present case," a newspaper had argued, progress was "certainly more particularly for the benefit of the Chinese" than the Europeans.²⁵ The focus on European profits ran counter to the idea of progress Ferguson believed in. "[H]ere, too," he argued, "we see history repeat itself. Where the European civilisation was introduced for the sake of greed alone, but social deformities ever appeared."²⁶

The reference, presumably, is to the chartered companies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Elsewhere, Ferguson had characterised their former dominance in Western Europe's relations with the outside world as unlawful.²⁷ Ultimately, the Western civilising mission was threatened not by trade itself but by human corruption. Therefore, to serve as the measure of civilisation, "Western civilisation need[ed] to be subjected to impartial criticism and substantial purification."²⁸ To Ferguson, the West's imperfections surfaced in the comparison with the Chinese and their:

calm in the face of daily troubles, patience in adversity, untiring diligence in all branches of industry, [and] moderation in food and drink [...] Here in China, the bombs of anarchists are unfamiliar. Even the, in the eyes of the lesser population, uninvited intruders from abroad, most of whom come out of self-interest, are treated with accommodation.²⁹

Similar criticism applied to Europe, where Ferguson saw "the demoralisation of labour in the large factories [...] by the greed of rapacious Machine life."³⁰ It shows how his thinking, particularly his insistence on the state as arbiter of commercial behaviour and diplomatic exchange as the preferred, or only, method of contact between states, was influenced by the crisis of liberalism. As a Spencerian "survival of the fittest" would ultimately only benefit the rich, he favoured a "socialist" state which would use law and taxation to oversee that the production factors of labour and capital were rewarded equally.³¹ With workers ultimate-

²⁴ J.H. Ferguson, *Het bimetalisme en de jongste muntverordening van Britsch-Indië: Eene schets op het gebied der staathuishoudkunde* (Amsterdam: J. Veen, 1894), 70.

²⁵ *Celestial Empire. Essays on the trade of Shanghai* (Sep. 1874), as quoted in Ferguson, *Bimetalisme*, 76.

²⁶ Ferguson, *Bimetalisme*, 76.

²⁷ Ferguson, *Philosophy*, 69.

²⁸ Ferguson, *Bimetalisme*, 79.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 80.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 78.

³¹ Ferguson, *Philosophy*, 141.

ly paying the price for the protection of capitalist enterprise through the higher price of products, tariff barriers were an inferior solution.³²

The Labour Trade

Historians have described Ferguson as a somewhat disobedient representative, who was always more concerned with his diplomatic than his consular duties.³³ Indeed, from the moment he arrived in Shanghai in 1873, Ferguson tirelessly pushed for a higher diplomatic rank with the Foreign Office. His consular status, he argued, made it impossible for him to pursue the Qing Empire's "opening up" in collaboration with the foreign envoys in the capital.³⁴ As a result, Ferguson was finally ranked resident minister and consul general after changes in 1876, 1880, and 1884. With permission from the Foreign Ministry, he moved his office to Zhifu in 1876 – still a treaty port, but one where many other diplomats spent their summers – and, finally, to Beijing in 1880. As the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin allowed the establishment of foreign embassies in the capital, but not consulates, this implied the office's duties needed to appear purely diplomatic to the outside world.³⁵ At that point, the move was even welcomed by parliament, which otherwise showed little interest in Chinese affairs.³⁶

Van Dongen argues Ferguson, in so doing, was likely motivated in part by the status that came with a diplomatic title and neglected his consular duties.³⁷ Similar criticism was the source of an explosive conflict over the labour trade. Hoping to cut costs and expand as well as stabilise the immigration of Chinese indentured labourers on which they relied, the quickly growing tobacco plantations in the Sumatran region of Deli had been pushing for Ferguson's help to recruit directly from China from the moment he took office. To their detriment, an 1874 survey of Chinese workers' living conditions on Cuba had caused the Qing government to ban all indentured labour and start appointing consuls to oversee the treatment of Chinese subjects abroad. Ferguson was unwilling to circumvent the central government in the pursuit of emigration. At that point, he was supported by his Foreign and Colonial Ministers, who argued active interference on behalf of the tobacco plantations was not the government's responsibility and jeopardised the equally important flow of labourers to the Dutch West Indies. However, his attempts to close an emigration deal with central or

³² J.H. Ferguson, *De wetten der maatschappelijke ontwikkeling: Eene natuurwetenschappelijk-staatkundige en godsdienstige handleiding der sociologie voor de zedenleer der beschaving* (trans. and rev. ed. of *The Philosophy of Civilization*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1906), 155--169; Ferguson, *Philosophy*, 147--159.

³³ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 54--55.

³⁴ Ferguson, "Staatkundigen Toestand," 90--92.

³⁵ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 55--57.

³⁶ HTK 1879--1880, App., 2-III Staatsbegrooting, no. 6, Voorloopig Verslag, 6; Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 58.

³⁷ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 54--55.

provincial authorities remained unsuccessful, not helped by his government's unwillingness to admit Chinese consuls to the colonies.³⁸

The impasse was the source of increased frustration for the committee of Deli planters, who accused Ferguson of sabotage out of a personal opposition to the labour trade. Pressure on government increased with the election of Cremer, their former spokesman, to parliament in 1884. Through the governor general of the East Indies, the planters enlisted J.J.M. de Groot – later a renowned Sinologist in Leiden and Berlin who was doing fieldwork in the Qing Empire with funds from the colonial government – to take up the emigration issue in 1886 together with the planters' agent. They succeeded within two years by seeking the cooperation of German consuls in the Southern port cities. In Guangzhou and Shantou, they gained permission for German trading companies to recruit labour migrants and ship them to the East Indies in return for bribes. Once there, the labourers would still be recruited under contract, though their choice of employer was free. That Ferguson had not taken this route may be explained as negligence but, by going outside the law, the risk of conflict and damage to the Dutch legation's reputation and work was genuine.

The breakthrough was received with great relief in the Netherlands and to his dismay, Ferguson was relocated to Shantou to work out the details of the arrangement until a second Dutch consulate general for South China opened in 1890 after active lobbying from the planters.³⁹ Paradoxically, De Groot's motivation for facilitating the trade has also been described as idealism; an "interest in ordinary people, albeit in a highly paternalistic way" which led him to want to free the labourers "from the exploitative intervention of Chinese brokers."⁴⁰ Though he shared Ferguson's perspective on China as "semi-civilised," he later blamed an inferior state and called on the foreign powers to depose the "Confucian tyrant," the emperor.⁴¹

The view that Ferguson sabotaged the labour trade remained popular and has also made its way into some historical accounts.⁴² A core reason was his discussion of the trade in one of six chapters of *The Philosophy of Civilization* from 1889. Ferguson compared the Straits markets to the commodification of human lives in the slave trade, widely condemned at the time, and denounced the recruitment of labourers under false pretences; the bribing, deceptive traders who encouraged the workers to spend their money on opium and gambling; and the generally very poor conditions of work and travel. By failing to intervene, Fer-

³⁸ Ibidem, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 98--101. Pages 102--115 give an overview of the developments in the Dutch position on admitting consuls.

³⁹ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 113--126; Van der Putten, "Small Powers and Imperialism," 120.

⁴⁰ B. ter Haar, review of *The Beaten Track of Science: The Life and Work of J.J.M. de Groot*, by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, ed. H. Walravens, *T'oung Pao* 92, no. 4 (2006): 553.

⁴¹ M. Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays*, sel. and intr. G.W. Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979): 360--361.

⁴² Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 163; cf. De Goey, *Consuls*, 83.

guson argued European states were neglecting their duties as representatives of Christian civilisation.⁴³

The planters and Cremer, their former spokesman and then a member of parliament, responded furiously.⁴⁴ Indeed, it is remarkable that Ferguson openly criticised the government policy he was supposed to defend and execute. The Dutch translation from 1893 included a short preface by the later Foreign Minister De Beaufort, by which the book gained an even more political character.⁴⁵ Relations with De Groot and the Deli planters soured further after they accused Ferguson of emboldening Qing officials to push for consular representation in the East Indies.⁴⁶ However, it was Ferguson's position that should perhaps have been given more sympathy in parliament. In 1902, it was brought to light that violence and injustice against indentured labourers, which had been the subject of rumours for decades, were indeed ubiquitous on tobacco plantations in the Dutch colonies.⁴⁷

In his book, Ferguson proposed the export of labour from China should be centrally organised and called for government supervision, as he did in his other work. Oversight by the Qing government would make sure wage, repatriation, and length of employment stipulated in the contracts would be honoured.⁴⁸ Rather than oppose the trade, Ferguson thus showed himself to be a supporter of the direct recruitment of Chinese labourers for the East Indies. In 1876, he had already expressed his preference for reciprocity and the admission of Qing consuls in the East Indies to the Foreign Minister.⁴⁹

Study of Ferguson's work on international law, therefore, does not take away doubt raised by Van Dongen on whether or not personal conviction motivated his professional decisions. Instead, it shows his efforts to strengthen the diplomatic character of his function and only conduct Sino-Dutch politics through formal channels were reflected in a strong faith in diplomacy as the only appropriate means for contact between states. In his time in office, however, Ferguson showed consistency in these convictions, while the shift laid with government. In 1872, cabinet had favoured the appointment of a Dutch ambassador to the Qing Empire, but was restrained by the opposition; in 1880, parliament even welcomed the relocation to Beijing. Opposition only arose with the issue of the labour trade, when economic interests clashed with the development of diplomatic relations under increased pressure from the Deli planters. This volatility reflects the Dutch government's lack of commit-

⁴³ Ferguson, *Philosophy*, 305--308.

⁴⁴ De Goey, *Consuls*, 83.

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Wetten*, vii--viii.

⁴⁶ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 125; 129; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 36, Deli Planters' Committee to Ferguson, Mar. 25, 1891.

⁴⁷ See chapter three. J. van den Brand, *De miljoenen uit Deli*, in J. Breman, *Koelies, planters en koloniale politiek: Het arbeidsregime op de grootlandbouwondernemingen aan Sumatra's oostkust in het begin van de twintigste eeuw* (Leiden: KITLV, 1992).

⁴⁸ Ferguson, *Philosophy*, 307--308.

⁴⁹ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 101--103.

ment to any clear line in its China policy, where the political will to treat the Qing Empire as an equal crumbled as the Liberal tradition underwent reform. This likely contributed to its envoy's increasingly defiant behaviour.⁵⁰ Ferguson ended his consular career in 1895 and retired to the city of Wageningen in the Netherlands. He did not pursue a parliamentary career, though his academic stature made him a welcome guest of the Dutch peace movement along with a smattering of politicians, most of them confessionals or Socialists.⁵¹ His role there remained marginal. Rather, Ferguson spent much of his time putting pen to paper, his book covers proudly boasting of his membership of the Institut de Droit International.

2.2 The Most Clever Engineer

Meanwhile, in these final decades of the nineteenth century, Dutch marine engineering was slowly taking on a global role. By necessity, the Dutch had exercised control over the sea and rivers for centuries. They exported their knowledge on river works and land reclamation to the kingdoms of Europe and continued to do so in the "modern" era of corporate organisation.⁵² The Dutch shone in the experience and organisation of the (family) company, the merit of generations upon generations of river constructors in flood-prone areas of the country, a structure which incorporated the rapid innovations in engineering quite organically. However, Great Britain, France, and Belgium led the development of steam-driven technology and applied engineering work on an unprecedented scale. The Suez Canal is a typical example. The Dutch contribution there remained limited to stock investment, the engineer F.W. Conrad's advisory role in the International Suez Commission, and consul general S.W. Ruysenaers' founding membership of the Suez Canal Company.⁵³

The East Indies were a natural first destination for Dutch engineers outside Europe, where they worked on irrigation and harbour works from the 1830s onwards.⁵⁴ Starting in 1843, marine engineers were educated at the new Delft Royal Academy, which also trained officials for (colonial) government.⁵⁵ It approached engineering comprehensively, teaching students water management, railway engineering, and industrial applications all at once. Its reorganisation into a dedicated engineering school in 1863 hardly altered the fact that con-

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 194.

⁵¹ See J.H. Ferguson, *The International Conference of The Hague: A Plea for Peace in Social Evolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1899). Ferguson was on the Dutch Women's Union for International Disarmament's (NVIO) committee for the peace movement's preparations for the 1899 The Hague Peace Conference. "Internationale ontwapening," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Feb. 1, 1899; "Vredes-manifestatie," *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, Mar. 14, 1899.

⁵² Bouwens and Sluyterman, *Verdiept verleden*, 54.

⁵³ Z. Karabell, *Parting the Desert: The Creation of the Suez Canal*, (New York: Random House, 2004), EPUB edition, chaps. 7 and 12.

⁵⁴ Bouwens and Sluyterman, *Verdiept verleden*, 54.

⁵⁵ Military engineering programs had existed since 1805.

sistently, twenty-five to thirty per cent of Delft's graduated engineers pursued a career in the East Indies.⁵⁶ Common among those was a technocratic mindset: the idea that they alone possessed the knowledge and disposition necessary for the development of the colonies. Clashes with the East Indies administration were widespread. Many, especially the railway engineers, were great admirers of De Lesseps, whose canal symbolised the seemingly limitless potential of engineering's alliance with private initiative.⁵⁷

The first time Dutch marine construction professionals took up employ with a non-European, non-colonial government was in Japan. River works were a notable exception to the Netherlands' generally negligible role in Japan's large-scale modernisation program after the restoration of imperial rule under the Meiji emperor in 1868, for which it depended on the scientific and technological knowledge of foreign experts known as *oyatoi gaikokujin*. It was by coincidence that Johannis de Rijke and George Escher, out of a total of eleven Dutch marine engineers, constructors, and overseers in Japanese employ, became entangled in a push for Chinese river reform that would go on for decades.⁵⁸

Engineers Abroad

The two men were of different backgrounds. De Rijke was born in Colijnsplaat, a seaside village on the island of Noord-Beveland, into a family of dike workers. As formal education was unattainable, De Rijke worked on local construction projects from a young age. There, he showcased his talent and was eventually tutored in mathematics and engineering by J. Lebret, a state engineer and later professor at Delft who his father likely met on the job. At the age of twenty-two, De Rijke moved to Amsterdam to work on large canal construction projects and was quickly promoted to overseer. His supervisor there, C.J. van Doorn, called him to Japan in 1872. For De Rijke, it meant a promotion to the position of engineer and a salary ten or twenty times higher than he was used to. Escher, rather, made a career as assistant engineer on the construction and upkeep of roads, railroads, and water works for the state after graduating from the Delft Royal Academy. He, too, had contacts with Van Doorn, with whom he had worked and studied.⁵⁹

Their different socio-economic and professional backgrounds had considerable consequences for the two men. Upon arrival in Osaka, Escher was invited for dinner with Van Doorn, but De Rijke was not. More tangibly, Escher was appointed first-class engineer with a four hundred fifty yen monthly wage while De Rijke became fourth-class engineer and received a three hundred yen stipend. These figures exceeded those of any Japanese engineer, while a common wage for a young teacher or police officer was no more than four

⁵⁶ Van Doorn, *Laatste eeuw*, 116--118.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, 132--145.

⁵⁸ Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 15; 123--124; 179--180.

⁵⁹ Kamibayashi, *Johannis de Rijke*, 17--21; 49; Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 179--180; 320. Escher's youngest of five sons was the well-known artist, M.C. Escher.

yen.⁶⁰ In the field, the more experienced De Rijke was nonetheless the one to take the lead. The two men worked together until Escher's departure in 1878 and remained friends for a lifetime, corresponding frequently about personal and professional matters. "[W]hen it comes to reliability and usability," Escher wrote, "I value someone like de Rijke higher than most civil Engineers from Delft. [...] In Holland, I cannot possibly find such a teacher."⁶¹

De Rijke lived and worked in Japan until 1903 with his children and two wives: Johanna Hassoldt and, some years after her death to cholera, Maria Heck. Religion was an important factor in De Rijke's new life with Heck, who was a devout follower of Abraham Kuyper. Eventually, he joined the ARP and, likely through his wife's mediation, started communicating with its leader.⁶² A letter from 1899 shows he acted as an informer on Japanese matters. De Rijke expressed his support for Kuyper's motion against the *Japannerwet* ("Law on the Japanese") of 1899, which conferred upon Japanese nationals in the East Indies the same rights given to European foreigners, writing: "If the oily Jap... 'is given an inch, he will take a mile'.⁶³ Thus, though it seems he had less difficulty than his colleagues adapting to this new life, that is not to say the engineer did not grow bitter and derogatory about life in Japan over time.⁶⁴ When the time finally came, he had long wished to return home.

The Dutchman became the principal foreign marine engineer in Japan of his generation, overseeing improvements of many of the empire's largest harbours and rivers. At home, such success would have been impossible to achieve for a man with no formal education. Much of it is owed to his remarkable ability to navigate the intricate politics of his position in Japan, a society renowned for its hierarchy and etiquette. In his work, De Rijke dealt with ministers and ministerial personnel, foreign diplomatic interests, anti-foreign sentiment, and opinion in Japanese and foreign-language newspapers. He navigated all of them to promote his own designs and views on the Meiji administration's long-term river policy to protect the quality of his work and thus, as he saw it, his job and reputation.⁶⁵ Of course, his position as a foreign advisor in Japan came with status and influential contacts, but De Rijke was able to build constructive relationships and use them to his advantage. The engineer gave little weight to this skill himself, and described it simply as "the ability to deal with the Japanese well."⁶⁶ All the while, he exchanged his designs with Escher, Lebret, the Royal

⁶⁰ Kamibayashi, *Johannis de Rijke*, 48--49.

⁶¹ Escher to Johanna Cornelia Pit, Oct. 4, 1875, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 454--457.

⁶² Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 357.

⁶³ De Rijke to Kuyper, Apr. 12, 1899, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 511.

⁶⁴ See his remarks on fellow Dutchmen and colleagues in De Rijke to Escher, Sep. 16, 1880, De Rijke to A.T.L. Rouwenhorst Mulder, Dec. 8, 1880, and De Rijke to Escher, Nov. 13, 1884, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 483--487; 492--497.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, De Rijke to Escher, Feb. 2--5, 1889, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 498--501; Kamibayashi, *Johannis de Rijke*, 193--198.

⁶⁶ De Rijke to Escher, Sep. 16, 1880.

Netherlands Society of Engineers, and others to gain feedback and make sure his work was not forgotten about at home.⁶⁷

De Rijke's career in East Asia did not end in 1903, however. Others have described in detail how the state of the Huangpu River connecting Shanghai to the ocean and Yangzi River had been a point of growing discontent among the city's foreign merchants.⁶⁸ The growing "Inner" sand bar (or "Wusong Bar," after the adjacent village) blocked access to the city for foreign ocean steamers. When they first arrived in Shanghai on their way to Osaka in 1873, De Rijke and Escher were held up for three days.⁶⁹ It was the result of Escher's own initiative with the Dutch consul, whose acquaintance he made during his stay, that he and De Rijke were invited by the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce in 1875 to study the bar and design a solution.⁷⁰ After all, the Dutchmen had only been advising the Japanese government for a short while and had little reputation preceding them. Escher discussed the idea of coming to Shanghai to make a study of the Huangpu with the consul in letters from December 1873.⁷¹ "By coincidence," Escher wrote in a letter to his mother, "no-one [in Shanghai] was abreast on river improvements, and so they fetched us."⁷² Mediation from the Dutch and Japanese consuls and NHM representative W.C. Korthals likely secured the pivotal support from the British and American consuls. Though Escher had planned to go with Van Doorn, the latter had taken leave and the invitation was finally sent to him and De Rijke.⁷³

In August 1875, the two men took unauthorised leave from their work in Japan to perform test measurements in the Huangpu. In Shanghai, they met with the regional governor (or *daotai*) and many foreign representatives: the consuls for the U.S., Great Britain, France, and Germany, the new Dutch consul, and officials of the Shanghai Municipal Council. There were also several Dutchmen: the crew of the navy vessel *Zr.Ms. Curaçao*, the Huangpu pilot Van Corbach, the merchant J.J.B. Heemskerk, and Ferguson, already living in Zhifu, who Escher had met before and was delighted to see once again.⁷⁴ Escher and De Rijke's report, submitted in May 1876, was very similar to works they had executed in the Japanese Yodo River not long before. It proposed to fortify the river and use the tidal flow, with the

⁶⁷ De Rijke to Escher, Jun. 27, 1889, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 501--503; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 56, De Rijke to Knobel, Jan. 15, 1898.

⁶⁸ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 152--157; S. Ye, "Corrupted Infrastructure: Imperialism and Environmental Sovereignty in Shanghai, 1873--1911," *Frontiers of History in China* 10, no. 3 (2015).

⁶⁹ Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 181.

⁷⁰ Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 191; Ye, "Corrupted Infrastructure," 432.

⁷¹ Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 363.

⁷² Escher to Pit, Aug. 24--Sep. 2, 1875, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 451--454.

⁷³ Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 181--182; 363; Kamibayashi, *Johannis de Rijke*, 71--72.

⁷⁴ Escher to Pit, Aug. 24--Sep. 2, 1875.

support of dredging machinery, to deepen the existing "junk channel" at Wusong while closing off the obsolete "ship channel."⁷⁵

"... because this is China"

As Eastern power closer to Japan than England because of the Indies, the Netherlands too should be eligible to supply mining engineers to Japan. Yet, we should then first do more in the Indies themselves. We here have placed our hopes in the new Liberal ministry to develop our influence and stature in the East. Men, who outside of the Netherlands only know our Indies, have no idea how small that stature has become.⁷⁶

Escher's five years spent working in Japan were an effective way of seeing a different part of the world and finding the adventure he seems to have craved, though he also had other motivations. Quotes like the one above show him voicing his support for Liberal politics and the idea that it was in the country's best interest to strengthen its commercial and industrial presence around the world. With the possibility, or in fact obligation, to use the East Indies as a springboard, Escher argued the Dutch state could gain economically by ensuring Dutch business and engineering were well-represented in Asia.

