

THE VOC, NATURAL KNOWLEDGE,
AND HOW THE WEST CAME TO LEARN ABOUT TEA



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MSc History and Philosophy of Science
Utrecht University | Thesis
September 2023
37,5 EC

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Abstract

Like tea, knowledge often flows – but not always in a steady stream. Sometimes it pours, drips, or evaporates. It may be barely enough to fill your cup, or spill over the edge. Either way, one is usually thirsty for more, and there is always *someone* in charge of serving. This thesis explores the extent to which the Dutch East India Company (VOC) attempted and managed to exert authority over the natural knowledge produced by its long-distance information networks in the seventeenth century. It will do so using tea as a case study. First, an overview of the VOC's knowledge directives created throughout this period will be provided. By carefully analyzing the available archival material, it will be argued that the Company's administration, apart from being a political, military and colonial enterprise, can and should also be regarded as a producer of knowledge, with strong ambitions pertaining the authority over this knowledge's content, transmission and security. Then, to better understand to what extent these directives were actually followed, a closer look will be taken at the endeavors of VOC officers to gain natural knowledge of tea and the tea plant. This will be done by first focusing on the information acquired and produced by the Company's overseas knowledge networks, and then addressing the reception of this knowledge in the Dutch Republic. As we will see, careful (re)consideration of the stories of tea and authority leads not only to new historical insights into both of them, but also to the refutation of the specious dichotomy between restriction and circulation. It will be argued that instead, the VOC's attitude towards its knowledge-producing activities can better be described as aspiring 'restrictive circulation'. The story of tea shows that irrespective of this ambition, the hodgepodge of actors and materials moving through space and time calls for more nuanced and varied approaches to the history of commerce. Operating from the field of history of science, this thesis aims to do its bit.

Frontispiece: detail from Olfert Dappert, *Gedenkwaardig bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye* (Amsterdam: J. van Meurs, 1670), 364/365. Collection Rijksmuseum. The image depicts the third Dutch embassy to China, taking place 1666-1668. In the back, the Dutch delegation is entering the room; In the front, tea is poured into pots for the guests.

This tea is nothing more than hot leaf juice!

– Iroh

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Introduction

...In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

- Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science,"¹

It is the year 1620. The European continent is raging with political, religious, and scientific turbulence. At sea, things are not much different. Europeans traverse its tempestuous waters with increased frequency and ambition, on a search for the worlds of seeming opportunity lying beyond the horizon. It is the final outburst of what textbooks have now glamorized as the Age of Discovery – even though the real discovering had only just begun.

The coming and going of ships in the ports of England, Portugal and the Dutch Republic must have been an exciting sight to behold, filling the imaginations of all who passed by. A careful observer, Francis Bacon might well have been one of them. Propagandizing inductive reasoning and observation as fundamental cornerstones to knowledge, he has been enthroned as a founder of the scientific method and the father of empiricism. Bacon lived in a time in which the border between what could practically be observed and what could not was shifting. While his contemporaries explored previously unknown worlds through micro- and telescopes, Bacon directed his gaze over and beyond the borders of the world to scale, the borders that had once been the absolute limit: transcontinental seafaring, quite literally, broadened the horizons of Europeans. Urging fellow naturalists to seize this opportunity for the benefit of natural philosophy, he argued:

We must also take into our consideration that many objects in nature fit to throw light upon philosophy have been exposed to our view, and discovered by means of long voyages and travels, in which our times have abounded. It would, indeed, be dishonorable to mankind, if the regions of the material globe, the earth, the sea, and stars, should be so prodigiously developed and illustrated in our age, and yet the boundaries of the intellectual globe should be confined to the narrow discoveries of the ancients.²

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, Andrew Hurley (trans.), *Collected Fictions* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 325.

² Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, ed. Joseph Devey (New York: P.F. Collier, 1620/1902), book LXXXIV, 103.