In Japan, Escher defended his country's interests in the same spirit. In general, it was common among Dutch professionals in Japan to protect each other's jobs and income and make efforts to promote Dutch business. A blend of self-interest and nationalist sentiment explains this behaviour. When acting in solidarity, the Dutch engineers stood a better chance of defending their own project designs to the Home Ministry and, ultimately, retain their jobs. Escher, meanwhile, also saw opportunities for the Dutch economy and was adamant about "buying Dutch" – using Dutch suppliers and making room for Dutch engineers and contractors as much as possible. Too often, he argued, the replacements of Dutchmen who left Japanese employ had been recruited from elsewhere. He blamed "the indifference of Dutch diplomatic agents etc.," showing his unhappiness with the foreign policy efforts of his government.⁷⁷

De Rijke, too, preferred purchasing Dutch machinery to support national industry, but only if the quality was not compromised.⁷⁸ The higher purpose he sought to fulfil with his work was of a different nature. He called it his *berggeschreeuw* or "shouting from the mountaintop," his "missionary work," and also "the big issue": the protection and proper management of nature.⁷⁹ This applied to his river reform, where he aimed to prevent floods and maintain a steady, lasting flow of water, but also to the problem of rampant deforestation in

⁷⁵ Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 364--365.

⁷⁶ Escher to unknown (extract), Jan. 4, 1878, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 64.

⁷⁷ Escher to Pit, Mar. 11, 1878, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 469--470.

⁷⁸ De Rijke to Escher, Nov. 28, 1896, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 508--511.

⁷⁹ De Rijke to Escher, May 17, 1879, and Apr. 12, 1880, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 473--475; 479--481; De Rijke to Escher (fragment), Apr. 3, 1880, in Kamibayashi, *Johannis de Rijke*, 115.

Japan. The two were connected: deforestation of riverside mountains caused soil erosion, which during frequent episodes of heavy rainfall would lead to dangerous amounts of sand and stones sliding into the rivers and obstructing their flow.⁸⁰ To the Japanese Home Minister, he wrote:

The distribution of mountains, plains and streams is made here according to a plan that could not have been devised by the most clever engineer. [...] All the destruction by which we are surrounded here and which causes so much troubles below in the plains, all these ruins were never intended by nature. Man has made it so. The possessors, Sir, of these mountains have not been content with *using alone* the production of nature, but *abusing* them, without any regard for their own interest or that of their children.⁸¹

De Rijke's motivation came from a twofold concern for the preservation of nature's beauty and the people's livelihood. After all, whereas river floods could cause death and destruction, a well-kept river would bring economic prosperity by fertilising land and providing an effective means of transportation. In his eyes, therefore, proper government was one that invested in public works. It shows his technocratic mindset: the Saint-Simonian reliance on public works for the common good, a reverence of science and the engineer, and hostility towards government officials impeding the execution of his view on water management. It motivated his aversion for war and increasingly negative view of Japan, where growing aggression in foreign policy and expensive war efforts severely impacted the already frail state of public works finances. At the time of the war with Russia (1904--1905), he argued what he called Japanese "jingoism" was threatening the well-being of the "polite and friendly, [...] simple locals."⁸² Strikingly, Japan's victory led to its informal admission to the circle of the world's Great Powers, reflecting a dominant view on proper government which De Rijke clearly did not subscribe to.

De Rijke's technocracy had strong religious underpinnings. As he wrote, Japan's landscape "could not have been devised by the most clever engineer," thus presenting its preservation as a duty to nature – God's creation indeed, which if well-kept provided a beautiful and fertile world to earth's inhabitants. It proves how for him, government was there to execute God's work, and he himself was likewise part of this higher purpose. Allegedly, the daotai had described the Wusong sand bar to Escher and De Rijke as a "heaven-sent barrier" for China's military defence which would therefore be impossible to remove.⁸³ Despite being a religious man, De Rijke must have lacked any appreciation for this

⁸⁰ Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 344.

⁸¹ De Rijke to Matsukata Masayoshi, Apr. 7, 1880 (facsimile and transcript of English original), in Kamibayashi, *Johannis de Rijke*, 120--122.

⁸² J. de Rijke, *Zomerreis van Oost-Azië naar Nederland met den Trans-Siberischen Spoorweg* (1904; repr., Goes: Jumbo-Offset, 2000), 16.

⁸³ Ye ascribes the quote to Prince Gong, who may have repeated it. Ye, "Corrupted Infrastructure," 430; Kamibayashi, *Johannis de Rijke*, 72; Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 192.

divine argument, or for China's need for defences. In his interpretation, as well, the landscape was a godsend, but required intelligent tending from its inhabitants.

De Rijke's notion of stewardship, with humankind as caretaker of nature, is still a popular concept especially in Christian theology.⁸⁴ The use of technology was not out of the question for Dutch neocalvinists. Kuyper, as a religious innovator, found justification in Genesis to approach the use of "means" as the divine duty to surmount nature, which had shown its hostile side ever after Adam and Eve were driven from paradise. Gradually, this duty gained importance in his politics. Kuyper supported vaccination, newspapers and telegraph, modern architecture, and land reclamation. His party's supporters were mixed: some used modern technology such as fertilisers, while others chose not to. De Rijke might be classified as the former. It allowed him to be a geographically mobile social climber, which characterised the ARP's following more than other Dutch political movements.⁸⁵

His views explain why De Rijke used the following words to describe the Yangzi Delta: "Here, all the preconditions for prosperity nature can give are present; however, one sees little else than the contrary, because this is China."⁸⁶ He maintained a highly negative opinion of Chinese government. He found its practice of law random, it did little about infectious diseases, and he saw the state of the dirt roads around Shanghai, on which people were transported using wheel barrows, as a sign of the country's general lack of civilisation.⁸⁷ Most importantly, however, De Rijke's judgment of Qing governance derived from his observations of its river works. The Grand Canal between Hangzhou and Beijing, the symbol of a tradition of water management and public works running through the various imperial dynasties back to the fifth century BCE, was "terribly neglected."⁸⁸ While sailing the Huangpu river, De Rijke remarked once more: "Dikes or any other works do not exist here; because the river belongs to China!"⁸⁹

In these observations, De Rijke saw the "high value for a people of organised, solid and indisputable authority that prevents randomness," thus referencing the Dutch state.⁹⁰ With their foreign government and European-style judiciary, Shanghai's foreign concessions had that potential. "The regime, followed amid this heathen land, is based on laws and institutions from Christian countries. I will not declare that therefore it is flawless, but the distinction between the municipal administration and the 'Chinese Mandarin rule' is highly notice-

⁸⁴ M. van der Linden and J. Dubbink, "Rentmeesterschap: Een klassiek christelijk model opnieuw onderzocht," *NZR-Cahiers* 5 (2020).

⁸⁵ D. van Lente, *Techniek & ideologie: Opvattingen over de maatschappelijke betekenis van technische vernieuwingen in Nederland, 1850-1920*, 58--65; Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 439--440.

⁸⁶ De Rijke, *Zomerreis*, 25--26.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 38--40.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 26.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 29.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 39.

able."⁹¹ He suggested it could serve as an example for the reform of the Qing administration, as he argued Japan's foreign settlements had for the Meiji government.⁹²

Over the course of twenty-five years, De Rijke had himself observed the silting up of the Huangpu river. He argued that if nothing was done, erosion and silting caused by ships and the tide would eventually cause the river to dry up and Shanghai, "the largest Metropolis of trade in the entire far East," to fall behind and disappear.⁹³ Furthermore, he was worried by the economic effects on Shanghai's hinterland, which relied on the Yangzi's tributaries for transport and irrigation.⁹⁴ The Huangpu River, he argued, suffered not from "misgovernment," but the "absence of any rule, or Gov^t, or administration whatever. It seems to me 'competent management' can only be found outside the administration of the Chinese altogether."⁹⁵ With Chinese and treaty powers unwilling to work together, efforts to commission public works were at an impasse. Therefore, De Rijke supported diplomatic efforts to install a foreign-led conservancy board for the government of the Yangzi Delta's waters.⁹⁶

Still, De Rijke seems to have regarded the supposed moral superiority of the foreign presence in China as somewhat of a myth. Through Knobel, he felt it necessary to warn the Qing authorities that foreign mining syndicates had a disregard for the natural environment and – through excavation and deforestation – would not help the state of the empire's rivers. "Business is business" is their motto, he wrote.⁹⁷ Likewise, he satirised foreign engineers' proposals for Chinese river reforms, arguing they commonly went something like this:

A profound study of the whole river;
Applying works of art;
Modern science and some more modern science;
and when those celebrities then find themselves stuck, they say:
the mode of execution – in fact what it all comes down to – to *depend on circumstances*.
It seems to me even a Chinese will take these grand words for fig leaves.⁹⁸

Seemingly, only the man himself could live up to his own high standards. Contrary to the consul, his main priority when writing a proposal was "finding the truth," not landing the commission – though he saw the benefit.⁹⁹ He suggested such integrity and competence in

⁹¹ Ibidem, 38.

⁹² Ibidem, 39.

⁹³ Ibidem, 26--31.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, 25--26.

⁹⁵ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 56, De Rijke to Knobel, Jan. 26, 1898.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, De Rijke to Knobel (English translation), Jun. 29, 1899, and De Rijke to Knobel, Aug. 5, 1899.

⁹⁸ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, De Rijke to Knobel, Jun. 5, 1899.

⁹⁹ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, De Rijke to Knobel, Jun. 20, 1897.

river engineering were typical Dutch notions. Responding to another of Knobel's letters, he wrote: "if the Syndicate should want a technical judgment that must *anyhow* be favourable, then preferably they would not engage Dutch river Engineers, who have toured and studied many mountain streams."¹⁰⁰

Here, then, we see an example of De Rijke's affiliation with his country. The engineer had been anti-German before and was also becoming strongly anti-British, sharing in the feelings of ethnic and moral kinship to the Boers which were thriving in the Netherlands when he wrote this letter in 1900 despite living half a world away. "I rather like the English individually, one can rely on them," he contended, "but collectively they are well on the way of losing their credit."¹⁰¹ De Rijke wrote of his eldest son's participation in the war with a mixed sense of worry and pride.¹⁰² As the comparison with Escher shows, however, the national interest was never his first priority. His mindset was typically technocratic, seeing the engineer as the bringer of prosperity and the state as the vehicle to harness this power for the common good. That this frequently manifested in a derogatory attitude towards Japanese and especially Chinese rule, in which only he knew what was best for the people of the two empires, fits this interpretation. Such attitudes also characterised technocracy in the East Indies.

The Huangpu

When the Huangpu dredging project in Shanghai was finally commenced in 1907, De Rijke served as its chief engineer. Even though, as chapter four discusses in detail, he enjoyed the support of Ferguson's successor, De Rijke owed this eventual appointment squarely to himself. Over the years, he consistently asked for attention to his and Escher's designs when visiting Shanghai, usually while underway to Europe; remained in touch with his contacts in the city's chamber of commerce; and published updated versions of his report after visits in 1897 and 1899.¹⁰³ As was his custom in Japan, he responded to competing reports in local newspapers and kept the Dutch engineering community up to speed on his activities.¹⁰⁴

After a failed attempt without Dutch involvement between 1883 and 1889, especially the British representatives in the Shanghai chamber of commerce, municipal administration and

¹⁰⁰ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, De Rijke to Knobel, Apr. 7, 1900.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, De Rijke to Knobel, Sep. 27, 1899; inv.no. 45, De Rijke to Knobel, Nov. 11, 1899.

¹⁰³ De Rijke to Escher (fragment), Oct. 25, 1881, in Kamibayashi, *Johannis de Rijke*, 148--149; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, De Rijke to Knobel, Apr. 3, 1897, Jun. 20, 1897, and Jul. 24, 1897.

¹⁰⁴ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, De Rijke to Knobel, Jul. 5, 1899; J. de Rijke, "Waterweg van Shanghai naar zee: Kanaal Dufourny," *De Ingenieur* 15, no. 12 (1900): 180; J. de Rijke, *The Improvement of the Lower Hwangpu or Woosung river to the Port of Shanghai with Remarks on Messrs. Franzius and Bate's "International Project" of February 1902* (Tokyo: printed by author, 1902).

maritime customs remained seriously interested in Huangpu dredging for the general benefit to ocean trade.¹⁰⁵ The clashing of British, German, French, and Chinese interests was still the primary obstacle to its execution. In the absence of a British bid, that De Rijke's contacts in the chamber of commerce preferred him over competing German and French designs was a result of his nationality as well as their favourable impression of Dutch dredging methods and De Rijke's decades-long involvement in the project.¹⁰⁶

After the Yihetuan Uprising, the foreign powers used their diplomatic and military leverage to force the central Qing government to give up part of its sovereignty over Shanghai's waters to a newly established river conservancy board, as well as one for Tianjin, and pay for half of the Huangpu works' costs from the Boxer Indemnity fund.¹⁰⁷ Like the opening of Shanghai to foreign trade, the modernisation of its port was thus not secured through cooperation but with military means. Still, it took five more years of Anglo-German bickering for the works to finally commence.¹⁰⁸ In February 1906, De Rijke arrived in Shanghai to take up the function of chief engineer on the project.¹⁰⁹ In May 1909, the former "junk channel" was opened and renamed "Astraea Channel," after the first ship that, to the great delight of English media, crossed it in May 1909.¹¹⁰ However, when De Rijke left, wearily, to return home for the last time in 1910, the works had only partly been completed due to a lack of funds. The new Chinese contractor Yih King Co. and the Swedish engineer H.M. von Heidenstam continued the dredging and upkeep of De Rijke's plans until finally finishing in 1928.¹¹¹

Conclusion

The Netherlands were still relatively open to the idea of welcoming the Qing Empire into the brotherhood of states in the early decades after the signing of the Treaty of Tianjin in 1863. Liberal governments in particular were enthusiastic to follow the Great Powers in establishing diplomatic relations after Chinese efforts in the Burlingame Mission, and so was the first consul general, Ferguson, who called on the Western powers to pursue Christianisation in the Far East in synergy. However, they were held back by parliament, which favoured cost

¹⁰⁵ Ye, "Corrupted Infrastructure," 435--436.

¹⁰⁶ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, inv.no. 45, De Rijke to E.D. van Walree, Apr. 21, 1899, and De Rijke to Knobel, Apr. 26, 1899; inv.no. 56, Van Walree to Knobel, Jan. 13, 1898.

¹⁰⁷ Settlement of Matters Growing out of the Boxer Rebellion (Boxer Protocol), Germany-Austria-Hungary-Belgium-U.S.-France-Great Britain-Italy-Japan-the Netherlands-Russia-China, Sep. 7, 1901, 1 United States Treaties Series 302, at VI and XI.

¹⁰⁸ Ye, "Corrupted Infrastructure."

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, 439.

¹¹⁰ De Rijke to Escher, May 10--May 14, 1909, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 511--513.

¹¹¹ Ye, "Corrupted Infrastructure," 453. They did not, as Ye argues, implement an alternative design.

reduction and a small state in light of a general lack of interest dominating Dutch China policy for around two decades.

As a result, the early Dutch presence in the Qing Empire comprised an age of outsiders and individuals, opening up opportunities for De Rijke. The engineer once wrote about himself that stupidity and poor skills in foreign languages were his main flaws.¹¹² He was selling himself short: indeed, he did not have the education or language skills his formally trained colleagues had, but he showcased great talent by almost singlehandedly building a career of nearly four decades in the Far East. In so doing, he laid the foundation for the success the Dutch shipbuilding and marine construction sectors found in China and Japan, which greatly depended on Dutch contacts.¹¹³ Had De Rijke's chances to have a similar career at home not been blocked by socio-economic differences, chances for these industries would have been much bleaker around 1900.

Ferguson and De Rijke upheld values quite typical of their respective disciplines and shared a strong moral commitment to peace, universal well-being and prosperity. Like technology, capitalism was a means to an end in this view. Strikingly, they saw their values as Christian, not Dutch or European. Judged by their views on Chinese law and public works, to them, the Qing Empire represented a lesser civilisation toward which Europe had a civilising duty. Even when De Rijke did start to voice nationalist sentiment, he had this Christian morality at heart, aiming his criticism at war efforts or the dishonesty or arrogance of foreign engineers. Escher, on the other hand, showed a national consciousness early on, even without commercial or political motives, expressed in his preference for "buying Dutch" and a more active industrial policy on behalf of the state. It strengthens the suggestion that in Dutch views on East Asia, nationalism did emerge as the Liberal elite's response to industrialisation.¹¹⁴

It was only with the election of Cremer and involvement of the Deli planters in the mid-1880s that China policy reappeared on the political agenda. Both in the criticism on Ferguson and installation of a second consulate general, the planters were given a sympathetic ear, showing government's newfound willingness to accommodate business in its consular policy. Around 1870, such had still been out of the question. It shows clearly how conflicting views on policy developed in the context of liberalism's crisis. Ferguson moved in the opposite direction to his government by calling for more, not less, state control over commerce and industry at home and abroad. It explains the consul's increasingly idiosyncratic behaviour along with two other factors: the difficulty to appoint a diplomat with closer ties to government to the unpopular Beijing position and the impediment to communication, forcing Ferguson to take decisions with a great deal of freedom. Emerging conflict,

¹¹² NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, De Rijke to Knobel, May 5, 1899.

¹¹³ Sluyterman and Bouwens, *Verdiept verleden*, 56.

¹¹⁴ See O. Kühschelm, "Buy National Campaigns: Patriotic Shopping and the Capitalist Nation State," *Journal of Modern European History* 18, no. 1 (2020).

therefore, was the combined result of ideological development and the nature of the Dutch presence in the Qing Empire in this early stage.

Chapter 3. Well-founded Expectations

Where other nations are developing so much activity, it would be truly pitiful if the Netherlands remain silently at home waiting for things to come, in a sector that so uniquely and by general acknowledgment has its seat among the Dutch.

J.J.B. Heemskerk, 1888.¹

By the late 1880s, Dutch commercial interest in the Qing Empire seemed stagnant. Demand for tea, spices, and other Chinese products persisted, as did the export of textiles, but quantities remained quite small and Dutch involvement in such exports did not extend beyond the trade agents in the treaty ports. While the East Indies were recovering from a global drop of sugar prices in 1883, however, foreign commerce in the Qing Empire was raging at an unprecedented pace, in eager anticipation of the growth of industry in- and outside the treaty ports. Coal was key. The Prussian geologist Ferdinand van Richthofen's surveys, started in 1868, had located coal fields which gave China the reputation of mineral wealth. Germans, Russians, and French in particular were eager to turn this symbol of industrialisation against Great Britain to challenge its dominance in the East.²

Newer forms of commercial and industrial organisation were pivotal in making this development possible. Hong Kong's powerful trading houses spearheaded the establishment of sugar refineries and cotton mills in the treaty ports. Coal mining and railway construction required engineers, contractors, and – crucially – capital, and syndicates combining the three proliferated. Dutch onlookers were bound to respond. One such response came from J.J.B. Heemskerk, the merchant in Shanghai who had supported De Rijke and Escher's Huangpu work back in 1875. Heemskerk's comments inspired a Dutch bid for Yellow River flood control.³ Ambiguously, he called on the Netherlands as a whole to compete with the foreign powers in the Qing Empire but stressed private initiative and entrepreneurship.⁴ How these two came together in the Yellow River bid is the topic of this chapter's second part. First, let us discuss the development of the Dutch private sector in relation to the Qing Empire and the significance of two actors with a shared colonial history: the oil company Royal Dutch and the politician and businessman J.T. Cremer.

¹ "Niet-officieel gedeelte: Binnenland," *Nederlandsche Staatscourant*, Aug. 4, 1888.

² Wu, *Empires of Coal*, 35; 98; 114--115.

³ Escher to Pit, Sep. 14, 1876. Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 465.

⁴ "Niet-officieel gedeelte: Binnenland," *Nederlandsche Staatscourant*, Aug. 4, 1888.

3.1 Golden Sediment

Long after its surrounding countries, the Dutch economy started to make a turn from agricultural towards industrial dominance starting in the 1860s. Crucial to this development were the proliferation of new industries, flourishing of capital investment, and the rise of managerial enterprises equipped to benefit from the large-scale, capital-intensive, research-focused character of new industries.⁵ A classical example is Royal Dutch, ultimately the largest and most successful of the oil companies established in the East Indies, with a history firmly rooted in the resource politics of the Dutch state.

The Dutch East Indies were known as bountiful, not only well-suited for agriculture but also rich in reserves of tin, gold, coal, and petroleum. To satisfy the staunch pursuit of a positive balance on the colonial budget and hold off surrounding empires competing for resources, whether or not the state would facilitate the exploitation of natural resources in the East Indies' Outer Provinces was never really a question in parliamentary debate. The era's Liberal wind dictated that such exploitation would take place through private initiative from which the state would benefit through tax duties, creating a new situation to which both the Dutch state and its colonial offshoot were adapting sprawlingly. First of all, the colonial state's presence outside of the central island of Java was minimal and it had not secured the exclusive right to grant mining concessions in many of the treaties with indigenous states it used to maintain control over the archipelago. Dutch control over the Indies' resources was therefore at risk from foreign explorers. Secondly, its relation to private enterprise remained hesitant.

Both problems can be clearly discerned in parliamentary discussion over the sequence of exploratory and military missions to the island of Flores in 1889 and 1890. After a German miner and then several more parties had come to seek concessions for tin mining on Flores, the colonial government, unsure how to respond to such requests for this specific region, stalled. Seemingly hesitant to grant concessions to a foreigner and forego the possibility of government exploitation, it sent an exploratory mission to the island led by the state engineer C.J. van Schelle. After the mission was attacked by indigenous Ngada living independently of the island's vassal states, a second mission, now armed with bayonets and grenades, continued a fruitless search for tin while causing destruction and eliciting hostilities where around one hundred were killed, mostly on the Ngada's side.⁶

⁵ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 377--379.

⁶ P. Jobse, "De tin-expedities naar Flores 1887-1891. Een episode uit de geschiedenis van Nederlands-Indië in het tijdperk van het moderne imperialisme," *Utrechtse Historische Cahiers* no. 3 (1980): 15--44. The number of casualties may have been significantly higher, but no accurate estimates are available.

The episode, one of the first times a colonial mining concession was discussed in parliament, shows the state's confusion over its new role in the colonial economy.⁷ Parliament's Liberals, adamant proponents of private exploitation, were critical. Cremer argued finding tin was the entrepreneur's role, whereas the state's purpose in resource exploitation was, first, to grant concessions or facilitate negotiations with indigenous rulers and, second, to guarantee law and order. The ruling confessionals, on the contrary, argued the state had been honouring its duties to private enterprise and went so far as saying the Flores mission was part of a Dutch tradition of spreading civilisation through military commercialism traced back to the VOC.⁸ By liberalising the mining sector, the state had hoped to increase benefits to the colonial treasury, an urge which clearly was widely felt. However, it struggled to come to terms with the potential loss of revenue to indigenous rights, private enterprise, or foreign parties that came with it.

Royal Dutch

Around this time, A.J. Zijlker became one of the first Dutchmen to take up the search for oil. Having become aware of the riches in the ground underneath the island of Sumatra as a tobacco plantation manager in Deli, he started canvassing in nearby Langkat, backed financially by colonial businessmen. The colonial government helped him obtain a drilling concession from the emir and even deployed a mining department crew to do the drilling after Zijlker was brought in touch with the Governor-General by his brother, a Liberal member of parliament. As it had in the Flores mission, the state thus valued the exploitation of the East Indies' resources by a familiar Dutch party higher than its ideals of state abstention.

Zijlker's connections begin to explain why he succeeded where many others failed. In 1889, he traveled to the Netherlands to establish the Royal Dutch Company for the Exploitation of Petroleum Wells in the Dutch East Indies.⁹ At the point of his sudden death in 1890, he had already sold his concession to the company.¹⁰ Thus emerged a business structure with separate ownership and management, one of several distinctly modern aspects about its organisation.¹¹ Royal Dutch continuously attracted men with experience in Dutch investment, politics, or colonial government as managers in Langkat or for board po-

⁷ Prominent earlier parliamentary debates concerned the exploitation and ownership of tin and ore on the island of Belitung and the Umbilin coal field on Sumatra.

⁸ HTK 1890--1891, 97--128.

⁹ Jonker and Van Zanden, *From Challenger*, 16--19.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 23.

¹¹ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 382--383.

sitions in The Hague, where they were optimally located to secure the government's good will.¹²

Royal Dutch focused on sales in Asia, which after North America and Europe was becoming the target of fierce competition in the oil industry at the time. The proximity of its oil wells to Asian markets allowed Royal Dutch to compete with companies with more advanced production and distribution networks like M. Samuel & Co., a British distributor for Russian oil, and Standard Oil, a near monopolist from the United States. Quickly gaining market share was key, as it gave the companies space to develop their businesses and find new petroleum fields. From the beginning, Royal Dutch therefore announced it would focus on the British and Dutch colonies as well as the Qing Empire for its sales.¹³ Due to its large population and minimal use of electricity, the Empire was considered potentially the most important market for the sale of kerosene as lamp oil. Already in the 1890s, it led to aggressive practices among the three companies such as price wars and dumping.¹⁴

At first limiting sales to the Straits, Royal Dutch started selling kerosene in the Qing Empire, India, Java, and Siam in 1894. Distribution in the treaty ports was handled by Meyer & Co., a German trading firm which also operated the tank installations for bulk imports Royal Dutch started constructing in 1897. Crucially, using Meyer & Co.'s established sales network and investing in cheaper transport and distribution allowed the company to match the competition's efficiency. In 1907, the same motives inspired Royal Dutch to set up an innovative up-country distribution network in alliance with Shell Transport & Trading, the former Samuel & Co., and Bnito, the latter's Russian suppliers. Kerosene had become the reason more and more of the Chinese population came in contact with industrial trade.¹⁵

Because industry in the treaty ports was at best tacitly condoned in the 1890s, the company required informal permission to place its tanks. As it did for protection and all other problems Royal Dutch might encounter in the empire, Meyer & Co. turned to its contacts in the German consular apparatus. For the benefit to German trading, they were happy to help. Whereas Royal Dutch frequently benefited from its Dutch ties, they were more of a liability in this case. Without the Germans, the company would have been bereft of support in the many treaty ports where the Netherlands did not have its own salaried consul. No backing was to be expected from British consulates, who had their own oil company to protect. When, for unrelated reasons, Germany did indeed cease to represent other countries in 1897, this put Royal Dutch at some disadvantage to Samuel & Co., which had the full power of the British consular apparatus at its disposal.¹⁶

¹² "Financiële Berichten," *Het Vaderland*, May 2, 1890; "Vergaderingen van aandeelhouders," *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, Jul. 18, 1894.

¹³ "Financiële Berichten," *Het Vaderland*, May 2, 1890.

¹⁴ Jonker and Van Zanden, *From Challenger*, 65--68.

¹⁵ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 73.

¹⁶ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 33, F.J. Haver Droeze to W.H. de Beaufort, Nov. 10, 1897, J.B.A. Kessler to Knobel, Sep. 13, 1897, and Knobel to Kessler (draft), Nov. 8, 1897.

Nonetheless, this exclusive reliance on German partners was a thorn in the side for E.D. van Walree, the Dutch consul in Shanghai. When general director J.B.A. Kessler visited the Qing Empire, Van Walree complained, he even failed to announce so to local Dutch consuls or consul general Knobel.¹⁷ This was not the way things were normally done in Dutch circles, so to say, and contributed to Kessler's unpopularity in Dutch business despite what historians see as his vital contribution to the company's survival and success.¹⁸ The same sentiment can be found in many Dutch discussions on commerce in the Qing Empire, for instance in the NHM, also after its former Penang agent H.W.A. Deterding took charge of Royal Dutch in 1900.¹⁹ Their promotion of solidarity among Dutch businesses for the benefit of all reflects the idea of "buying Dutch" discussed in chapter two. For a consul tasked with the advancement of Dutch commerce as a whole, such makes sense. "Once it has left our archipelago," Knobel once concurred, "the petroleum leaves behind its golden sediment in foreign treasure chambers."²⁰ For the NHM and other trading firms, however, the petroleum companies were simply a big fish. In that spirit, the young J.L. van Laer called on J. Stoop, the managing director of Dordtsche Petroleum Maatschappij based in the East Indies, before he opened his own firm in Shanghai in 1898.²¹ With an oil company as client, his business would surely have been off to a flying start. It was to no avail. Frankly, for the petroleum companies, no Dutch firm in the Qing Empire was established enough to take on the stiff international competition.

That Cremer, as Colonial Minister, accused the Dutch petroleum industry of a lack of "broad and patriotic insight" should therefore also be taken with a grain of salt.²² After all, he never made such remarks about the Dutch tobacco or shipping industries, which had remained in very close cooperation with German consuls and trading firms in the Qing Empire after the labour trade issue of the late 1880s. As board member, Cremer had often had a significant hand in this himself.²³ Meanwhile, he also supported limiting the power of appointing members to Royal Dutch' board to a small number of preference shares and at Kessler's request shut down the possibility of Standard's takeover of Moeara Enim, which held a concession near Palembang in Sumatra's South. To face the possible exhaustion of its Langkat production sites, he allowed the company to move in and exploit nearby Aceh's

¹⁷ NL-HaNA, Vereniging Buitenland Amsterdam, 2.18.10.01, inv.no. 6, Van Walree to Vereeniging "het Buitenland," Jun. 6, 1898.

¹⁸ NL-HaNA, Van der Wijck, 2.21.183.98, inv.no. 3, Cremer to Van der Wijck, Feb. 7, 1898; Jonker and Van Zanden, *From Challenger*, 23; J.P. Poley, *Eroica: The Quest for Oil in Indonesia, 1850--1989* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2000), 93.

¹⁹ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 73.

²⁰ F.M. Knobel, *Oostersche verpoozingen* (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1902), 102--103.

²¹ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 41, Van Laer to Knobel, Aug. 22, 1897.

²² NL-HaNA, Van der Wijck, 2.21.183.98, inv.no. 3, Cremer to Van der Wijck, Mar. 4, 1898.

²³ See shipping initiatives in chapter four and the Deli Planters' Association's refusal to work with Dutch consuls in 1890, as described in NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 36, J.J.B. Heemskerk to J. Rhein, Jun. 17, 1890.

oil wells in the context of a raging war. It was partly thanks to Cremer's ministry, therefore, that Royal Dutch and the Dutch petroleum industry at large survived their "double crisis" of 1898.²⁴

Though this was certainly a new stage, state support runs through the early history of Royal Dutch. Much as in the Flores mission, the colonial government was only committed to its Liberal policies as far as they served the development of Dutch enterprise in the mining industry. The company was able to benefit from its government's goodwill to a great extent because of its powerful connections, a quality it sustained also by having its pick of the large selection of young and more experienced personnel attracted to the oil industry. Whereas the state's favouritism towards Dutch enterprise is typical of the highly competitive nature of imperial relations, so is what happened in the Qing Empire, where Royal Dutch by default was the object of competing national interests and Dutch protectorship. Germany, on the other hand, was a powerful party without its own stake in the Chinese kerosene market and had a strong desire to challenge British interests. Royal Dutch was successful because, as a true multinational, it was able to move flexibly between these national frameworks.

Deli Fields

Descriptions of the Pierson cabinet (1897--1901) as the "cabinet of social justice" usually take no account of its Minister of the Colonies.²⁵ Cremer made his career and a fortune of over half a million guilders as administrator of the Deli Company, the largest tobacco plantation in the Deli region on Sumatra, before returning to the Netherlands to pursue a career as politician and businessman.²⁶ Because of his experience, Cremer was widely considered a colonial expert during his time as a Liberal member of parliament between 1884 and 1905 and enjoyed great popularity in his electoral district of Amsterdam. His ministerial appointment, however, rested less on ideological alignment than on his long-standing endorsement of a more aggressive conquest of Aceh, the sultanate on Sumatra's Northwest coast where the Dutch had been fighting a sluggish war since 1873. Whereas prime minister Pierson convinced Cremer to join the cabinet, it was in fact Queen Regent Emma (r. 1890--1898) who had insisted on the appointment.²⁷ Military governor Van Heutsz led a new phase of heightened aggression and bloodshed by which the war was finally concluded in 1904.

While working for the Deli Company, Cremer, as a Dutch national with a knack for politics among an international crowd and representative of the most powerful of the tobacco

²⁴ R. Lenstra, "Jacob Theodoor Cremer, het koloniaal beheer en het Nederlands belang in Atjeh," *Economisch-Sociaal-Historisch Jaarboek* 49 (1986): 194--203; Jonker and Van Zanden, *From Challenger*, 46--54.

²⁵ Dudink, *Deugdzaam liberalisme*, 9; Te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef*, 139.

²⁶ Lenstra, "Jacob Theodoor Cremer," 173.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 178--179; Kuitenbrouwer and Schijf, "Colonial Business Elite," 76--77. Formally, the function of prime minister did not exist.

companies, had come to speak for the Deli planters in publications directed at Dutch political and public debate. As publicist and politician, he called for state support to private enterprise and voiced many of the protectionist complaints which were becoming more common in the business world. For example, the Dutch government's failure to subsidise Dutch ocean shipping in the 1860s, he argued, had denied opportunities to Dutch shipping and shipbuilding, subjected the Deli planters to higher costs, and thereby "raised the generally good principle of free trade to mere foolishness."²⁸ Whereas parliament turned to him as an authority on the mechanisms of the market, Cremer himself thus came to champion a mixed economy in which government based its decisions whether or not to intervene in the economy on the interests of the private sector, ultimately to benefit from the growth of Dutch businesses and the national economy.

Writing about new legislation for indentured workers after the Mirandolle parliamentary motion of 1875 petitioned to treat breach of contract as a civil offence rather than a crime punishable with forced labour, for example, Cremer argued the plantations needed no government supervision because rational businessmen would never alienate their already scarce workers with violence or unfair treatment.²⁹ Not much later, in 1880, the colonial administration's *coolie ordinance* placed policing and judicial powers over labourers directly in their employers' hands. A dark chapter in modern Dutch history was thus allowed to continue in which sexual exploitation of women was ubiquitous and physical abuse and death were common prices contract labourers paid for minor offences, elopement, or insults to their employers. They were covered up in coordinated fashion by maintaining secrecy, denying allegations, and discrediting the (Socialist) opposition, practices Cremer was part and parcel of. Tellingly, after he took charge in 1897, the Colonial Ministry's yearly communication of Deli's crime statistics to parliament suddenly came to a halt.³⁰

Parliament and the public dismissed news and rumours about Deli's injustices until 1902, when a Dutch lawyer in the East Indies appealed to the Christian moral conscience in a pamphlet on the issue. That is somewhat at odds with this study's premise that societal discomfort with the treatment of low-skilled labourers grew in the final decades of the century. Rather, Cremer employed a developmentalist narrative which did strike a chord at home, as his popularity with the voting public shows. In political and popularising publications, he argued the tobacco industry had brought prosperity and peace to Deli and paved

²⁸ J.T. Cremer, "De ontwikkeling van het stoomvaartverkeer in den Nederlandsch-Indischen archipel," *Bulletin van het Koloniaal Museum te Haarlem* 8 (1894): 6.

²⁹ J.T. Cremer, *Een woord uit Deli tot de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal* (Amsterdam: G. van Tyen en Zonen, 1876); Cremer, *De toekomst van Deli. Eenige opmerkingen* (Leiden: Gualth. Kolff, 1881), 10--19; HTK 1898--1899, 105.

³⁰ Breman, *Koelies, Planters*, 155--162.

the way for Western civilisation in the absence of government. The construction of a privately owned railway network under his directorship was a favourite example.³¹

They are the same arguments the Indies' railway engineers used to promote their ideal of a colonial technocracy. Cremer even followed them in arguing he and the planters were more concerned with the well-being of the colonial population than the trained officials of centralised government.³² He propagated the same vision for Aceh, where he argued the introduction of Western commerce would bring pacification and prosperity, and made it a cornerstone of his policy as minister.³³ Van Heutsz shared this developmentalist view and ardently supported the opening of Aceh's oil wells, provided the product was refined locally to increase employment and economic activity in the region. Much to the latter's disappointment, then, Cremer did not want to go as far and Royal Dutch ended up simply extracting the mineral resources leaving only little behind – "golden sediment" indeed, most of which ended up lining the pockets of indigenous rulers. Securing their support was also a means of pacification. Cremer made many a noble "friend" where he went, but it hardly left the majority of the population better off.³⁴

The planters built a strongly racialised society from the start, where the discourse of white superiority, a justification for the hierarchy of the plantation, was much stronger even than was the case in Java's established colonial society.³⁵ Without exception, Cremer described the indentured labourers as treacherous and immoral, their individual qualities deriving from a racial essence.³⁶ Each ethnicity had its own function on the plantation. Because of their "diligence [...] care and [...] calculating nature," ethnically Chinese workers were considered indispensable for the farming of tobacco and, because of widespread opium use, valuable to the colonial treasury. So as not to have to waste their efficiency on any other crop or task, Cremer argued Deli benefited most from a variation of workers from the Qing Empire, British India, and the East Indies. To justify their pervasive economic exploitation, he stressed the workers were free to spend their money as they chose and had ample means of organisation – more than the planters wanted, in fact, leading them to suppress it in the name of colonial order.³⁷

³¹ Cremer, *De toekomst van Deli*; Cremer, "Delische schetsen," pt. 3, *Eigen Haard* 15, no. 5 (1889), pt. 4, 15, no. 22 (1898), pt. 5a, 16, no. 36 (1890), and pt. 5b, 16, no. 37 (1890); Cremer, "Per Automobiel naar de Battakvlakte," *Eigen Haard* 33, no. 16 (1907).

³² "De heer Cremer over decentralisatie in Indië," *Indische Gids* 13, no. 1 (1891): 238--241.

³³ Cremer, *Woord uit Deli*, 26--27; Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 334; NL-HaNA, Van der Wijck, 2.21.183.98, inv.no. 3, Cremer to Van der Wijck, Aug. 2, 1897.

³⁴ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 218; Breman, *Koelies, planters*, 151; see also Cremer on indigenous rulers in letters to Van der Wijck, Aug. 2, 1897, and Mar. 4, 1898.

³⁵ Breman, *Koelies, Planters*, 155--156.

³⁶ See also Aerts, *De letterheren*, 446.

³⁷ J.T. Cremer, "Emigratie van Hindu's naar Sumatra's Oostkust," *Tijdschrift van Nederlandsch-Indië* 14 (1885): 306--310; Cremer, *Woord uit Deli*, 8.

In Cremer's descriptions to the public, the ideal European entrepreneurs and employees were true representatives of Western civilisation. He employed the language of science by stressing the importance of accurate measurement – "facts over feeling" – while of course, knowledge of the product and its process were crucial.³⁸ Their most important quality, however, was the management of the racialised workers: strict oversight to keep them from cutting corners, "confident, fearless, and fair action" to maintain control, and authority over the ethnic subgroups to resolve conflicts on the plantation.³⁹ Technology and racial science thus went hand in hand in Cremer's proud presentation of the plantation as the product of Western innovation.⁴⁰ "Yes, Deli fields," he wrote, "you have shaped many a young man, who at home would have remained average among the average, into men of action, fit to lead, create, and bear responsibility."⁴¹ Presented alongside adventurous travel narratives in the lay protestant illustrated journal *Eigen Haard*, Cremer's "planters' epic" reflects a Dutch appetite for racial hierarchy and admiration for the entrepreneur.⁴²

The heights the Netherlands could grow to, if only the state supported private enterprise. Cremer was also closely involved when the protectionist vision of close integration of state and industry increasingly gained traction at home. He was there as board member and, soon, president when the KPM was established with state support in 1888 in answer to the long-standing wish to return shipping in the East Indies to Dutch control. His close friend and colleague C.J.K. van Aalst may or may not have been exaggerating when he argued it was due to Cremer's initiative that Amsterdam's bankrupt largest shipyard was successfully rejuvenated as a separate engine manufacturer (Werkspoor) and shipyard (NSM) in the early 1890s thanks to closer coordination with the national shipping and railway sectors.⁴³ With the number of jobs at stake, it gave him the reputation of a man of the people at a time when the state hardly pursued any industrial policy to speak of. Cremer's principal achievement as minister was the introduction of a colonial Mining Act (1899) which guaranteed concession rights to the holders of exploration rights, barred foreigners and foreign enterprise from gaining concessions and largely ignored claims of indigenous owner-

³⁸ Cremer, "Delische schetsen," pt. 2, *Eigen Haard*, 14, no. 48 (1888).

³⁹ Cremer, "Delische schetsen," pt. 1, *Eigen Haard*, 14, no. 44 (1888), and pt. 2.

⁴⁰ S. Tuffnell, "Engineering Inter-imperialism: American Miners and the Transformation of Global Mining, 1871--1910," *Journal of Global History* 10 (2015).

⁴¹ Cremer, "Delische schetsen," pt. 1.

⁴² Breman, *Koelies, planters*, 9.

⁴³ C.J.K. van Aalst, "Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer. 30 Juni 1847--14 Augustus 1923," *Handelingen en mededeelingen van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde te Leiden, over het jaar 1923--1924* (1924): 54; C.A. de Feyter, *Industrial Policy and Shipbuilding: Changing Economic Structures in the Low Countries, 1600--1980* (Utrecht: HES, 1982), 209. Such praise was not uncommon among this circle of directors; see, for instance, B. Nierstrasz on Van Aalst in De Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij*, 185.

ship over subterranean resources – all for a four per cent tax on gross revenue which certainly encouraged exploration but did too little for the colonial treasury.⁴⁴

3.2 Projects Carried Out Abroad

Both in his time on Sumatra and after returning to the Netherlands, Cremer was prolific as a member on the boards of directors of numerous colonial and industrial businesses and institutions. One of these was the Society for the Promotion of Dutch Engineering Works Abroad. Its history is entangled with the same political developments.

Things were set in motion by Heemskerk, the well-connected Dutch merchant in Shanghai, whose first cousin J. Heemskerk Azn. just then finished his second term as prime minister. Over the summer of 1888, the government gazette *Nederlandsche Staats-Courant* published two of his memorandums about the state of Dutch business in the Qing Empire originally sent to the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs. The first, published in July, discussed the growing Chinese market for shipping. Heemskerk voiced the common disdain for Dutch shipping's decline, already mentioned once above, by discussing how Chinese ocean and river shipping were dominated by French, German, and especially British ownership. Instead of accusing the state, he blamed the difficult transition to steamships and a lack of entrepreneurial initiative "outside the Dutch colonies or American railroads" and proposed for Dutch and Belgian shipping interests to be combined in a shared line to Hong Kong with stops in several South-East Asian and East Asian ports.⁴⁵

The second memorandum, reported on in August, concerned the Yellow River. When the flood of the Yellow River in 1887 made between nine hundred thousand and two million inhabitants casualties, bids to apply modern methods to Yellow River flood control started popping up throughout the West. Again, Heemskerk argued that whereas the Dutch lacked the entrepreneurial attentiveness, British, French, and German merchants and engineers were offering their help to the Qing government with hopes of securing a major contract and increasing their country's political influence. They had already been looking for infrastructural projects in the years before and set up syndicates like the Mission de l'Industrie Française en Chine to organise investors nationally, while Heemskerk noted how the German ambassador Von Brandt was covertly recruiting engineers for a potential future in China.⁴⁶ For the benefit to Dutch marine contracting and the steel industry, he urged engineers and investors to set up a syndicate and start looking for work abroad more actively as well, beginning with the Yellow River. Chances were the Netherlands' minor role in "grande poli-

⁴⁴ Van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog*, 220--225.