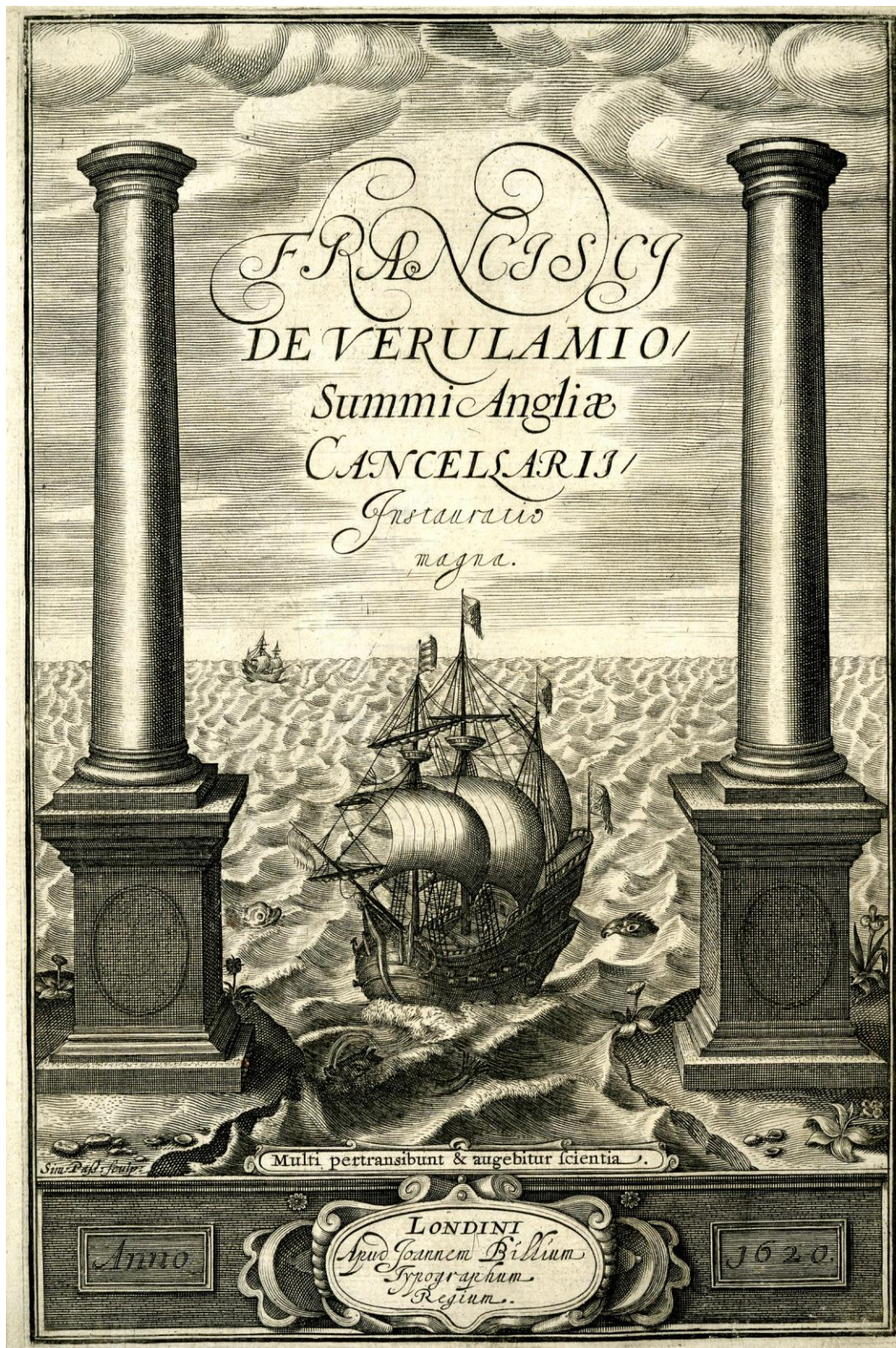


Figure 1 Frontispiece to Francis Bacon, *Instauratio Magna* (London: J. Bill, 1620). The British Museum Collection.

Natural philosophers like Bacon were not the only ones realizing the potential of travel for the advancement of learning. Long-distance corporations, trailblazed by Portuguese traders and Jesuit missionaries and followed by British and Dutch trading companies, were eager to assemble their own corpora of natural knowledge to further their own operations in these newly ‘discovered’ regions of the earth.³ Such knowledge could range from geology and ecology to linguistics, culture, and history. As the main purpose of most of these corporations – the Society of Jesus being an important exception – was of a commercial nature, knowledge of commodities was vital to the success of their operations. Where can spices such as cinnamon, camphor and nutmeg best be found? What kinds of cotton were most suitable to the market back home? How are Chinese ceramics produced (and can Europeans do the same)? Commodity historians have long been aware of the intriguing perspectives on global history one may arrive at when focusing attention on trading goods.⁴ The fairly recent and still ongoing broadening of the field of History of Science has opened up the same stories to historians operating under its flag, allowing for different stories to be told, taking into account new actors, angles and aspects. This thesis is a product of the opportunities provided by this transdisciplinary, more holistic approach to historical actors.