⁴⁵ "Binnenland," *Nederlandsche Staats-Courant*, Jul. 16, 1888.

⁴⁶ Wu, *Empires of Coal*, 102--115.

tique" would give such a syndicate the edge over its European competitors; a sharp observation, considering De Rijke's Shanghai appointment discussed in the previous chapter.⁴⁷

Heemskerk's call to compete with Great Britain, Germany, and France, not to dominate but to *keep up*, was a success. In November of the same year, the Society for the Promotion of Dutch Engineering Works Abroad (Vereeniging ter Bevordering van de Uitvoering van Werken in het Buitenland door Nederlanders, hereafter "the Society" or "Society for Promotion") was established in direct response to his advice. It brought together investors, politicians, engineers, and contractors and soon sent an exploratory mission to China, exactly as the memorandum proposed. On his own, the merchant thus carries significant responsibility for this new, competitive tone in the Dutch debate on its interests in China. The eagerness with which newspapers around the country copied each other's reporting on these pieces, announcing the Yellow River memorandum as an "important" or "highly important writing," however, shows it struck a chord in Dutch public debate.⁴⁸ The professional journal for Dutch engineers *De Ingenieur* copied the piece in its entirety, adding:

For the technical world, the near future probably lies in the far East, more so than in the "far West," which no longer really needs European help, or even in South Africa, where the lack of population and consequently of necessities remains for now an obstacle to a desired forceful development.⁴⁹

Together, the society's fourteen members represented a blueprint for a prospective international, industrial Dutch marine contracting sector. Cremer was listed as one of the financiers, as was J.J. van Tienhoven van den Boogaard, mayor of the municipality of Werkendam, renowned for its marine contracting work. F.S. van Nierop, co-director of the Amsterdamsche Bank since its creation with German funding in 1871, Marten Mees, a socially engaged banker with a very strong network in colonial trade, and H.J. de Marez Oyens, a partner in his family's banking firm H. Oijens & Sons, also brought in capital.⁵⁰ The three men were on the forefront of Dutch investment in infrastructure. Though the firms they represented had moved away from the *crédit mobilier* moniker, they invested actively in shipping, colonial industry, and American railroads.⁵¹

⁴⁷ "Binnenland," *Nederlandsche Staats-courant*, Aug. 4, 1888.

⁴⁸ "Waterwerken in China," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Aug. 7, 1888; "Binnenland," *Provinciale Brabantsche en 's Hertogenbossche Courant*, Aug. 7, 1888.

⁴⁹ "Waterbouwwerken in China," *De Ingenieur* 3, no. 34 (1888): 291.

⁵⁰ Stadsarchief Rotterdam (Rotterdam City Archives, hereafter NL-RtdGA), Firma R. Mees en Zoonen, entry no. 305, inv.no. 661, Society for Promotion, *Concept finantieele regeling*; H. den Heijer, "Rotterdamse ondernemers en bestuurders. Een koloniale kruisbestuiving," in *Het koloniale verleden van Rotterdam*, ed. G. Oostindie (Amsterdam: Boom, 2020), 169.

⁵¹ A.J. Veenendaal Jr., *Slow Train to Paradise: How Dutch Investment Helped Build American Railroads* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 82--92; 167.

J.G.W. Fijnje van Salverda, the society's chairman, had recently retired from one of the top positions in the Dutch Department of Public Works. He was one of the society's engineers, along with deputy chairman W.F. Leemans, the national superintendent of rivers in the same department. Other engineers were N.H. Nierstrasz, manager of the Hollandsche IJzeren Spoorweg Maatschappij (Holland Railway Company), an engineer with business experience and owner of a technical consultancy, and P.G. van Schermbeek, a military engineer with experience in Japan who was to lead the Yellow River mission.

Finally, a third group consisting of some of the country's foremost river contractors brought on capital of their own and would supply manpower and material for potential work. A. Volker, J.C. van Hattum, and P.A. Bos were successful contractors from the town of Sliedrecht, which bordered the same wetlands as Werkendam and was equally renowned. Their firms had in recent years started working abroad; Van Hattum, in fact, became the first river contractor to work on a project outside of Europe or the Dutch colonies in 1884 when his firm won contracts in Argentina and on the Panama Canal. H.J. Hensterman, chief of Nierstrasz' technical office, and J. Kooij were the remaining members.

The members were likely assembled through personal connections, as many had met earlier in their careers. One project in particular, the Nieuwe Waterweg, connects several of the society's members. The deep-water canal connecting the port of Rotterdam to the North Sea had silted quickly after its opening in 1872 and Mees, who was engaged in many of his home city's affairs and a strong supporter of improving infrastructure for the sake of the economy, had been a vocal proponent of new upkeep measures. Between 1880 and 1886, Leemans oversaw such works in close consultation with Mees, while Volker and Bos, who ran a joint enterprise, carried out the dredging.⁵²

Nonetheless, it is not entirely clear who took the initiative to the society's establishment, due in part to its secretive behaviour. The official account stated Fijnje took the initiative himself after hearing about the Yellow River flood, thus clearly hiding the involvement of Heemskerk. Furthermore, Fijnje's retirement to the coast of France in 1889, leaving many of his duties to Leemans, does not imply the kind of direct involvement perhaps expected from the initiator of such an enterprise. It is possible that Fijnje and Leemans were instructed by the Foreign Ministry, where Heemskerk's letters arrived well before they were published, and the Department of Public Works. At least, Foreign Secretary C. Hartsen was aware and supportive of the Society's plans, as Cremer's December 1888 speech to parliament makes clear:

[Heemskerk's] plea to the Dutch, to attempt and gain a terrain for themselves [in China], has not been in vain. Response has not been limited to plans and discussion, as instead, actual steps

⁵² W.C. Mees, *Man van de daad: Mr. Marten Mees en de opkomst van Rotterdam* (Rotterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 1946), 211-215; J. Korteweg, *Breaking New Ground: Dutch Dredging Pioneers*, trans. P. de Vlaam (Amsterdam: Balans, 2018), 85.

have been taken. I do not believe it would be right to go into detail just yet, but nor do I believe the Foreign Minister will contradict me when I say there are *well-founded expectations*.⁵³

After its establishment, however, there is less doubt that the society acted independently, though the state did pledge a diplomatic commitment.⁵⁴ After the dissolution of the enterprise in 1893, it reported the government had supplied merely "moral support."⁵⁵ At the time of the mission, Ferguson had been relocated to Shantou and thus been of no use. Cremer, meanwhile, became the member of parliament by far most engaged with Sino-Dutch relations in debates calling for improved diplomatic and consular representation in the Qing Empire for the benefit of emigration and opportunities for Dutch industry, which he argued might benefit from Chinese industrialisation.⁵⁶ He was supported in the First Chamber by G. van Tienhoven, a future prime minister and Van Tienhoven van den Boogaard's brother.⁵⁷ The appeal was met with the installation of the new consulate general for South China in Xiamen, which would protect emigration and allow Ferguson to return to Beijing. Cremer, nonetheless, remained critical, as the government was not prepared to make consular reform in support of existing businesses to the extent he pled for. The Society's Yellow River mission had not been able to benefit from diplomatic support at all, he recounted, and new reforms were too little, too late.⁵⁸

Cremer's involvement in the Society laid very much in line with the vision he propagated for the East Indies, in which industrial enterprise nurtured the political and economic goals of the state. After all, the organisation combined the prospect of profit with a strong sense of serving national economic priorities – e.g. the internationalisation of industry, competing with foreign industrial interests – using methods the state endorsed but was considered unprepared or incapable to employ. Significantly, as was the case for the interests of business in Deli he so ardently defended, Cremer himself had a financial stake in the success of this industry, then a common phenomenon of which he is an extreme example. Though the support for private enterprise enjoyed general parliamentary and public approval, it was driven by Liberal forces in society – parliamentarians, bankers, and engineers – existing in a close-knit network, like the Van Tienhovens, and was eventually stumped by a more conservative outlook on state responsibility. Thus, similar to private initiative in the state's resource politics, state support for business was still very much a contested trend.

⁵³ HTK 1880--1881, 520.

⁵⁴ HTK 1889--1890, 384.

⁵⁵ NL-RtdGA, Mees, 305, inv.no. 661, "Vereeniging ter Bevordering van de Uitvoering van werken in het Buitenland door Nederlanders, 1888--1893" (report).

⁵⁶ HTK 1888--1889, 520.

⁵⁷ Reports of the First Chamber of Parliament (*Verslag der handelingen van de Eerste Kamer der Staten Generaal*, hereafter HEK), 1888--1889, 227--228.

⁵⁸ HTK 1889--1890, 379--387.

Inspecting the Yellow River

Upon hearing about the Society's plans, De Rijke, who knew Van Schermbeek from when the latter had served in the Japanese army between 1883 and 1886, had been very sceptical. He argued the project was a hopeless attempt to export Dutch capital and lacked expertise in river engineering. Though the Dutch investors had the money, they did not have "an army" of labourers or personnel to oversee such an enormous project. "This mission from Holland is a result of Heemskerk's long letters. [...] Only the Chinese Gov^t. itself can take this up. [...] The project is begging for money, just for no reason, from the Chinese. Scientific mission a newspaper says." De Rijke expected Heemskerk to be the only one to benefit as the enterprise was bound to lose money, and advised Escher and their fellow engineers to stay away.⁵⁹ He was equally dismissive of rumours of the Society's interest in Japan, but argued:

it would be different if one of the *tough* fellows of Van Hattem's bunch came here himself. Sooner or later the Tokyo harbour will become an issue, there might be something to do then. Does Jan Van Hattum's Co still exist? I would be prepared to help such fellows with all possible information if one of them came himself.⁶⁰

De Rijke's comments show how the Society's alliance of capital and engineering caused friction in the budding internationalisation of the sector, which in his mind should rely on the experience and expertise of established dredging firms and engineers.

In December 1888, Van Schermbeek; the overseer A. Visser Gzn., an employee of Volker & Bos; and the civil engineer B.M. Blijdenstein left the port of Marseille for the Qing Empire. According to their own report, their mission was threefold: to seek the attention of the Qing government, judge the feasibility of Yellow River flood control, and collect the data necessary to predict the costs of such a project.⁶¹ Their mission therefore started with visits to Tianjin, where they had an audience with Li Hongzhang, the powerful reform-oriented viceroy of Zhili, and then moved on to the Zongli Yamen, the office for foreign affairs established in 1861, in Beijing.⁶² Whereas the Qing officials Van Schermbeek encountered were by a rule skeptical of the feasibility of flood control and the need for exploratory studies, he wrote Li was very content with their plan to inspect the Yellow River free of charge and happily gave his assistance.⁶³ In two tours, together covering some eight hundred kilome-

⁵⁹ De Rijke to Escher, Feb. 2--5, 1889.

⁶⁰ De Rijke to Escher, Jun. 27, 1889. Like the Van Hattums, the Van Hattems were marine contractors from Sliedrecht who had recently started working abroad.

⁶¹ J.G.W. Fijnje van Salverda, P.G. van Schermbeek, and A. Visser, *Memorandum relative to the Improvement of the Hwang-ho or Yellow River in North-China*, trans. W.D. Dickinson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1891), 66--67.

⁶² P.G. van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 1, *De Gids* 63, no. 1 (1899): 306--307.

⁶³ P.G. van Schermbeek, *Mededeelingen over de reis naar de doorbraken der Gele Rivier* (The Hague: J. & H. van Langenhuisen, 1892), 6; Van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 1, 304--307.

tres of the river from Sishui, near Zhengzhou in the province of Henan, to the river's mouth, the group sampled water levels, depths, discharge, and amounts of soluble material, inspected dikes as well as the sites and restoration works of the major breaches of 1852 and 1887, and studied the use of the landscape for excavated housing and agriculture, all to gain an idea of the river and its social and economic functions in the surrounding region.⁶⁴

In a travel report published in 1899, Van Schermbeek observed the Qing Empire had been facing the consequences of poor river management. Though regular construction and upkeep of dikes along the Yellow River would prevent disasters and thus prove cheaper in the long run, Qing officials could not be bothered to spend the money and preferred waiting for emergency funds from the central treasury, their general attitude one of "Après nous le déluge!"⁶⁵ Van Schermbeek strongly disagreed with the idea that they could learn river management from the history books they studied for the imperial examination and saw the faulty positioning of dikes and failure to cover them in vegetation as examples of Chinese engineering's lack of knowledge on nature's forces.⁶⁶ Though he argued the Qing dynasty might soon be superseded, the Chinese people would never be relieved of the yoke of the mandarin class without – referencing discussion of societal degeneration in the Bible – "foreign yeast."⁶⁷

This combination of disdain for Chinese rule with a patronising sympathy for its population is, by now, a familiar aspect of many Dutch observations on the Qing Empire. Whereas Van Schermbeek and De Rijke shared their negative judgment of Qing rule based on the state of its public works, however, the former thus saw it as a justification for foreign conquest and was altogether less critical of the idea of European superiority. Nonetheless, the enthusiastic reception of reporting on the mission back home reveals the curiosity and eagerness with which Van Schermbeek and the engineering class approached the possibility of work abroad.⁶⁸

Following Heemskerk, the Society believed that it would have to beat stiff foreign competition with stronger diplomatic backing than the Netherlands could provide if it was to gain commissions for the Dutch marine engineering industry in China. Van Schermbeek discussed them during his travels:

Apart from our Syndicate others had also been active in China, or were still hunting for concessions: they were French, Germans, and Americans. (...) Supported by their diplomacy, these competitors worked less in the field, than in the yamens – the offices – of the high functionaries.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Fijnje, *Memorandum*, 68--70.

⁶⁵ Van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 1, 303.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, 303; 307; 321; Van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 2, *De Gids* 63, no. 2 (1899) 100; 102n1.

⁶⁷ 1 Cor. 5:6--8; Van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 1, 323.

⁶⁸ Van Schermbeek, *Mededeelingen*; "Vergadering," *De Ingenieur* 6, no. 47 (1891): 438--439.

⁶⁹ Van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 1, 305.

Without data, however, no accurate cost estimate was possible, and the Dutch did their best of convincing the Qing authorities of the "charlatanism" of any who told them otherwise.⁷⁰ The Society's bid thus relied on offering a proposal of superior quality, and was preoccupied with outperforming its Western competitors on an unborn project the prospected client had very little interest in to begin with.

Based on the observations made by Van Schermbeek and Visser, geological studies of China and the Yellow River landscape by Von Richthofen and others, and studies of comparable rivers and landscapes in Europe, Fijnje wrote an impressive feasibility study and stipulated what measurements were needed for a full proposal.⁷¹ To reinforce its claim to superiority, the Society's report presented the quality of its work as typically Dutch, opening its memorandum as follows:

the tidings of [the 1887 Yellow River flood] awakened the utmost interest in the Netherlands, whose inhabitants had to conquer nearly every foot of their territory in a death-grapple with the watery element, and to defend it continually against the constant encroachments of their unrelenting foe.⁷²

Van Schermbeek recounted how he and his companions introduced themselves to Chinese officials as 'inhabitants of a far-away country with many wicked rivers' which had of late 'been reshaped from a curse into a blessing' with the use of new techniques, who had now come to observe the Chinese restoration of the Yellow River breach.⁷³

Their work, however, built on a European rather than Dutch heritage. Van Schermbeek firmly placed himself in a European literary and scholarly tradition by comparing his journey and observations to the work of the writers Dante Alighieri, John Milton, and Jonathan Swift – the dystopian reference is clear – as well as the mathematician Simon Stevin and the geologist Von Richthofen.⁷⁴ Fijnje compared aspects of the Yellow River and the surrounding landscape to different parts of the Rhine, Danube, and Rhône and referred to the international institutionalisation of the improvement of Rhine navigability as stipulated during the Congress of Vienna as a driving force behind the century's considerable scientific innovations in river management, among which he considered the discovery of the economic benefits of infrastructural projects one of the most important.⁷⁵

It is true that Dutch river workers developed some unique pre-industrial techniques through centuries of experience in the wetlands, chief among them the sinking of mats of

⁷⁰ Fijnje, *Memorandum*, 66; Van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 1, 307.

⁷¹ Fijnje, *Memorandum*.

⁷² *Ibidem*, vii.

⁷³ Van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 2, 98.

⁷⁴ Van Schermbeek, "Naar de Gele Rivier," pt. 1, 300; 310; pt. 2, 104; Van Schermbeek, *Mededeelingen*, 19.

⁷⁵ Fijnje, *Memorandum relative to*, 2.

weaved osier, *zinkstukken*, to prevent river erosion. De Rijke and his colleagues applied this technique with great success both in Japan and Shanghai.⁷⁶ That hardly placed Dutch river works above its foreign counterparts, however. De Rijke promoted the Japanese use of *yakago* – long, stone-filled netting – to his colleagues at home and the Chinese in turn used techniques for the reparation of dike breaches which Fijnje argued were "unequaled in Europe."⁷⁷ Fijnje was not even adamant that the osier works should be used on the Yellow River.⁷⁸ Rather, the Society's proposal built on Dutch experience in river management which was fundamentally grounded in European scientific innovation, having benefitted, for instance, from the use of groynes copied from German states and steam dredgers purchased abroad.⁷⁹

While in the Qing Empire, the delegation had also attempted to sell the Society's services on other occasions. In Shanghai, it had made propositions for the sale of a bucket dredging ship and the execution of De Rijke's Huangpu river design, progress on which was still stagnant at that point. In Tianjin, Van Schermbeek argued foreign diplomats might someday, "after the murder of a missionary, for instance," negotiate the reform of the Beihe River, which froze and caused shipping to come to a standstill every winter.⁸⁰ Its greatest success was an agreement for the sale of a dredger equipped with a mud-press to Zhang Yao (1832--1891), the governor of Shandong, who intended to try it out for Yellow River upkeep.⁸¹ In the absence of consular support, the Society hired the services of H. Mandl & Co., an Austrian commercial representative with offices in several treaty ports, to represent its interest to the Qing government at considerable cost.⁸² Heemskerk, at that point, already expressed his fear of being taken off the payroll of what he argued was his brainchild.⁸³

Nonetheless, all of the Society's projects ended in failure. It sent its Yellow River memorandum to Qing officials and interested parties around the world but received no response from China – the piece was "officially completely ignored."⁸⁴ When interviewed by a Dutch reporter on his tour of Europe in 1896, Li expressed issue with the report's scope, arguing his government could barely hire a company based on a report on only a small part of the

⁷⁶ De Rijke to Escher, Sep. 28, 1910, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse Stroomversnelling*, 516.

⁷⁷ "Yakago: Japansche oeververdediging van korven met steenen gevuld," *De Ingenieur* 15, no. 1 (1900): 8; Fijnje, *Memorandum*, 54.

⁷⁸ Fijnje, *Memorandum*, 60.

⁷⁹ A. Bosch and G.P. van de Ven, "Rivierverbetering," in *Geschiedenis van de techniek in de negentiende eeuw: De wording van een moderne samenleving 1800-1890*, ed. H.W. Lintsen, vol. II, *Gezondheid en openbare hygiëne. Waterstaat en infrastructuur. Papier, druk en communicatie* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1993), 121--122; Korteweg, *Breaking New Ground*, 45--54.

⁸⁰ Van Schermbeek, *Mededeelingen*, 5.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 21.

⁸² NL-RtdGA, Mees, 305, inv.no. 661, Contract between H. Mandl & Co. and Society for Promotion.

⁸³ NL-RtdGA, Mees, 305, inv.no. 661, Heemskerk to M. Mees, Nov. 20, 1889.

⁸⁴ "Vereeniging, 1888--1893."

Yellow River's length.⁸⁵ Such, of course, had never been the Society's intention. More likely, Li had drawn his own conclusions about the likelihood a Yellow River reform project of such a large scale would ever be funded by the impoverished, war-ridden Qing Empire.

The dredging machine was ordered from the J. & K. Smit shipyard in Kinderdijk and shipped to Shanghai with some delay, but after Zhang's death, his successor managed to find a way to cancel the sale. The Society blamed Mandl & Co. and especially Heemskerk for the situation, arguing they had been the most adamant supporters of the sale for its supposed value to relations with the Qing government but did not communicate their failure in securing payment in advance, on which the Society claimed it had insisted. Whereas the machine was sold to Mandl & Co. at a slight loss, the Society's forty-five thousand guilders investment in its mission to the Qing Empire was lost. Meanwhile, the Society had entered negotiations about river contracting, road, and railway works in Ottoman Empire, Iran, Spain, Siam, Montenegro, and Greece which had likewise failed to bear fruit.⁸⁶ In 1893, the company requested bankruptcy, a decision Cremer had supported early on.⁸⁷

The history of the Society's Yellow River mission illustrates the uneasy partnership of investors and engineers in the internationalisation of the Dutch marine contracting sector. Whereas its proposal was presented as a humanitarian or civilising mission and placed the organisation in a European tradition, aspects similar to those found describing the work of Dutch engineers abroad in chapter two, the mission itself was driven by political and economic nationalism. Contractors hoping to expand beyond Europe were joined by investors looking to put Dutch capital to work abroad who, apart from political influence and experience investing in public works, brought on a nationalist outlook. The society made efforts to differentiate the Dutch marine contracting sector from its foreign counterparts, stressing such qualities as heritage and reliability, in order to facilitate the sector's internationalisation, the export of Dutch capital, but especially the development of the Dutch economy as a whole in times of increased industrial competition along national lines. Operating from a minimal knowledge of Chinese politics and lacking the political contacts necessary to sell the project to the Qing government, it was doomed to failure. As De Rijke predicted, Dutch investors' belief in Heemskerk's promises had only led to disappointment.

Conclusion

As competition among the Great Powers intensified, the Qing Empire, too, became the object of greatly increased foreign activity and interest. Because of its legality, business was

⁸⁵ "Li-Hung-Chang," *Leidsch Dagblad*, Jul. 8, 1896.

⁸⁶ NL-RtdGA, Mees, 305, inv.no. 661, W.F. Leemans, "Verslag van de werkzaamheden der Vereeniging ter bevordering van de uitvoering van werken in het buitenland door Nederlanders" (unpublished report, May 8, 1893).

⁸⁷ NL-RtdGA, Mees, 305, inv.no. 661, Minutes of the Society for Promotion, May 29, 1893.

the ultimate vehicle. In this chapter, we have seen this development influence Dutch commercial actors in three different ways: first, the call to national organisation, second, the use of a narrative building on Dutch tradition, and third, the development of an imperialist mindset. Together, they helped Dutch industry turn its gaze toward the Empire.

The pressure on Dutch business and state to work together paralleled the rising criticism of centralisation in colonial policy in the 1870s, the idea of "buying Dutch." With its contacts in parliament, Royal Dutch made clever use of the government's seemingly conflicted stance and the widely carried urge to exploit the East Indies' natural resources. Cremer, too, was custom to highlight the alignment of private and public interests in his work for the Deli Company. By arguing the Society for Promotion's competition for market share in the Qing Empire was a political goal, he helped supplant this narrative directly from colonial to foreign politics. Promises about the Qing Empire's future for Dutch business helped attract the attention of Liberal nationalists, investors, and a marine construction sector looking to internationalise. Government, too, showed an interest, but more in word than deed. That none of these collectives were particularly active or organised makes it difficult to determine who exactly actuated this new Dutch attitude.

In this context, businesses took on a profile as Dutch organisations pursuing Liberal ideals for two reasons. First, it helped distinguish the company from its competition, which often was similarly organised nationally. Diplomatic backing, however, was equally important in this competition. Secondly, therefore, an idealist narrative served to convince the national audience and state. The idea of national organisation combined well with the rise of social liberalism at home, as Cremer showed by helping to save jobs in the reorganisation of the shipping and railway industries. Meanwhile, Knobel's criticism of Royal Dutch shows the nationalist narrative's political effect. However, by seeking alliances across borders instead of cultivating a Dutch image – difficult as that may be with such a name – the oil company, too, simply did what it had to in order to survive.

As the idea of a "scientific mission" to the Yellow River suggests, the Liberal idealism must have appealed to some Dutchmen (and Society members), like the technocratic engineers, more than others. However, Cremer's experience in Deli shows such narratives and political engagement did not always correspond with the behaviour of commercial enterprise. In reality, men like him and Van Schermbeek placed themselves in a tradition of European moral superiority used as justification for the subjugation of workers and empires alike, a clearly imperialist view. Parliament strikingly failed to intervene. Instead, it seemed quite content to look the other way.

Chapter 4. Planting the Flag

It was precisely 4.43 when the royal train steamed into the station, greeted loudly by the swarming crowd. Their greeting, progressively passed further on, relayed to the palace a truly *telephonic* message of the far Eastern guest's arrival.¹

There was no shortage of excitement when in early July, 1896, Li Hongzhang visited the Netherlands on a tour of Western Europe and the U.S. after attending the coronation of czar Nicholas II. Together with the emperor and empress dowager, the minister was one of the most well-known Chinese political figures in the Netherlands at the time, and, due to his progressive politics, probably the most popular. Newspaper reporting shows his arrival was effortlessly incorporated in the popular idea of the modern times. Now was the era of clocks, trains, telephone, and Sino-Dutch diplomacy.

Frits Knobel (1857--1933), appointed the new Dutch consul general to Beijing a year earlier, accompanied the minister on parts of his visit. Li was received more than cordially with a welcome at Hotel des Indes, reception at the royal palace, and festive banquet with Prime Minister Röell and Colonial Minister Bergsma at the shoreside Kurhaus.² Meanwhile, as a curious statesman and an industrial entrepreneur in his own right, Li was eager to inspect Dutch industry while the Dutch saw an opportunity to promote their commercial interests. Their failed attempt at securing a Yellow River dredging concession in mind, the Society for Promotion's former president Leemans had already informed with Knobel whether there was any chance of a meeting.³ "If it leads to nothing, I'd rather not," Leemans wrote, and asked Cremer to go instead.⁴

Cremer was impressed by their meeting, but there were no direct results.⁵ Instead, Dutch success in China in the following ten years was driven by the wider Dutch interest the warm welcome represented. The growth of Sino-Dutch trade, Li told a reporter, would follow naturally after Dutchmen in the treaty ports built a reputation in sectors not yet monopolised by the Great Powers, and so it happened.⁶ Before 1900, three new trading houses opened up shop in the treaty ports, followed by the shipping line JCJL and colonial bank NHM in the years after. How men like Knobel, parliament, and the shipping sector encouraged this development is the subject of this chapter.

¹ "Li-Hung-Chang," *Leidsch Dagblad*, Jul. 8, 1896.

² P.N. Kuiper, *The Early Dutch Sinologists: A Study of their Training in Holland and China, and their Functions in the Netherlands Indies, 1854--1900* (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2015), 429--430.

³ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Knobel to Leemans (draft), Jun. 24, 1896.

⁴ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Leemans to Knobel, Jun. 23, 1896 and Jun. 25, 1896.

⁵ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 33, Cremer to Knobel, Jul. 25, 1896.

⁶ *Haagsch Dagblad*, quoted in "Een onderhoud met Li-Hung-Chang," *Leidsch Dagblad*, Jul. 8, 1896.

4.1 The Struggle for Life

At the time of Li Hongzhang's visit, Knobel was in the capital asking attention from Dutch business and promoting his annexation proposal to the government.⁷ His appointment as consul general and minister resident in 1895 shook up the Dutch representation. The son of the Swiss *pâtissier* Fridolin Knobel and Maria Johanna Keuchenius, a distant cousin of the former Calvinist Colonial Minister, had occupied positions in Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Tehran before being appointed to the top position in the Qing Empire. He suffered a gunshot wound in the final days of the Yihetuan Uprising and represented Dutch interests in the peace negotiations before returning home in 1901.

Dutch diplomacy in China faced very different challenges now that the Western powers were drifting away from their formerly cooperative politics. Whereas MFN status had allowed Knobel's predecessor J.H. Ferguson simply to benefit from any negotiations between the Qing Empire and Western powers from the sidelines, the predicted partition of China and new tensions pitting empires with territorial ambitions against the defenders of the Open Door increased pressure on small powers to choose sides. Strict adherence to political neutrality inspired consecutive Foreign Ministers to refrain from doing so and, in fact, warn Knobel against taking decisions that could be explained as favouring one of the European powers or endangering European unity, including entering business alliances for infrastructural projects or resisting joint diplomatic or military action against the Qing.⁸

Knobel's appointment was very much the result of his political alignment with Cremer and the supporters of a more aggressive consular policy. After missing out in Japan, the Foreign Minister argued in 1894, reorganisation of the neglected consular apparatus in the Qing Empire was paramount if the Netherlands were to gain a slice of the trade of what he described as an empire "in transition."⁹ He even thanked Cremer, the "distinguished specialist of Dutch trade interests in the East," for his support for Knobel's nomination after years of criticising Ferguson's consulate.¹⁰ Ferguson, Cremer once argued, epitomised an unseemly trend among Western powers to treat the "uncivilised" Qing Empire as an equal.¹¹ A new consul, it implied, should be able to obey his government's policy without hesitation.

Knobel nonetheless turned out to be a similarly outspoken publicist as his unpopular predecessor and was unafraid to contradict Dutch foreign policy in his words and actions.¹² Signing, hardly inconspicuously, "K.", he complained that their lack of entrepreneurial initiative was causing the Dutch to miss out on territorial and economic expansion in East Asia

⁷ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 210; 221.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 198--201.

⁹ HTK 1894--1895, 372.

¹⁰ HTK 1888--1889, 519--528; HEK 1888--1889, 227--228; HTK 1889--1890, 379--387; HTK 1895--1896, 435--442.

¹¹ Quoting Ferguson's *Philosophy*. HTK 1891--1892, 320.

¹² Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 201.

and South America in *De Gids* in 1899. Still, the Dutch flag was nowhere to be found in the Qing Empire's waters and tobacco plantations depended on German goodwill for their labour supply. The absence of Dutch banks from East Asia was a relatively new complaint.¹³ The article, titled "Also in view of the East Indies," clearly alluded to the growing domestic fear of foreign threats to colonial sovereignty. To protect their dominion, Knobel argued, the Dutch would need to benefit from the East Indies' "sphere of influence" and take part in the Qing Empire's economic growth as well as its partition. Where necessary, he argued, others had used force.¹⁴

None of his arguments were particularly new.¹⁵ Rather, Knobel followed the behaviour of other foreign powers or the opinions of likeminded compatriots. The same applies to his 1896 and 1898 proposals to the Foreign Minister to occupy Shantou as a Dutch annexation in case a "partition of China" unfolded.¹⁶ It seems that J.J.B. Heemskerk – formerly of Shanghai, now Hong Kong – first brought the idea to Knobel's attention, arguing it would protect the labour supply to the colonies from Germany's rumoured plans for expansion and be a "splendid victory" for the Netherlands in the "'struggle for life' for the smaller nations."¹⁷ Knobel responded:

Your plan concerning Swatow as concession appears to me as if you had advised me to become Governor-General of the N. East Indies i.e. not an absolute impossibility but an utmost improbability in any case. The easiest thing for me would be now to respond: "I will do nothing"¹⁸

But instead, he asked Heemskerk to design a proposal together with F.J. Haver Droeze, the consul general for South China in Hong Kong, which Knobel might present to the government on his trip home later that year.¹⁹

What he lacked in innovation, Knobel made up for with the vigorous promotion of his preferred view on Dutch political and economic growth in the Qing Empire. He took his consular duties very seriously from the moment of taking office and immediately informed about the viability of a Dutch shipping line to the Qing Empire. As consul in Tehran, he had proposed a similar measure to increase trade with the Netherlands.²⁰ Knobel reported on the state of foreign industry in China to Dutch newspapers to arouse the interest of investors and enthusiastically invited companies interested in exporting to China to contact

¹³ Knobel, *Oostersche verpoozingen*, 102--103.

¹⁴ K., "Ook met het oog op Indië," *De Gids* 63, no. 3 (1899), reprinted in Knobel, *Oostersche verpoozingen*.

¹⁵ See, for instance, E. Heldring, *Oost-Azië en Indië: Beschouwingen en schetsen* (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1899), 65; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Van Walree to Knobel, Nov. 27, 1897.

¹⁶ See also Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 211--215.

¹⁷ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 69, Heemskerk to Knobel, Dec. 19, 1895.

¹⁸ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 69, Knobel to Heemskerk (draft), Jan. 9, 1896.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ NL-HaNA, Buitenland, 2.18.10.01, inv.no. 13, Knobel to G.M. Boissevain, Jan. 3, 1892.

him with their questions and proposals.²¹ Most of all, he encouraged them to band together and form national syndicates.²² The consul was in frequent communication with the initiators of each of the three trading houses established in the treaty ports in the late 1890s: J.L. van Laer & Co.; Hotz, s'Jacob & Co.; and the Holland-China Syndicate. The London-based merchant A.P.H. Hotz, in particular, was a personal friend who made Knobel's acquaintance after travelling to Persia in 1891.²³

In the same spirit, Knobel took an interest in river engineering, informing after the work of the Society for Promotion with Leemans and the Foreign Minister and hoping to add a "technical attaché" to his consular staff. Clearly, he was following the behaviour of the Belgian and German legations, which had used these methods to considerable success in order to eventually get a hand in Qing industry or infrastructure.²⁴ Leemans recognised this, and though he expressed his sincere appreciation for Knobel's perseverance, he wanted nothing more to do with the Chinese after the Society's earlier experiences. The Dutch would be better served, he argued, by using their engineers to develop industry in the East Indies.²⁵ In fact, when Cremer later approached him to become Governor-General of the East Indies, Leemans turned him down.²⁶ It seems he did not share in Knobel's or Cremer's boundless ambition. Knobel, however, saw it as his consular duty to pursue this opportunity for Dutch business. "Had our technical activity had no history in this country," he wrote to his superior, "how much lighter the task would be!"²⁷

Vereeniging "het Buitenland"

Knobel's dedication was exactly the quality which Vereeniging "het Buitenland" praised in him and what led to the association's considerable success in China. Almost each of its yearly reports make special mention of Knobel, "whose restless pursuit of the advancement of Dutch interests repeatedly gave the impetus to the sending out of [its] candidates," and often of Haver Droeze, Heemskerk, and Van Walree, the consul in Shanghai from 1897 on-

²¹ Knobel, *Oostersche verpoozingen*, 116--212; see Knobel's correspondence with Dutch firms in NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.nos. 39 and 41.

²² See, for instance, NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 39, Knobel to J. Beenhouwer (draft), Jun. 24, 1897, and Knobel to D. van Geldere, Co. (draft), Sep. 10, 1897.

²³ C.J.M. Achour-Vuurman, "Albert Paulus Hermanus Hotz: Businessman, Traveller, and the First Dutch Photographer in Persia," in *Iran and the Netherlands: Interwoven through the Ages*, eds. M. Gosselink and D.J. Tang (Gronsveld: Barjesteh van Waalwijk van Doorn, 2009).

²⁴ Wu, *Empires of Coal*, 102--111; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Knobel to J. Röell (draft), Mar. 27, 1896. There, see also F. Corsten to Knobel, Feb. 15, 1899, and Knobel to De Beaufort (draft), Feb. 19, 1899.

²⁵ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Leemans to P.W. van der Sleyden, Mar. 31, 1897, and Knobel to Röell (draft), Jun. 19, 1897.

²⁶ NL-HaNA, Van der Wijck, 2.21.138.98, inv.no. 3, Cremer to Van der Wijck, May 28, 1899.

²⁷ Knobel to Röell, Jun. 19, 1897.

wards.²⁸ Clearly, the association had strong backing among the Dutch consuls in the Qing Empire.

Het Buitenland was established in 1888 with clear purpose. To keep up with German and English trade, its founding manifesto argued, the Netherlands needed to follow similar methods. German trade houses in particular had started giving preferential treatment to their compatriot businesses with considerable success, while also in Belgium and Austria – the comparison with smaller colonial powers was inevitable – government was more supportive and business more organised. "[O]ur youth," the manifesto argued, "will once again have to uphold our old fame for trade overseas." The organisation facilitated the employment of young Dutch men abroad, who, by promoting the sales of Dutch manufactures, would contribute to its ultimate goal of developing Dutch exports and bilateral trade relations.²⁹

Apart from maintaining a network of Dutch professionals, its main method for doing so was lending funds to "candidates" for the initial costs of travel and stay to make the option of finding work outside Europe, a costly and initially financially unrewarding affair, more widely available.³⁰ Later, it would extend its activities to finding jobs for recent graduates at trading houses in nearby Europe, e.g. London or Hamburg, an important part of the commercial training of privileged young men.³¹ Apart from doing a service to the national economy, Het Buitenland therefore argued it was fulfilling a social duty for the state which justified its yearly subsidy of three to five thousand guilders.³²

In spite of their frequent attempts and instigation from the Foreign Minister, Het Buitenland found little success in the Qing Empire while Ferguson still occupied the legation. Perhaps due to the nature of his network, he recommended no positions at trading houses, while his attempts with the Imperial Maritime Customs Service led to nothing.³³ Both Knobel and his colleagues, however, actively used their contacts in the treaty ports to find suitable vacancies, not always openly mentioning Het Buitenland's involvement. By 1900, seventeen candidates were active in the Qing Empire or Hong Kong, out of a global total of fifty-seven.³⁴ This success was a great delight to the organisation, which treated China and

²⁸ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Vereeniging "het Buitenland" (hereafter: Het Buitenland), annual report, 1897. See also the reports for 1898, 1899, and 1901.

²⁹ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Het Buitenland, founding manifesto, Jul. 1888.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, *Mededeelingen van de Vereeniging "het Buitenland"* (1898): 13.

³² NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Het Buitenland, "Aan de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal," Dec. 1898. See the annual reports for yearly budgets and subsidies.

³³ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Het Buitenland to G. van Tienhoven, Feb. 13, 1892, Van Tienhoven to Ferguson, Feb. 18, 1892, and Het Buitenland to Knobel, May 26, 1896.

³⁴ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Het Buitenland, annual report, 1900.

Japan as its "principal terrain."³⁵ The reason was no different than what inspired its establishment: to follow in the tracks of competing "merchant nations."³⁶

In its place between the spheres of private and public interest, Het Buitenland enjoyed considerable support from business and Liberal politics. Upon its establishment, A.P.C. van Karnebeek, just after leaving the position of Foreign Minister, was named honorary chairman. The prominent parliamentarian J.P.R. Tak van Poortvliet and the senator and industrialist C.T. Stork held positions on the board, which was further made up of presidents of Dutch chambers of commerce and interested bankers and businessmen like Marten Mees and Balthasar Heldring, whose son Ernst later joined the board as well. More generally, its list of around two hundred contributing members was a who's who of the worlds of business and Liberal politics including Knobel and, inevitably, Cremer.³⁷

Het Buitenland's members thus existed in a tight network with strong professional and ideological overlap. To a far extent, the same applied to its candidates, whose introduction to the organisation was often mediated by family. In working abroad, they hoped to find a quick way to make a career in commerce.³⁸ Many were graduates of the Openbare Handelsschool: a public institution for commerce-oriented secondary education in Amsterdam, the first of its kind, with a lively alumni organisation called Hou en Trouw. Ernst Heldring was a graduate, and so was Van Walree – the two were close friends. Het Buitenland argued that because of superior education, for instance in languages, Handelsschool graduates were usually better prepared for work abroad than others.³⁹ Candidates were furthermore expected to share Het Buitenland's mission.⁴⁰ Rather similarly to the Dutch engineering class and its technocratic ideals, then, their shared educational and networked background made the organisation's candidates an ideologically homogeneous group. The existing business elite was clearly the greatest beneficiary of the extension of Dutch networks abroad Het Buitenland promoted.

In the Qing Empire, this classist bent was further emphasised by the nature of treaty port society and attitude of Dutch representatives. When one candidate's new employer reported his alcohol abuse to Knobel, he and Het Buitenland responded in shock, not concern, and quickly informed the candidate's father. After all, they argued, he had the reputa-

³⁵ NL-HaNa, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Boissevain to Knobel, Apr. 13, 1898.

³⁶ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Het Buitenland to Knobel, Dec. 27, 1895, A.J. Cohen Stuart to Knobel, Apr. 9, 1897, and Het Buitenland, annual report, 1899, 8.

³⁷ Het Buitenland, founding manifesto; Het Buitenland, annual reports, 1897 and 1901.

³⁸ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Het Buitenland to Knobel, Feb. 15, 1896, H.L. Rakers to Knobel, Jun. 26, 1896, and Cohen Stuart to Knobel, Mar. 25, 1897.

³⁹ Het Buitenland, annual report, 1898, 9.

⁴⁰ The pre-enrolment questionnaire for candidates informed after education, family and references, professional experience, health, and preferred location of placement. See *Mededeelingen van de Vereeniging "het Buitenland"*.

tion of all Dutchmen to uphold.⁴¹ Appearances were at least as important as professional ability. Consider also this letter from Van Walree, who advised:

Here, Portuguese and other half-bloods are used for the simpler office activities. A European must be able to act independently and take up such work right away. If he cannot, he will always lag behind, and it will be of no use sending him to places where only a good position or good expectations weigh up against the downsides of the experience.⁴²

It sheds light on the motivation of the consul himself, who had been highly displeased to be relocated from the Yokohama to the Shanghai consulate.⁴³ His transfer to the employment of the NHM in 1903 as its first agent in the "metropolis of the Far East" earned him a reputation as pioneer of Dutch business in China and must, indeed, have fulfilled his hopes, as he rose to a board position within ten years.⁴⁴

Van Walree's disquieting ethnic reference reflects the idealisation of European high society in Shanghai's foreign concessions perpetuated in the city's race tracks and gentlemen's clubs. It shows Dutchmen, as Northwestern Europeans, were positioned and expected to partake in a myth of whiteness where ethnic and cultural superiority were expressed in the intellect and manners of its representatives. It was inherently upper-class. One of Het Buitenland's candidates struck Van Walree as "a true farm boy," badly suited to Shanghai life, while Heemskerk explicitly asked for French-speaking Dutchmen "from good families."⁴⁵

The championing of the lower classes, therefore, was little more than a showpiece.⁴⁶ Het Buitenland's loans did make working abroad more attractive to young professionals and thus served the ultimate purpose of increasing Dutch exports, but in practice – at least in the Qing Empire – the work focused on a *bourgeois* crowd much more alike to the organisation's own membership. It was exactly this membership of industrialists and entrepreneurs, furthermore, which stood to gain directly from greater sales abroad. Het Buitenland's success in the Qing Empire derived particularly from the willingness of the Dutch consuls, who shared its background and ideals of national greatness and personal gain. Contrary to technocracy, there was no patronising concern but rather an arrogant disdain for their alien surroundings.

⁴¹ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Het Buitenland to W. van Zuylen, Jul. 10, 1896, and Cohen Stuart to Knobel, Jul. 13, 1896.

⁴² NL-HaNA, Buitenland, 2.18.10.01, inv.no. 6, Van Walree to Het Buitenland, Apr. 28, 1899.

⁴³ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 32, Van Walree to Knobel, Jul. 27, 1897.

⁴⁴ Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 189.

⁴⁵ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Het Buitenland to Knobel, Dec. 27, 1895, and Van Walree to Knobel, Mar. 23, 1899.

⁴⁶ Cf. P.J. van Winter, "Nederlanders op nieuwe markten", *De Gids* 98, no. 4 (1934): 68.

For Knobel, Het Buitenland was a useful ally. It shared his own professional objectives and its government connections came in handy when the Foreign Minister needed convincing, for instance when Knobel wanted a decoration for Robert Hart, the most important foreign diplomat in the late history of the Qing Empire.⁴⁷ Gideon Boissevain, the organisation's (vice) president, had worked closely with prime minister Pierson at several points in his career, like when they founded the Nederlandsche Kas-Vereeniging with Balthasar Heldring in 1865. Together, Knobel and Boissevain attempted to get Foreign Minister De Beaufort to recommend a Dutch engineer and Buitenland candidate to the German government for employment in one of Germany's railway construction projects in the Qing Empire. Unsurprisingly considering De Beaufort's policy of strict abstention in China, it was to no avail.⁴⁸ In his search for work for Dutch engineers, Knobel's collaborations with both Het Buitenland and the government sorted little effect.

Instead, his most productive partnership was with Johannis de Rijke. They were brought in touch through the mediation of Escher, who had made it to regional chief engineer for the public works department. As House Speaker and one of the foremost Liberal politicians of his generation, Escher's father-in-law J.G. Gleichman was a powerful figure to be recommended by.⁴⁹ Knobel hoped De Rijke's involvement in the planned removal of the Wusong sandbar in Shanghai – an issue now spanning more than two decades – would be rewarded and asked his opinion on similar issues, such as the Beihe River access to Tianjin.⁵⁰ A renewed bid for Yellow River flood control even took on quite serious forms after Knobel asked De Rijke to comment on the proposal of the Belgian engineer Armand Rouffart.⁵¹ When it came to projects with a history of Dutch involvement like the Yellow River, the consul was like a dog with a bone, a motivation reminiscent of *contiguity* in imperial expansion as described by Betts. Perhaps, Knobel argued, De Rijke could be borrowed to the Qing government and benefit from the Japanese government's hopes for reconciliation after the Sino-Japanese War.⁵² Thus, to help De Rijke's cause, he used the political circumstances to his advantage as only an envoy truly could. Knobel encouraged

⁴⁷ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Knobel to Cohen Stuart (draft), May 22, 1896.

⁴⁸ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Het Buitenland to De Beaufort, Nov. 20, 1899, L.H. Ruysenaers to Het Buitenland (copy), Nov. 24, 1899, and Het Buitenland to Knobel, Dec. 1, 1899, and Dec. 6, 1899.

⁴⁹ De Rijke to Escher, Nov. 28, 1896; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Gleichman to Knobel, Jan. 19, 1897.

⁵⁰ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, De Rijke to Knobel, Apr. 3, 1897, and Apr. 29, 1897.

⁵¹ See NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, particularly De Rijke to Knobel, Mar. 17, 1899, and Apr. 26, 1899, and De Rijke, *The Yellow River. Comments on a Report made by A. Rouffart C.E.* (Yokohama: Kelly & Walsh, 1899).

⁵² NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, Knobel to De Rijke (draft), Apr. 11, 1899.

De Rijke to write reports which he subsequently promoted among the foreign envoys, Li Hongzhang, and the Zongli Yamen while also asking attention for them at home.⁵³

After the Yihetuan Uprising, however, such plans were definitively off the table. As discussed in chapter two, De Rijke did come to lead the Huangpu dredging project in Shanghai. The commission for the work's construction also went to a Dutch enterprise, the East Asiatic Dredging Company (EADC). The syndicate of three contractors with funding from the NHM and Mees & Co. banks was established in order to benefit from De Rijke's imminent appointment.⁵⁴ Though French, German, and Japanese companies all made cheaper bids, British diplomatic support was once again decisive.⁵⁵ On the project, the EADC was at the centre of a corruption scandal after its employees over-reported the dredging yield and enriched themselves with the proceeds.⁵⁶ In spite of the damage to its reputation, the work created an opportunity which benefited Dutch dredging and finance long-term. The company was reorganised as Havenwerken and, as it had equipment on site, had a strong market position compared to European competition. Retaining close ties to the NHM, it dominated harbour construction in the newly established Republic until the Japanese invasion, a period in which many Dutch engineers found employ in China.⁵⁷

Doubtful about the capacity and interest of the domestic financial sector, however, Knobel nor De Rijke had initially been interested in forming a Dutch syndicate for Shanghai and instead chose to focus on finding consensus among the treaty powers. Knobel was of the opinion that the work was best taken up by the Shanghai municipal council, whereas a syndicate would only complicate matters further. De Rijke, meanwhile, saw this and other engineering projects as the treaty powers' shared responsibility for Chinese trade and popular well-being and prioritised its execution over Dutch ownership of the project, which he argued was better left in the powerful hands of the British.⁵⁸

The idea to form a Dutch dredging syndicate came from outside. The first to suggest it to De Rijke was a Yokohama-based merchant from Rotterdam called Den Arend. Representing the Dutch shipyard Conrad, he approached the engineer in 1896 and asked for his support to alleviate "congestion of capital" at home.⁵⁹ Conrad's sale of at least four hy-

⁵³ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Knobel to De Rijke (draft), Jan. 5, 1898; inv. no. 45, Knobel to De Rijke (draft), May 25, 1899, and Jul. 20, 1899, and Knobel to Van Sandick (draft), Jul. 20, 1899.

⁵⁴ In Dutch, the EADC was called Ten Bokkel Huinink, Korthals Altes, Van Thiel de Vries & Co. after its directors. Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 191--195.

⁵⁵ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 154--155.

⁵⁶ De Rijke to Escher, Dec. 17, 1909, in Van Gasteren et al., *In een Japanse stroomversnelling*, 513--516; Ye, "Corrupted Infrastructure," 448; Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 154--158.

⁵⁷ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 46; 156--175.

⁵⁸ De Rijke to Knobel, Jul. 5, 1899; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, De Rijke to Knobel, Sep. 27, 1899, and Feb. 24, 1900, and De Rijke to E.L. van Nierop, Jun. 26, 1899; inv.no. 56, Knobel to Van Nierop (draft), Mar. 11, 1898.

⁵⁹ De Rijke to Escher, Nov. 28, 1896.

draulic dredgers in Japan speaks to his success. The merchant moved to Shanghai not long after hearing about the Huangpu project from De Rijke, but was an unpopular man. Whereas De Rijke suggested it was antisemitic prejudice, Den Arend certainly had a hand of his own in the souring of his relationship with Van Walree, who, much to the former's misfortune, was relocated from Yokohama to Shanghai around the same time as him. Even though he spoke the language of economic nationalism, Den Arend was largely shunned by the Dutch consuls in the Qing Empire as a result.⁶⁰

Instead, the first attempt to form a Dutch dredging syndicate for Shanghai came from the Dutch consul in Kobe E.L. van Nierop, a frequent contact of De Rijke's. Van Nierop convinced Knobel that a syndicate was better suited to bear the responsibility for the work than Shanghai's municipal authorities, and that the involvement of De Rijke – who, he wrote, "however apt an engineer is no merchant" – created a unique opportunity for Dutch interests. After the latter informed him of his proposal's progress, Van Nierop took it upon himself to find "reliable folk" to form a syndicate.⁶¹ Most likely, he was referring to his first cousin, the president of the Amsterdamsche Bank and founding member of the Society for Promotion F.S. van Nierop.

From that moment onwards, Knobel, De Rijke, and Van Nierop collectively pursued the forming of a syndicate with Dutch backing for dredging projects in the Qing Empire. After Van Nierop's attempts led to nothing, De Rijke approached some of his contacts – he considered Brits and Russians, too – but to no avail.⁶² Knobel turned to his own associates. When the English businessman J.L. Kaye approached him to find Dutch investment for a business entailing marine construction and copper mine concessions up the river Yangzi, he sensed an opportunity to gain the British foreign ministry's backing for the Huangpu project and wrote to his friend Hotz in London and his contacts in *Het Buitenland*.⁶³

The people Hotz approached as potential investors comprise a familiar band: Cremer, Leemans, Mees, Boissevain, Volker, Bos, F.S. van Nierop, and Ernst Heldring. R.P.J. Tutein Nolthenius, an engineer and equally well-connected figure, completed the list.⁶⁴ In 1896, Nolthenius had once, to no avail, expressed his interest in the Qing Empire to Knobel and soon after taken up a position on the editorial board of *De Gids*.⁶⁵ It meant the business elite's view on the East now had a new voice in the national media. Thanks to him, *De Gids*

⁶⁰ Ibidem; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 32, Van Walree to Knobel, Nov. 29, 1897; inv.no. 39, Den Arend to Knobel, Sep. 1, 1897; inv.no. 45, De Rijke to Knobel, Mar. 17, 1899, and Jul. 15, 1899.

⁶¹ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 56, Van Nierop to Knobel, Mar. 31, 1898, Van Nierop to Knobel (extract), Apr. 24, 1898, and Knobel to De Rijke (extract), May 5, 1898.

⁶² NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, De Rijke to Knobel, Mar. 23, 1899.

⁶³ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 38, Kaye to Knobel, Jun. 17, 1899; inv.no. 44, Knobel to De Rijke, Oct. 17, 1899, Knobel to Boissevain (draft), Oct. 17, 1899, and Jan. 4, 1900, Boissevain to Knobel, Feb. 1, 1900, and Knobel to Hotz (draft), Mar. 15, 1900.

⁶⁴ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Hotz to Knobel, Jan. 29, 1900.

⁶⁵ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Knobel to De Rijke (draft), Apr. 9, 1897.

published Knobel's "Also in view of the East Indies" and Van Schermbeek's "To the Yellow River" analysed in chapter three. For the latter piece, he also asked attention from Charles Boissevain, who happily obliged.⁶⁶

As had been the case for the Society for Promotion, the new coalition of the financial and marine construction sectors was an uneasy one, especially for De Rijke. In a letter discussing the Yellow River, Van Schermbeek told him what the Dutch needed to succeed was not better designs but "expansive political views, expansive wallets, and an expansive conscience," practically encouraging them to bribe their relations in the Qing government.⁶⁷ This seems to have been a bridge too far even for Knobel.⁶⁸ Besides, it took the consul general some effort to convince De Rijke not to let his aversion of the *jingoes* get in the way of their potential business with Kaye in the Qing Empire.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the project never got off the ground due to a number of factors. Hotz wrote that the potential investors had no faith in Kaye's project and feared the political situation in the Qing Empire. Strikingly, he also quoted the investors' discomfort with Britain's reputation for the maltreatment of labourers on similar projects.⁷⁰ Kaye, furthermore, did not possess the kind of political influence in London Knobel was hoping on to sway the British government, never mind its capitulation with the Boer War.⁷¹

Despite the wasted effort, Knobel's attitude was such that he pursued these opportunities even if people would accuse him of "trop de zèle."⁷² If it "proves to how many companies China offers opportunities," he wrote to Gideon Boissevain, it had anyhow been worth the effort.⁷³ Indeed, his views became more and more common. In 1901, for instance, Leemans took up the presidency of a newly established commission for the placement of Dutch engineers abroad.⁷⁴ Such plans were never part of the government's official China policy, which remained focused on abstention, though De Beaufort did allow Knobel to act in accordance with the majority of his colleagues in the matter of the Shanghai river conservancy board.⁷⁵ In 1901, he acceded to the commission of diplomats overseeing the negotiations for the removal of the Wusong Bar.⁷⁶ Both in the Netherlands and the Qing

⁶⁶ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, Tutein Nolthenius to Knobel, Apr. 11, 1899, and Sep. 6, 1899; C. Boissevain, "Nieuwe banen", *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Sep. 3, 1899 (evening).

⁶⁷ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Van Schermbeek to De Rijke, Jan. 4, 1900.

⁶⁸ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Knobel to De Rijke (draft), Mar. 17, 1900.

⁶⁹ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 45, Knobel to De Rijke (draft), Nov. 20, 1899.

⁷⁰ Hotz to Knobel, Jan. 29, 1900; Boissevain to Knobel, Feb. 1, 1900.

⁷¹ Hotz to Knobel, Jan. 29, 1900; De Rijke to Knobel, Feb. 24, 1900; Knobel to Hotz, Mar. 15, 1900; Knobel to De Rijke, Mar. 17, 1900.

⁷² NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Knobel to Boissevain (draft), Feb. 24, 1900.

⁷³ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, Knobel to Boissevain (draft), Mar. 15, 1900.

⁷⁴ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 44, De Beaufort to Knobel, Mar. 26, 1901, and Vereeniging van Delftsche Ingenieurs to Knobel, Mar. 30, 1901.

⁷⁵ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 57, De Beaufort to Knobel, Aug. 19, 1899.

⁷⁶ NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 57, Knobel to De Rijke (draft), May 5, 1901.

Empire, then, things were moving quickly in the direction of the competitive, globalised economy which Knobel and the business sector adhered.

4.2 Patronage and Patriotism

It turns out that these developments allowed for Dutch business to approach China on a much larger scale. The birth of the Java-China-Japanlijn, finally and swiftly addressing the complaints about Dutch shipping's minor role in the Far East, and the establishment of the NHM Shanghai agency after a long absence from the Qing Empire announced the beginning of organised Dutch business activity in China as defined by Van der Putten.⁷⁷

Brugmans described the JCJL as the product of two converging initiatives. On one side of the globe, Van Walree saw chances for a Dutch shipping line connecting the East Indies, Qing Empire, and Japan if only it was extended to San Francisco. Meanwhile, in April, 1900, in The Hague, De Beaufort notified Cremer, then Colonial Minister, of Danish interest in establishing a shipping line connecting Java to Siam, the Qing Empire, or Japan. On Cremer's request, his contacts in the Dutch shipping sector formed a committee exploring the possibility of a subsidised Dutch counter-initiative. As the new director of the Koninklijke Nederlandsche Stoomboot Maatschappij (KNSM), Ernst Heldring was one of its members, who also happened to have discussed Van Walree's plans in personal letters. Through his mediation, the two initiatives came together in 1901.⁷⁸

Contrary to popular narrative, several attempts to establish a (subsidised) shipping line between Java and the Qing Empire had been made in the preceding decades, though each had ended in failure. In 1878, parliament had stumped a first subsidy proposed, of all people, by consul general Ferguson, the supposed nemesis of colonial business.⁷⁹ A subsidy from the East Indies budget for the British-owned NISM's three-monthly line between 1880 and 1884 was discontinued due to disappointing results. Later, yearly losses of up to a hundred and fifty thousand guilders caused new, unsubsidised attempts in 1891-1893 and 1896 – the second by Lauts, Wegener & Co., Deli's German partners in the labour trade – to be halted quickly. A want for cargo was the main problem. Sugar, Java's most important export product, filled the ships for only part of the year while imports remained low, and the shipping lines did not immediately stimulate economic activity in the East Indies to the desired degree.⁸⁰

These circumstances explain the importance of state support. On the one hand, both Van Walree and Heldring were suggesting new attempts in 1899, at a time when the latter would still write that "categorically, where we're from we do not subsidise steamship

⁷⁷ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 33--34.

⁷⁸ Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaanaart*, 30--39.

⁷⁹ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern imperialism*, 76--77.

⁸⁰ Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaanaart*, 26--29.

lines."⁸¹ Heldring thought the failure of the 1896 attempt was partly due to "avoidable circumstances," whereas Van Walree argued the development of the Japanese economy, where imports and exports tripled over the course of the 1890s, made for a changed situation with new opportunities, an opinion shared by the KPM's agents in Japan and Batavia.⁸² On the other, competition had only increased, and the sector as a whole was extremely hesitant at risking such high losses once again. Without the guarantee of a subsidy, therefore, it is highly doubtful that the JCJL would have received investments of 1.51 million guilders from the NHM and 450 thousand from the KPM, SMN, and RL shipping companies combined upon its establishment, and another one million in a 1904 shares emission.⁸³

The JCJL was finally established in 1902. In a contract with the Colonial and Trade Ministers in the Kuyper cabinet, the company committed to organising at least thirteen journeys a year at regular intervals in return for an interest-free loan totalling 3.75 million guilders spread out over fifteen years, shouldered in equal parts by the Dutch and colonial budgets.⁸⁴ The company was further obliged to commission Dutch shipyards for the construction of at least two thirds of its new ships, hire only Dutch citizens or colonial subjects as captains, pilots, and engineers, and welcome a government commissioner on the supervisory board.⁸⁵ Due to a lack of promise, Van Walree's proposed extension to San Francisco was ultimately abandoned. The line started operating in 1903 and proved a great success, quickly growing its cargo and paying dividends in every subsidised year except 1907. By its half-centenary in 1952, JCJL lines extended from East Asia, via Indonesia to Oceania, East Africa and South America.⁸⁶ Ironically, the company's remains, through several mergers and takeovers, can be traced to the Danish transport multinational Maersk.

Though parliamentarians pointed out the JCJL would receive a much higher average sum per mile than the KPM, they were quickly satisfied by Trade Minister J.C. de Marez Oyens' promise that as a loan, it would be paid back from the company's profits. Such would only occur after it had paid at least a five per cent dividend over each year of its existence, however, meaning the state bore more risk than any of the company's creditors. It was even made explicit that the loan would likely be used to pay shareholder dividend, as Oyens argued it would otherwise be impossible to organise a successful emission of shares.⁸⁷

In parliamentary debate in June 1902, it became clear that the agreed sum was determined in negotiations between the JCJL and the government and not the result of an informed decision from the Minister. Instead, he called on the Chamber "not [to] worry too

⁸¹ Heldring, *Oost-Azië en Indië*, 71.

⁸² Ibidem, 73; Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaانvaart*, 30--31; 36--37.

⁸³ Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaانvaart*, 53; 82.

⁸⁴ In 1900, the domestic budget totalled 127.4 million. Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 335.

⁸⁵ Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaانvaart*, 44--48.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, 44--48; 84--104; 198--205.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, 50; HTK 1901--1902, 1571--1578.

much about the sum of the subsidy." "For a consortium which still needs to find investment, [it is] not always desirable to give full disclosure of the smallest details." Of the two main opposition figures in the debate, the progressive D. Bos saw this as a severe objection to the proposed legislation while D. Fock, Cremer's fellow party member and a later Colonial Minister and Governor-General of the East Indies, praised the initiative shown by the government and the shipping sector and argued: "as much as I regret the lack of clarification, considering the great importance of this matter, I wish to cooperate and place my trust in the Government and [these] enterprising men."⁸⁸ As proven by their silent approval of the proposed legislation, Fock's was the dominant sentiment among parliament's other members.

Strikingly, the labour trade was not discussed, even though the issue had remained the Dutch state's main priority in China at least until the Yihetuan Uprising and its relevance was pointed out to parliament beforehand.⁸⁹ In reality, the JCJL exceeded expectations on this front and revolutionised the transport of labourers, who soon made up ninety per cent of passengers on its ships. Finally, the trade was thus brought under Dutch control, lowering costs for colonial business and weakening German influence on the colonies.⁹⁰

It shows a significant change of views in parliament, which now responded positively to popular commercial arguments which had previously failed to gain traction: that this opportunity was the last chance for a Dutch firm to enter the East Asian shipping market, for instance; that the government had secured major benefits to Dutch shipbuilding; or Van Walree's claim, in a consular report circulated before the debate, that Shanghai's predicted growth required a Dutch business presence in the city.⁹¹ Naturally, the colonial interest was one of parliament's main considerations. Its swift embrace by the Kuyper cabinet was much more surprising than Cremer's proposal itself.⁹² At least in name, Kuyper's ARP built on anti-liberal foundations, seeking to defend the clerical guidance of political and personal life from the march of liberalism and atheism. His priority as prime minister laid not so much in economic policy but in the promotion of the Netherlands as an exemplary nation founded on calvinism. Not in the least, this included exemplary colonial rule. In the East Indies, the Kuyper cabinet therefore pursued the prosperity and wholesale Christianisation of the population, a rather different kind of enlightenment.⁹³

To an extent, Kuyper claimed to feel kinship with Liberal colonial policy for starting to dismantle the cultivation system and ending the *batig slot*, the use of colonial profits for the

⁸⁸ HTK 1901--1902, 1571--1574.

⁸⁹ HTK 1901--1902, App., 170, no. 3, MvT, 8.

⁹⁰ Blussé and Van Luyn, *China en de Nederlanders*, 191.

⁹¹ Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaanaart*, 50; HTK 1901--1902, 1571--1578.

⁹² Brugmans, *Van Chinavaart tot oceaanaart*, 45.

⁹³ Kuiper, *Zelfbeeld en wereldbeeld*, 226; 230; 246.

metropolitan budget.⁹⁴ He subsequently embraced its "industrial" manifestation under Cremer but argued the aim of exporting capital and developing private initiative would soon be superseded by a "socio-economic interpretation of colonial policy" in which the development of industry would serve colonial welfare and "raise up the Indian population from an agricultural to an industrial state," a teleology of industrial development shared by the Socialist colonial specialist H.H. van Kol.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Kuyper had denounced the labour trade, as the creation of jobs for Dutch colonial subjects was one of the pillars of his ethical welfare policy.⁹⁶ Queen Wilhelmina's (r. 1890--1948) 1901 throne speech announcing the Dutch "moral calling" towards its colonies had even stressed that "[r]egulations on the protection of coolies working under contract will be strictly upheld."

Room for manoeuvre, however, was small, as confessional voters were hardly opposed to the Liberal management of the state. A.W.F. Idenburg, the cabinet's Colonial Minister from 1902 until 1905, reflected on the confessional electoral base in the run-up to the 1913 elections, arguing:

That children need to be raised in fear of the Lord, the Holy Book teaches clearly, and the conscience of every Christian will respond "amen." But whether the obligation of insurance against disability, disease, accidents must be imposed, and if so to whom, etc. the Holy Book answers less clearly, and accordingly one can find opposing views among decided evangelicals.⁹⁷

Likewise, the Kuyper cabinet had rallied Calvinist and Catholic voters with a call for the Christian view on the modern state, expanding on the Christian order which Kuyper argued the Liberal party, at that point, represented as well.⁹⁸ Instead, confessionals and Liberals found a common enemy in Van Kol, whose criticism was apparently considered a great threat to colonial unity despite his party's minor influence in parliament.⁹⁹ The prime minister himself was barely involved in colonial politics, leaving them to the more expert Idenburg. Though he warned for the capitalists' lack of "love for the Javanese," it was only in the early 1910s that Kuyper gained a concern for the power of Royal Dutch Shell and the distribution of mineral wealth in the colonies.¹⁰⁰ In 1913, he looked back on both Liberal and

⁹⁴ A. Kuyper, *Ons Program*. 5th rev. ed. (Hilversum: Höveker & Wormser, 1907), 336; Kuyper, *Our Program. A Christian Political Manifesto*, trans. and ed. H. van Dyke (1879; Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015); cf. Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten*, 178.

⁹⁵ HTK 1900--1901, 395.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 395.

⁹⁷ Idenburg to Kuyper, Sep. 16, 1911, in *Briefwisseling Kuyper-Idenburg*, eds. J. de Bruijn and G. Puchinger (Franeker: T. Wever, 1985), 247--256.

⁹⁸ Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 456--457.

⁹⁹ Idenburg to M.E. Idenburg-Duetz, Nov. 28, 1901, and Nov. 29, 1901, in *Briefwisseling Kuyper-Idenburg*, 77--78. For the confessional parties' opposition to the Social Democrats, see Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 446n18.

¹⁰⁰ HTK 1900--1901, 395; Kuyper to Idenburg, Oct. 31, 1911, and Nov. 7, 1912, and Idenburg to Kuyper, Dec. 10, 1912, and Dec. 31, 1912, in *Briefwisseling Kuyper-Idenburg*, 256--259; 322--325; 334--337; 340--343.

confessional colonial politics as what he saw as the united pursuit of Christianisation, "even from Cremer."¹⁰¹

When it came to foreign policy, however, Kuyper was passionately involved. Naturally, his desired reputation of exemplary Calvinist rule could not suffer the disgrace of a military defeat, causing Kuyper to vehemently promote the defence of national autonomy from foreign expansionist threats both at home and in the colonies.¹⁰² He consistently criticised the "imperialism" (as "Caesarism") of the Great Powers as driven by a combination of commercial interests and lust for violent expansion, reserving his particular resentment for British claims of "Christian" rule.¹⁰³ In the process, Kuyper became quite the imperialist himself. He defended moderate protectionism where his party had always promoted free trade and saw Europe as duty-bound to dig up the Qing Empire's mineral resources if it would not do so itself.¹⁰⁴ A measure of aggression, he argued, was necessary to withstand British, Japanese, German, or American threats to the East Indies, like when he gave his support for a Dutch annexation on Chinese soil in 1899.¹⁰⁵ Notably, he went on:

I have discussed [the Netherlands' status as colonial power] on numerous occasions with men who have earned their stars in shipping. Each acknowledged the current moment demands a steamship connecting our colonies with China and Japan, but that they were unable to launch one without the Government's forceful support.¹⁰⁶

The JCJL loan, therefore, served Kuyper's imperialist program. Though Van Kol was rarely supportive, the cross-party like-mindedness of "ethicists" like him and Kuyper is one of the distinguishing features of the ethical policy's early stage.¹⁰⁷ However, so is the alliance of Liberals and Confessionals. Nearly every political faction could find ways to pursue its own priorities within the ethical policy's confines.¹⁰⁸ The JCJL loan was the result of the shared ethical imperialism of Liberal businessmen and Christian civilisers. Though a deeper dive into the ARP's business policies would be welcome, the impression lingers that the Calvinist leader was happy to turn a blind eye to the labour trade and the colonial business sector's violent treatment of labourers for the higher purpose of Christianisation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ Kuyper to Idenburg, May 6, 1913, in *Briefwisseling Kuyper-Idenburg*, 365--367.

¹⁰² Kuiper, *Zelfbeeld en wereldbeeld*, 226; 230; 246.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, 210; Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 317--319.

¹⁰⁴ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 318--319; Kuiper, *Zelfbeeld en wereldbeeld*, 191--192; HTK 1900--1901, 396.

¹⁰⁵ HTK 1899--1900, 415.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁷ Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten*, 177; 181; 186.

¹⁰⁸ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 254; 259.

¹⁰⁹ In this light, Idenburg's dismissal of the Rhemrev report on Deli's violence against indentured labourers is equally puzzling. Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 463; Breman, *Koelies, planters*.

To benefit from its investment in the JCJL, the NHM, too, moved into the Qing Empire in 1903. Taking part in the historically important China trade had been one of the company's objectives and contractual obligations upon its foundation, but the Guangzhou agency established in 1825 soon proved unsuccessful and was discontinued in 1827.¹¹⁰ Once more between 1848 and 1849, the company briefly ran an agency in Guangzhou. To deal with dwindling revenues from trade, it reinvented itself in the 1880s and soon developed into one of the major Dutch colonial banks, specialised primarily in the financing of agricultural production and East Indies trade but also active in industry and infrastructure.¹¹¹ In order to find more business in financing and currency exchange, it gradually expanded its network of agencies in East and South-East Asia once again. After branches in Penang and Yangon, the new Shanghai branch was only the NHM's third agency established in that spirit.¹¹²

Ernst Heldring played an important role in this move. The young Handelsschool graduate had been travelling East Asia and the East Indies from 1897 to 1899 as the conclusion to his informal training for a career in business, meeting several of the key Dutch figures in the Qing Empire, and described his observations on the economies of East Asia in a book published in 1899. He suggested establishing a Dutch bank and sugar refinery in Shanghai to stimulate trade between the Qing Empire and the East Indies and gain a stake in the Chinese sugar trade beyond Hong Kong and, like many others, criticised an apathetic Dutch state and business sector for the relative absence of Dutch commerce and shipping.¹¹³ Though Heldring argued Dutch absence from the competition for railway concessions was a natural outcome of the absence of a Dutch bank in China and a native railway industry, he saw no reason why the Dutch should not play a role in the exploitation of "the country's colossal mineral riches," made imminent by the ongoing penetration of the Chinese hinterland by railway and river transport. "Using plentiful, cheap labourers," such projects would prove an "excellent investment of capital."¹¹⁴

As the son of an NHM board member and, from 1900 onwards, president, Heldring's role in the establishment of the company's Shanghai agency was crucial.¹¹⁵ Upon his return to the Netherlands, he formally advised the company on Far Eastern matters and insisted it moved into the Qing Empire quickly.¹¹⁶ The establishment was further motivated by the

¹¹⁰ De Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij*, 42--49.

¹¹¹ Ibidem, 85--89; 137--138.

¹¹² De Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij*, 16--26; ibidem, appendix 1, Domestic and foreign agencies, 1824--1964.

¹¹³ Heldring, *Oost-Azië en Indië*, 65; 69.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem, 57; 68--72.

¹¹⁵ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 28.

¹¹⁶ NL-HaNA, Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij (NHM), 2.20.01, inv.no. 5341, E. Heldring, "Opmerkingen naar aanleiding van het dossier C. Kraay," May 14, 1900.

need for a banking agent to oversee the collection and distribution of the Dutch share in the Boxer Indemnity and the expansion of currency exchange and helped, too, by the resignation of a skeptical board member and appointment of the more favourable C.J.K. van Aalst, formerly in charge of the important Singapore agency, in 1902.¹¹⁷

In a very similar turn of events in 1904, Heldring convinced his father to acquire a majority stake in the failing Zuid-Amerika Lijn (ZAL) connecting Amsterdam and Argentina in order to keep out a German syndicate. Once more, he argued the national shipping sector was at risk, this time from a race to the bottom with German competitors in which a takeover would be yet another defeat. The NHM had no business interests in South America, however, and when it finally parted ways with ZAL's struggling successor KHL in the 1930s, the bank had lost millions.¹¹⁸ The nationalist motivation has met with great skepticism both then and now. The move protected Amsterdam's shipping sector in particular as Rotterdam's quickly growing port closely collaborated with German shipping for the river trade and stood to benefit from ZAL's potential German takeover, leading to bitter complaints from Rotterdam's chamber of commerce in national media against what it saw as a disingenuous nationalist narrative. De Graaf follows this reading in his study of the NHM's history. Especially since the bank had no established interest in South America, he argues, in this instance it was made to work for the self-interest of Heldring, his company KNSM, or stakeholders in Amsterdam's economy.¹¹⁹

The suggestion that Heldring shrewdly exploited the NHM's commitment to the national interest is questionable, however, as his motivation enjoyed widespread support. The NHM's takeover bid was a very public affair. In order to convince the board not to sell to the German syndicate, rather than approaching the ZAL covertly, the NHM managing board communicated its intentions of preparing a competing bid to *Algemeen Handelsblad* and thereby caused a significant row.¹²⁰ Strikingly, it thus relied on the nationalist sentiment of the public and ZAL shareholders to win the takeover battle. Among such publicity the managing board could impossibly, as De Graaf suggests, have ignored its supervisory board or the interests of shareholders.¹²¹ Later that decade, the KHL received a government subsidy modelled after the JCJL's, showing parliament, too, was convinced of its importance for the

¹¹⁷ Van der Putten, *Corporate Behaviour*, 33; De Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij*, 162.

¹¹⁸ De Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij*, 184--189.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 184--185; 426.

¹²⁰ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Dec. 8, 1904 (evening); E. Heldring, *Herinneringen en dagboek*, ed. J. de Vries, vol. 1 (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1970), 160--161; M. Janssen, "Ernst Heldring en de Zuid-Amerika Lijn: Ondernemen voor het vaderland," *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, no. 2 (2014), historischnieuwsblad.nl/ernst-heldring-en-de-zuid-amerika-lijn/.

¹²¹ De Graaf, *Voor handel en maatschappij*, 426--427.

national economy.¹²² Heldring emerged as the champion of organisation and collaboration in the shipping sector and has at times been characterised as a "patriot entrepreneur."¹²³

The ideals of nationalism and national organisation are both typical of Heldring's career. In his memoirs, he wrote of a lifelong ambition "to expand Dutch influence abroad" and recounted proposing the merger of Amsterdam's shipping companies as early as 1903, when the other directors still "had far too little knowledge of what revolved in the world outside of the Netherlands."¹²⁴ Therefore, the construction of the Scheepvaarthuis (Shipping House), started in 1913, was a project after his own heart. By bringing the offices of the SMN, KPM, JCJL, KNSM, NRM, and KWIM shipping companies together under one roof in a groundbreaking piece of Amsterdam School-style architecture, it embodied the close cooperation of Amsterdam's shipping sector in a new incarnation as a symbol of national historical pride.¹²⁵

To do so, no small deal of colonial symbolism was used in the building's construction and ornamentation. Its location in Amsterdam's harbour was essentially the cradle of Dutch ocean shipping, while among the decorations on its outer walls were the sculpted faces of some of its most celebrated captains and generals, like W.I.J. Bontekoe or J.P. Coen, but also L.P.D. op ten Noort, SMN's recently deceased president. They were commissioned by Heldring, who, on behalf of Amsterdam's chamber of commerce, also gifted sculptures of Coen, H.W. Daendels, and J.B. van Heutsz – all famous but increasingly controversial generals whose violent expeditions helped establish and expand Dutch territory in the East over the centuries – for the NHM's new headquarters in the 1920s and took the initiative for a number of monuments to Van Heutsz.¹²⁶ The Scheepvaarthuis thus portrayed the modern companies as heirs to a long Dutch tradition of Eastbound shipping which stood at the root of the nation's greatest achievements: those in the colonial sphere.

The Colonial Institute, Amsterdam's third "cathedral of modern colonialism" after the Scheepvaarthuis and NHM headquarters, was similarly a product of the business sector's initiative.¹²⁷ Echoing the evolution of Dutch China policy discussed in this and previous chapters, the project took off in 1910 amid criticism from Liberal businessmen and politicians on their government's passive attitude compared to Great Britain, Belgium, and Germany, where similar institutes and museums had arisen in the 1890s as expressions of imperial prowess. Again, Cremer was closely involved. The state was more comfortable as a financial partner to the private sector than as initiator of such projects, however, as it had

¹²² Ibidem, 185.

¹²³ Janssen, "Ernst Heldring."

¹²⁴ Heldring, *Herinneringen en dagboek*, 108; 154--156.

¹²⁵ Y. Koopmans, "Koloniale expansie en de Nederlandse monumentale sculptuur," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 105, no. 3 (1992): 395.

¹²⁶ Ibidem, 395; Vanvugt, *De maagd en de soldaat: Koloniale monumenten in Amsterdam en elders* (Amsterdam: Jan Mets, 1998), 46--48; 54; 64--69.

¹²⁷ Vanvugt, *De maagd*, 77.

been with the Colonial Museum in Haarlem, privately established in 1864 to display the mementos of colonial trade. As a result, the Colonial Institute was constructed with joint private and public funds in the capital, home to the majority of the country's colonial business elite.¹²⁸

The vision was to bring the economic, scientific, and cultural aspects of empire all "under one roof" as a research institute, school, library, and splendid new museum venue all in one.¹²⁹ Particularly the art and ornamentation in the building complex were funded by private sponsors.¹³⁰ Decorative reliefs in the building complex displayed workers on tobacco fields and rubber farms, or a missionary flaunting the crucifix to two awestruck onlookers. Cremer had even had similar reliefs displaying his own life and achievements in the East added to his own villa. The message was clear. Life in the colonies was happy and just and Dutch colonial business was on the forefront, bringing prosperity and civilisation.¹³¹ The institute's entrance hall, constructed entirely in marble, was especially lavish. There, along with those of Cremer and Heldring's SMN, the names of the majority of entrepreneurs or businesses in tobacco, petroleum, shipping, and colonial banking discussed in this study can still be found in the list of sponsors, eternalised in pink marble.

Heldring and Cremer had different reputations as collectors, mostly due to their different backgrounds. Cremer was at times mocked for his spending and saw his canal-side house (now Amsterdam's mayoral residence) rechristened the "tobacco palace" in parliament.¹³² Heldring, on the other hand, became known as a true aristocratic patron of the arts and was active for several related organisations, one of them specifically for the collection of (South) East Asian art and artefacts. With his work, world-class art was added to national collections and Dutch masterpieces were retained or repurchased.¹³³

The wave of colonial monumentalisation thus followed a similar trend as Dutch commerce in China, where their conviction and financial capacity caused some of the same members of the colonial business elite to march ahead of the "troops": a willing but hesitant parliament. Its competitive attitude towards neighbouring countries shows a "march of nations" interpretation of nationalism which was furthermore clearly imperial, fully embracing Dutch colonial history in all its facets. Heldring and the colonial business elite thus helped shape the Dutch cultural landscape. Doing so furthered their own interests as well, present-

¹²⁸ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 263; 269; 287.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, 264.

¹³⁰ Vanvugt, *De maagd*, 79.

¹³¹ Koopmans, "Koloniale expansie," 397; Vanvugt, *De maagd*, 81--86.

¹³² HTK 1890--1891, 111; Kuitenbrouwer, "Drie omwentelingen," 583.

¹³³ R. Steenbergen, *De nieuwe mecenas: Cultuur en de terugkeer van het particuliere geld*, (Amsterdam: Business Contact, 2008), 56, 59--62; Steenbergen, "De Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst in het interbellum: Deftige verzamelaars, rijke donateurs en Indische fortuinen," *Aziatische Kunst* 38, no. 3 (2008): 8.

ing themselves as colonial benefactors, Dutch enterprise in the East Indies as a just cause, and fair trade between East and West as the foundation of colonialism.¹³⁴

Conclusion

By appointing the favourable Knobel to the highest diplomatic position and awarding a loan to the JCJL, government, under increased pressure from outside and within, showed a new willingness to accommodate calls for national organisation. Thereby, it not only went from tacit approval to financial support for Dutch initiatives, but parliament also responded to arguments it had ignored before, such as the JCJL's importance to colonial exports, the potential growth of Shanghai, and the benefits to domestic industries. This significant ideological shift was strongly connected to colonial politics: Cremer designed the loan to keep up with growing commercial competition in Asia, while the Kuyper cabinet implemented it to protect the East Indies from the growing perceived threat of foreign invasion.

Quite clearly, a nationalist Liberal (business) elite impelled the Netherlands' newfound attention for commercial opportunities in the Qing Empire towards its peak. The involvement of merchants like Heemskerk and media like Charles Boissevain shows this imperialism was indeed motivated by entrepreneurship and national prestige both. The same sentiments gave rise to the formation of industrial syndicates, wherein Dutch consuls were more actively looking for Dutch capital for investment opportunities in the Qing Empire than the other way around. The case of the NHM's ZAL takeover, too, shows profit-oriented actors (directors and shareholders, in that case) could be swayed by nationalist arguments.

With Heldring acting as their herald, the entrepreneurs from that point onwards actively sought to profile the colonial business sector as a national treasure. The proud display of the Christian mission and the implementation of economic reform shows business' former identification with Dutch Liberalism had made way for an embrace of the broader civilising mission. Thus, it compromised with Kuyper, whose support for the JCJL was ultimately motivated by his aim of protecting a very similar image of Dutch greatness as a colonial power inspired by Christianity. In their silence on the labour trade as well as the reverence for colonial conquerors, they upheld the idea of impeccability in Dutch colonial rule, choosing power over self-reflection. Together, they represent the new ethical imperialism. This also impacted the Qing Empire, where the time had finally come to "plant the flag." Not in Shantou, as it turned out, but the Dutch flag certainly made a reappearance in Chinese waters.

¹³⁴ Vanvugt, *De maagd*, 55; 78.

Conclusion

To the villagers of Colijnsplaat, it must by now be a familiar tune: how their forebear Johannis de Rijke was celebrated in Japan while his name was all but forgotten about at home. This has changed in the last three decades thanks to the efforts of scholars, museums, and other enthusiasts in both countries, while De Rijke's story has also been dredged up to give historic meaning to Dutch relations with China and Japan.¹ It made him "the Zealander who rescued Japan from the tide."² That classification nonetheless fails to recognise the engineer's full impact. With his talent for engineering and diplomacy, he built a platform and reputation for Dutch marine construction in the Far East without which Havenwerken's dominance in republican China and the sale of Dutch dredging machines to Japan would have been improbable, if not impossible.

De Rijke's biography shows the Dutch working class in the nineteenth century could be incredibly mobile, socially but especially geographically. His son Hendrik (1890--1919) followed in his father's footsteps, working with him on the Huangpu project while studying remotely at an American college.³ He stayed in China after the revolution but found an unfortunate end to cholera while building river works originally designed by his father in the city of Nantong.⁴ This study's protagonists mostly escaped similar dangers, by comparison, of work far away from home, though it was one of the main reasons why the Qing Empire was a relatively unpopular destination among Dutch professionals. The high salary and career prospects were, therefore, important motivating factors appealing in particular to an engineer with no formal education like De Rijke. The Dutch consuls general Ferguson and Knobel, on the other hand, received a low stipend, hardly covering expenses. Instead, they were able to reach a prestigious diplomatic position in the Qing Empire which was only available to richer or more well-connected colleagues in countries closer to home.

While each of these three men made a lasting impression on the Dutch presence in the Qing Empire, however, their efforts were soon overshadowed by the advent of Dutch businesses. It is commonly assumed that before 1895, Dutch business showed little interest in the Qing Empire beyond its search for indentured labourers.⁵ The establishment of Vereeniging "het Buitenland" and the Society for the Promotion of Dutch Engineering Works

¹ Sizoo, *De Rijke*; "Een bekende Zeeuw in Japan," *Zeeuwse Ankers*, n.d., zeeuwseankers.nl/verhaal/een-bekende-zeeuw-in-japan; De Rijke, *Zomerreis*, 137--145.

² "Museum eert Zeeuw die Japan van het water redde," *NOS / Omroep Zeeland*, Feb. 9, 2019, nos.nl/artikel/2271199-museum-eert-zeeuw-die-japan-van-het-water-redde.html.

³ De Rijke to Escher, Dec. 17, 1909; NL-HaNA, BuZa / Legation China, 2.05.90, inv.no. 56, De Rijke to Knobel, Mar. 25, 1901.

⁴ Sizoo, *De Rijke*, 24--29.

⁵ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 349.

Abroad, both in 1888, justifies a modest revision of this view. Judging by their popularity, political and commercial connections, and membership, their search for opportunities in the Qing Empire for Dutch shipping, manufacturers, and marine construction had widespread support in the sector. With Royal Dutch' sales and the establishment of three trading houses in the treaty ports, this interest did indeed only start to bear fruit after 1895, and reached new heights with the establishment of the JCJL and NHM Shanghai branch in 1903.

Where Van der Putten pointed out the NHM expansion was partly the result of Dutch participation in the Boxer Protocol, the JCJL, without its loan, likely would never even have seen the light of day.⁶ It built on the argument that a Dutch shipping line would bring great benefits to Dutch domestic and colonial exports. In preceding decades, similar proposals had mostly been rejected, while the Qing Empire in general could rarely turn heads in parliament. Van Dongen nonetheless argued the economic interests of the metropole and particularly the colonies dominated Dutch China policy from 1863 until the turn of the century.⁷ This paradox is the result of the great change of perception, during this period, in what these interests entailed.

State

After a period of silence following the opening of official relations, the first developments in Dutch China policy followed the Burlingame Mission's visit to The Hague. In their positive response and appointment of a consul general, Liberal governments accommodated the Qing Empire's advances and showed a willingness to develop mutual relations, motivated, in typical mid-century fashion, by the increase of mutual trade as equal partners. The Foreign Minister's argumentation for the appointment shows government sought less to encourage Dutch business than to clear the way by improving diplomatic contact. Ferguson took this objective to heart, showing significant commitment to formalising diplomatic relations within the empire by seeking contact and collaboration both with foreign ambassadors and the Qing government. Meanwhile, he made few efforts to encourage or support Dutch commercial activity, especially in the eyes of his critics in the business world. By refusing to assist in the recruitment of indentured labourers, government, too, showed it did not count such support among its responsibilities.

It is true the (colonial) business sector initially made no advances of its own after the opening of Sino-Dutch relations. Growing cross-border competition among industrial enterprise is one reason this changed as time progressed. The growth of the industrial sector at home, technological developments in shipping and communication, and the construction of the Suez Canal are some of the main reasons why more and more foreign, particularly European companies turned to the Qing Empire. For Royal Dutch, for instance, increase in

⁶ Van der Putten, "Small Powers and Imperialism," 123--127.

⁷ Van Dongen, *Tussen neutraliteit en imperialisme*, 352.

scale was crucial for keeping up with larger competitors. It saw the Qing Empire as a potentially highly unsaturated market for kerosene due to its size and specific degree of industrialisation and quickly increased its sales. Eventually, it developed oil tanks and up-country distribution to extend its reach within and beyond the limits of the treaty ports. Both measures contributed to the Qing Empire's further "opening up."

Especially after the Berlin Conference, meanwhile, many came to see the increase of foreign commercial activity as a symptom of imperialist competition. This view certainly was not without justification, as the rapidly growing commercial interests were generally organised along national lines and embassies, especially Germany, were using more aggressive tactics to strengthen their claims on railway concessions, natural resources, and potential annexations. Public statements from J.J.B. Heemskerk or *Het Buitenland* reflect a nationalist response, more on which below, calling on the Netherlands and Dutch companies to participate. Many referred to the "missing out" on the opening up of Japan as a significant loss for Dutch industries which should not be repeated, while stakes were even higher in the Qing Empire due to its predicted partition. If the Empire was colonised by the Great Powers, Dutch colonial sovereignty might come under threat and chances for Dutch industries would diminish. The Society for Promotion is one example of a company aiming to represent Dutch interests in this imperial struggle, which it combined with the search for international markets for the domestic marine construction sector.

In different ways, therefore, both motives are characterised by the growing fear of exclusion in a world where the remaining "free space" seemed to be running out quickly. Companies and organisations responded by entering early, hoping for better development prospects both for themselves, like Royal Dutch, national business, or both, like the Society for Promotion. As Betts described, "international politics, at least in the last several centuries, [...] abhors a vacuum." Therein, it is hardly different from modern capitalism. In his terms, each of these expansions could be explained as *preemptive*, aiming to secure claims in anticipation of future developments.⁸

In the East Indies, the Dutch government showed its willingness to make private enterprise the subject of preemptive political expansion by allowing the subsidised KPM to monopolise inter-island shipping and giving preference to Dutch exploitation of mineral resources in the Flores mission.⁹ Particularly the JCJL loan is a typical example showing commercial expansion in the Qing Empire likewise became a serious geopolitical consideration. Therein, the Qing Empire's proximity to the East Indies and importance to colonial economic interests was clearly the most important consideration. It shows the element of *contiguity* was similarly applied to Dutch commerce, as it was in the popular allusions to the East Indies as a "springboard" for Dutch business into nearby Asian markets.

⁸ Betts, *The False Dawn*, 81--82.

⁹ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 346.

Partly, government's changing relation to business was a symptom of the crisis of liberalism. Chapter two discussed a significant shift in the mid-1880s where Ferguson became more and more critical of European industry at home and abroad while parliament instead grew more supportive of commercial interests. In the East Indies, after the gradual abolition of the cultivation system was kickstarted in 1870, the changes in the public-private relationship could clearly be discerned in government's increasing reliance on the market for the development of infrastructure, creation of jobs, and tax revenue and was often a source of hesitation and conflict for both central and local government. Where the effectiveness and accessibility of public goods was one concern, most typically in discussion on railways, the violent Flores mission shows the protection of Dutch commercial interests soon became another.

In the East Indies, businesses exploited this vacillation by presenting themselves as policy vehicles to secure political benefits. In Deli, the state's administrative weakness allowed the tobacco planters to gain judicial powers with the *coolie ordinance*. This development was transplanted to foreign politics by commercial forces going ahead of the troops – government and its China policy, that is – in formulating a national interest, placing themselves at the center by focusing on business as the subject of imperialist competition in the Qing Empire. When the same logic was eventually translated into policy, it seriously favoured business interests. With its loan of nearly four million guilders, for instance, the state gambled on the JCJL to achieve its political goals but received very little influence or security in return.

The state's role in the economy, therefore, was indeed the main point of discussion in Dutch China policy in this period. As time went on, government started using its capacities to defend the interests of specific enterprises or sectors, for instance by assisting colonial enterprise in the recruitment of indentured labourers or encouraging businesses to seek out the Qing Empire with subsidies or consular policy. Cremer's election to parliament was crucial. There was little counterweight to his criticism of his government's – and particularly Ferguson's – lack of support to business in the Qing Empire, which mirrored his lamentations about the ways in which the policies of centralisation and liberalisation of earlier Liberal governments had failed to accommodate the private sector in the colonies. Under Knobel, Dutch representation instead sought the boundaries of power politics in the Qing Empire and kept close ties with a circle of directors of banks and colonial business. Their central role was partly the result of government's acknowledgment of their importance to Dutch interests; on the other hand, it filled a void left by the absence of the "family tradition and aristocratic mentality" which Kuitenbrouwer argues dominated Dutch foreign policy in this era but failed to reach the Beijing position due to its unpopularity among the diplomatic class.¹⁰ In this latter sense, the position was slowly integrated with the appointment of Kno-

¹⁰ Ibidem, 340.

bel's successors – J. Loudon, A.J. van Citters, and F. Beelaerts van Blokland respectively – in the 1900s.

Where Van Zanden and Van Riel, along with many others, point to the lasting dominance of *laissez faire* in Dutch politics, we may therefore conclude that mercantilist tendencies existed and had the upper hand in China policy at this crucial time.¹¹ Where Van Dongen pointed out the protection of economic interests, however, the main constant in Dutch China policy in the period under discussion was the inclination to follow along with the Great Powers. In parliament, G. Dumbar already indicated the same motive in opposition to Ferguson's eventual appointment in 1872, rightly predicting such a stance would ultimately end in conflict. Certainly, the protection of the economic and military interests of the East Indies was the principal motivation for such imperialist policies, but in preemptive commercial competition in the Qing Empire, these interests became increasingly vague, long-term, and of a growing geographic scale. Government's willingness towards political and economic intervention on behalf of its colonial interests could thus be stretched considerably to include imperialism in China.¹²

In their assessment of Cremer's Standard Oil measure, Van Zanden and Van Riel summarise these developments as a growing complexity in government's relation to the private sector due to the advent of large enterprises.¹³ It certainly presented a new situation in which government increasingly relied on business. The social liberal movement may be understood primarily as an attempt to reintroduce regulation to the economy after this transformation. Along with the colonial Outer Provinces, we can count the Qing Empire to the periphery of Dutch influence where administrative weakness added to the state's dependence on the private sector, which was translated to policy as the perceived importance of commerce to imperialist competition and survival grew. With his imperialist narrative, Kuyper helped popularise this agenda. By lending greater freedom to business and private property, these policies at times contradicted the social liberal trend.¹⁴ We may therefore conclude imperialism, overarching mercantilist and social liberal developments in this case, best explains government's increasing willingness to intervene on behalf of Dutch business in the Qing Empire as the nineteenth century came to a close.

Business

The mercantilist dynamic had striking consequences, particularly in the way businesses marketed their products. As their nationalist narrative appealed to Liberal ideology and political objectives in colonial and foreign policy, so the "Dutch" identity they subsequently

¹¹ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 336.

¹² Van der Putten comes to similar conclusions in "Small Powers and Imperialism." Cf. Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 336.

¹³ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Nederland 1780--1914*, 386.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Stuurman, *Wacht op onze daden*, 311.

took on to gain political and popular support and distinguish themselves from foreign competitors focused on Liberal ideals like freedom, peace, and prosperity. In the colonial context, the main target was the discourse of the "pacification" of newly occupied areas, most typically Aceh.¹⁵ This idea of achieving peace through economic activity runs through the liberal economics of thinkers like Cobden and Saint-Simon. The JCJL, meanwhile, as part of the infrastructure between the Netherlands and the Qing Empire, argued it would relieve a bottleneck on exports and thereby encourage the development of industry and agriculture in true Saint-Simonian fashion. For the Dutch in the Qing Empire, there was no such thing as pacification; instead, a business like the Society for Promotion would present its marine construction work as a humanitarian effort of a superior quality deriving from a Dutch historical heritage.

The sectors of shipping and trade in particular embraced the nationalist discourse using references to the Dutch Golden Age and the VOC's fame for overseas trade, typical markers of Dutch late-nineteenth century nationalism precisely around the time Van Deysse coined his "march of nations." Het Buitenland's 1888 founding manifesto articulated it perhaps most clearly, arguing an organised effort to promote the sales of manufactures abroad was required for the Netherlands to reclaim a historical role in global trade it lost to both more and less powerful neighbours. Similarly building on the national historical imagination, Heemskerk called for the creation of Dutch shipping and marine construction industries of international allure in the same year. Already at that point, the Qing Empire represented the locus above all others of this competition for commercial influence.

In Deli, Cremer used similar narratives starting in the 1880s, highlighting the planters' role in bringing prosperity and "Western civilisation" to the colonies in the form of infrastructure, economic activity, and the occasional missionary. Strikingly, his direct involvement connects the majority of the businesses and developments discussed here. In general, only a handful of (colonial) bankers and entrepreneurs with powerful connections in politics and business – people like Heldring, Van Nierop, Mees, and Boissevain – was involved in the Dutch commercial expansion in the Qing Empire. Not only did they seek for government to work in their favour; they are also among the protagonists in what Bossenbroek calls exceptional cases where regenten capitalism influenced imperial expansion, such as on Sumatra.¹⁶ It suggests the concept of Dutch regenten capitalism deserves to be expanded to include Dutch foreign policy towards the non-Western world, reaching further than was known thus far.

Their significant degree of organisation gives an indication of how Dutch businesses sought to find a profit in the Qing Empire. In particular the shipping initiatives could count on great interest because of their benefit to other businesses, like colonial agriculture and domestic industries. With their mostly overlapping ownership, the JCJL and NHM are the

¹⁵ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 334.

¹⁶ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 114--115.

most obvious examples of companies gaining from each other's presence. Secondly, businesses like the Society for Promotion or Royal Dutch hoped to benefit from the Qing Empire's specific degree of industrialisation and relative absence of competition, giving them the potential of fast growth. Third, trading houses in particular anticipated a great increase of trade between the Qing Empire and the Netherlands, particularly in Shanghai, due to the Empire's gradual opening up. Thereby, each of these businesses gambled on peace, or, in case China's partition became reality, an orderly transition of power.

In the work of Den Arend, De Rijke, and E.L. van Nierop, the argument of an excess or congestion of capital in the Netherlands was also used quite successfully to organise Dutch interests abroad. Knobel's continuous efforts to attract Dutch capital by reporting on foreign investment fall in the same category. In reality, however, and as the consul found out, investors showed little concrete interest. It shows the idea that Dutch capital required new (colonial) destinations was more a product of the imagination than reality. As Norman Etherington argued in 1984, it was a common confusion at the time, immortalised in J.A. Hobson's thesis describing imperialism as driven by European capital's search for new markets.¹⁷

It is highly unlikely, therefore, that the spike of Dutch interest for commercial opportunities in the Qing Empire around 1900 was driven by the search for investment opportunities beyond the East Indies, as suggested by Brugmans and the regenten capitalism model, though a quantitative analysis would be required to rule out the possibility entirely. Instead, the main motive uniting lawmakers, entrepreneurs, investors, and public opinion behind this commercial expansion was to follow in the footsteps of the imperial powers, a product of Dutch imperialism on which the business sector had only little influence.¹⁸ Rather, it was due to its wider nationalist appeal – the growing power of which, also in East Asia, is evident for instance in De Rijke's increasing distaste for German and British imperialism – that the narratives businesses used to gain political and popular support found considerable success.

Ethical Imperialism

Among the various businesses and individuals who used the imperialist argument in Dutch media, each had a material or political motive. Cremer secured great political benefits for the Deli Company, for instance; Heemskerk hoped to use the nationalist moment to attract new business; and Heldring, as has been pointed out by De Graaf, eventually gained a personal stake in the growth of shipping. It confirms the assumption, in many business histories, that expressions of nationalism in business were made primarily for commercial gain,

¹⁷ N. Etherington, *Theories of Imperialism: War, Conquest and Capital* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 67; 263--266; J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: James Pott, 1902).

¹⁸ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 114--115; 355.

though we may add emphasis to the fact that it did so both by feeding political nationalism and responding to it. The power, however, was in the credibility of these arguments, leading them to resonate with Dutch overseas communities and select media. For these businessmen, therefore, financial gain and nationalist motives cannot and need not be separated.

Still, their societal impact relied on broader societal support in the form of Liberal nationalism. Whereas a range of journals was eager to report on Dutch efforts in (East) Asia, for instance giving a platform to De Rijke's reports on his engineering work, the expansion of Dutch commercial activity in the Qing Empire was particularly popular among select Liberal media. They had promoted the expansion of overseas trade for decades. Already in the 1870s, G.A. Escher articulated a similar economic nationalism in his "buying Dutch" mentality, calling for solidarity among Dutch professionals and an active government supporting commercial expansion, particularly in East Asia. Opinion leaders like Charles Boissevain or select contributors to *De Gids* were passionately supportive of Dutch business expansion abroad and helped publicise Knobel and Van Schermbeek's calls for Dutch participation in the race for industrial and territorial concessions in the Qing Empire. Whereas the Dutch commercial presence in the Qing Empire grew significantly under the wing of the dedicated Knobel, the consul therefore represents a broader societal trend in Dutch society.

Over the course of just ten years at the very end of the nineteenth century, this nationalist, utopian narrative shifted to an imperialist one and came to dominate the Dutch perception of its relations with the Qing Empire. To the domestic public, a Dutch commercial presence in the Qing Empire was presented less as a duty than a prerogative based on a discourse of racial and civilisational superiority. The Liberal nationalists perpetuated an image of Dutchness as white, Christian, aristocratic, and enterprising, thereby claiming as theirs a commercial opportunity created by an outcast of Dutch society like De Rijke. The civilising duty, a personal motivation for De Rijke and Ferguson, became a justification for imperialism, for instance in how Van Schermbeek wrote about the impossibility of modernisation under Chinese rule.

There were several reasons. First, the development of Dutch commercial interest from an emerging sentiment of "buying Dutch," through nationalism to a mature imperialism reflects the development of Liberal nationalism towards "imperialism motivated by entrepreneurship and national prestige" as described by Aerts. It resembles Gellner's description, summarised by Van Sas and Bossenbroek, of nationalism as carried by a societal forefront inspired by the rise of industry and subsequent need to compete across borders. Second, where Heemskerk already promoted the Liberal nationalist ideas in 1888, their share among the Dutchmen in the Qing Empire grew significantly due, for instance, to consular policy, the work of *Het Buitenland*, and commercial expansion. Meanwhile, Liberal journalists and media like Boissevain and *De Gids* became more outspoken in their support. Third, for instance by incorporating a stronger focus on Christianisation, it reflects the political trend of the Liberal-Calvinist alliance in overseas policy, presenting separate objectives under a sin-

gle strategy as in the colonial ethical policies. Though the commercial orientation in Dutch imperialism was ultimately a Liberal product, Calvinist imperialism, personified by Kuyper, was supportive.

Interestingly enough, Siep Stuurman typified Boissevain's conservative Liberalism in this era as in retreat, disgruntled about domestic political developments like social policies.¹⁹ With regards to the Qing Empire, however, it was very much thriving. The discourse of "ethical imperialism," heretofore used mainly to describe an era in colonial and, hesitantly, foreign policy, was ubiquitous as a narrative justifying commercial expansion to the Qing Empire around 1900. The support of men like Boissevain and Van Vollenhoven is one indication; the focus on moral guidance as a Dutch strategy in international politics is another.²⁰ Strikingly, it had a profound impact on select businesses' relationship to Dutch identity.

Credit to the Nation

The Netherlands, in sum, did not pioneer mercantilist policies like state support or import tariffs as Germany or the U.S. did. Partly, this was the result of political neutrality and its economic reliance on imports and exports, making jingoism a risky tactic for governing parties. The ideological justification, on the other hand, gradually made way for a readiness to give state support to the extent circumstances allowed. *Laissez faire* – with the exclusion, for instance, of infrastructure or education – lost support from business and a growing number of imperialist politicians and opinion leaders on both sides of the aisle.

In general, ethical imperialism presented the interests of the state, private sector, and colonial population as in alignment by positioning business as a responsible force in the push for colonial development. To do so, it relied on ideological justification in liberal economics – Liberal governments were accustomed to relying on private initiative for the development of infrastructure at home. However, the public-private dynamic outside the metropole was different for a number of reasons. Taking the East Indies as an example, it suffered from administrative weakness, forcing a greater reliance on business; a distorted public sphere where the non-white population lacked all representation in national media or government, a factor which painfully undermines Cremer's argument that indentured labourers in Deli possessed the means to organise; and a racist ideology justifying exploitation in interpersonal contact. The geopolitical stakes and civilising ideology motivated Liberal and Calvinist governments to ignore these objections in their colonial policies.

It suggests that those looking to write the history of Dutch contemporary political economy and economic policy certainly should not overlook this period, especially the years from 1885 until 1900. Here, we have seen antecedents for critical concepts in Dutch poli-

¹⁹ Stuurman, *Wacht op onze daden*, 292.

²⁰ Kuitenbrouwer, *Modern Imperialism*, 322--324.

tics: industrial policy, the influence of geopolitics on economic policy, and the public-private relationship. Taking place in the metropole, the creation of Werkspoor exemplifies the political consequences of the call to organise Dutch commercial and political stakeholders. By focusing on the creation of employment, businessmen like Cremer played a role in the social question and gained popularity in the process, helped by the nationalist moment. The corporatism Van Zanden and Van Riel argue mostly defines Dutch politics was clearly more than a polarised feud of labour and capital. Thus, the "visions" approach helps uncover societal dynamics which would be difficult to notice in typical studies of intellectual history, like the historiography of social liberalism.²¹

Around the same time, the same colonial business elite started to cultivate this Dutch nationalism and the civilising mission at home, with the Colonial Institute as a typical example. Ernst Heldring and the shipping sector placed themselves at the centre of the national tradition with strong references to the VOC and created narratives with a legacy which can be traced to the current day, much like their patronage of the arts helped shape the country's contemporary cultural landscape. Their wholehearted embrace of the history of colonial violence, for instance in the celebration of generals like Van Heutsz, reflects the way the ethical policies forcefully promoted the idea of the colonial state as a benevolent civiliser to evade criticism from outside. By ignoring the violence of the Dutch colonial past in praising what he called a historical "VOC mentality" in Dutch commerce, then prime minister Jan-Peter Balkenende in 2006 showed how powerful this narrative remained throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Where Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn look for the narrative's historical roots in the VOC era, there is an obvious connection to this much younger wave of nationalism.²²

Identifying so strongly with the Dutch nation and empire is a striking choice on the part of these entrepreneurs and businesses, as they forewent the position of neutrality on which private enterprise could normally rely. For such a choice to be profitable, naturally, the benefit at home would need to outweigh the inevitable loss of income abroad. This balance and its consequences for business operations might be assessed in detail in future studies, but here it is interesting to note the comparison with the seventeenth century, where Weststeijn notes "a national conception of 'Dutch empire' did not materialize because of the persistent notion of a purely commercial enterprise based upon urban and corporate personifications of empire."²³ We see businesses make the opposite choice in this age of empire, and their initiative in colonial propaganda suggests their contribution (or: the role of profits) to the national conception of empire in the early twentieth century should not be underestimated, even when keeping the wholly different context of a nationalised colonialism in mind.

²¹ Cf. Dudink, *Deugdzaam liberalisme*.

²² Koekkoek et al., "Introduction," 2--7.

²³ Weststeijn, "Empire of Riches," 39.

In similar fashion, the early history of Dutch business in the Qing Empire bears great significance for the national self-image. In fact, each of the sectors of petroleum, shipping, and marine construction discussed most elaborately in this study takes an important place in Dutch identity, either in its historical or contemporary form. The celebration of the history of the VOC and Dutch overseas trade in general is a typical characteristic of the nationalism emerging in the late nineteenth century. The way business, state, and nationalism came together in how select businesses took on a Dutch identity to secure public and political support, however, is not common knowledge. Ethical imperialism looked for Dutch heroes and put forward the marine construction sector in a way that strongly resonates in its contemporary reputation as credit to the nation. Besides, the history of the Society for Promotion particularly shows the sector gained significant momentum as an opportunity for Dutch industrial interests to compete commercially with the imperial Great Powers. Strikingly, this development came from outside the sector itself. It was not only their history and expertise, therefore, but also social dynamics and international politics which put this sector on the path to further industrialisation and expansion, eventually to grow to its contemporary size and reputation.

Abbreviations

ARP	Anti-Revolutionaire Partij (Anti-Revolutionary Party)
JCJL	Java-China-Japanlijn (Java-China-Japan Line)
KHL	Koninklijke Hollandsche Lloyd (Royal Dutch Lloyd)
KNSM	Koninklijke Nederlandse Stoomboot Maatschappij (Royal Netherlands Steamship Company)
KPM	Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (Royal Packet Navigation Company)
KWIM	Koninklijke West-Indische Maildienst (Royal West Indies Mail Service)
MFN	Most-Favoured Nation
NHM	Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij (Netherlands Trading Society)
NISM	Nederlandsch-Indische Stoomvaart-Maatschappij (Netherlands Indies Steamship Company)
NRM	Nieuwe Rijnvaart Maatschappij (New Rhine Shipping Company)
RL	Rotterdamsche Lloyd (Rotterdam Lloyd)
SMN	Stoomvaart-Maatschappij "Nederland" (Netherlands Steamship Company)
Society (for Promotion)	Vereeniging ter Bevordering van de Uitvoering van Werken in het Buitenland door Nederlanders (Society for the Promotion of Dutch Engineering Works Abroad)
VOC	Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company)
ZAL	Zuid-Amerika Lijn (South America Line)
Zr.Ms.	Zijner Majesteits (His Royal Majesty's)

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