For amidst the turbulence of the seventeenth century stood a small plant. Growing in China and Japan, its luscious twigs would slowly but surely reach across the continent, right into the living rooms of European men and women. In 1610, a returning fleet sailing under the newly founded VOC had brought some of the enigmatic good back to the Dutch Republic: tea had arrived on the European continent. And it was there to stay. Over the course of the seventeenth century, as trading routes were settled and a consumer base created, tea became a common commodity under Dutch consumers. By the 1750s, the VOC managed to establish a direct trading route with the commercially standoffish Chinese, cutting costs to a great extent. Yet *what* tea was remained somewhat of a mystery. While VOC employees were eager to get a better understanding of the plant they only ever saw in dried or powdered form, scientific uncertainty remained in regards to its cultivation, botanical properties, and health benefits. The Chinese seem to have been determined not to provide any more information to Europeans than absolutely necessary, and while relations with the Japanese were generally better, limited physical access to Japan prevented all but a handful of VOC officials to be able to see the plant for themselves. It wasn’t until 1824, when Philipp Franz Balthasar von Siebold was able to secretly obtain germinative tea seeds while stationed in Deshima and have them smuggled successfully to the Dutch East Indies, before Europeans were able to start their own tea cultivation. And only in the 1840s did the Scottish plant hunter Robert Fortune discover that green and black tea were produced from the same plant, rather than different species. In the meantime, Europeans were dependent on brokers, middlemen, and Chinese merchants operating outside of China for their information. Clearly, distrust, secrecy and uncertainty seem to have thrown sand in the gears of trading companies in their search for knowledge. Looking

³ Steven J. Harris, “Long-Distance Corporations, Big Sciences, and the Geography of Knowledge,” *Configurations* 6 (1998): 269–304; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, And Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

⁴ For more general information on the field of commodity history and its contributions to understanding global connections, see Joshua Specht, “Commodity history and the nature of global connection: recent developments,” *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 1 (2019), 145–150.

back on the complicated diplomatic relations with China, Fortune's wording was undoubtedly colored by the Victorian perspectives prevalent in his time:

“Shut out from the country, and having no means of getting information on which we could depend (for independent of Chinese statements, the accounts written by the Jesuits were in many instances grossly exaggerated), it is not to be wondered at if the works in our language were more remarkable for the exhibition of the imaginative power of their authors, than for facts concerning China and the Chinese. We were in the position of little children who gaze with admiration and wonder at a penny peep-show in a fair or market-place at home.—We looked with magnifying eyes on everything Chinese; and fancied, for the time at least, that what we saw was certainly real. [...] This mystery served the purpose of the Chinese so long as it lasted; and although we perhaps did not give them credit for all to which they pretended, at least we gave them much more than they really deserved.”⁵

This thesis unites existing literature on long-distance trading, politics, commodities, and travel writing, and combines it with an original analysis of knowledge of tea, in order to provide a clearer understanding of the extent to which the VOC administration attempted (and managed) to exert authority over the natural knowledge produced by its long-distance information networks. First, Chapter I will provide an overview of the seventeenth-century developments in the VOC's establishment of knowledge directives. What attempts were made by Jan Compagnie to control information acquired by his employees? After this, a case study of the story of tea will provide us with a window into the practical implementation of these knowledge directives. Chapter II will focus on the operations of overseas knowledge networks laid out by the VOC: what kind of knowledge was gained on tea, and how? And to what extent was the VOC involved? Continuing on this same note, in Chapter III will explore the reception of tea and knowledge thereof in the Dutch Republic. As we will see, careful (re)consideration of the stories of tea and authority leads not only to new insights into both of them, but also to the refutation of the tempting but specious dichotomy between restriction and circulation.

0.1 Explanation of the project

Scope

Without romanticizing the VOC's operations too much, long-distance trading of the early modern period is often understood to have carried people, products, and ideas further than anyone or anything had ever been able to go before. While doing my research, I have often wondered: how far should *I* go? Bound by a word limit like the early modern traveler bound to earth by its gravity, and determined not to lose myself in scientific description like the empire's cartographers described by Borges in the epigraph, I have needed to confine the scope of this research to very particular territory.

⁵ Robert Fortune, *Three Years' Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China* (London: Spottiswoode and Shaw, 1847), 4. Fortune's unforgiving opinion of the Chinese should be seen in the light of a contemporary shift in the reputation of the Chinese among westerners from positive to negative, greatly affecting the tone of discourse on China. For an exploration of this development, see Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). As for his dismissal of Jesuit sources: we will get back to this, but for now, suffice to say their reputation as knowledge-makers has generally been a point of contention.

First of all, there is the parameter of time. In this thesis, I have focused on roughly seventeenth century for several reasons. First of all, it is during this period that the VOC establishes and builds upon its administrative knowledge regulations, which, towards the end of the century, would undergo fewer and fewer evolutionary changes. Secondly, while the history of tea has received considerable attention from scholars, most prefer to focus their attention to the burgeoning of British tea practices and trade.⁶ As tea drinking only came into fashion in the UK decades after it had become a normalcy in the Dutch Republic, and the Brits would only begin to trade the product in 1692 (a good 80 years after the first shipment by the VOC), a large and important part of tea's European history seems to go unnoticed.⁷ In this thesis, I therefore hope to correct the wrongful impression one may get from this imbalance in the current body of literature.⁸

Secondly, concision demands I cannot give equal attention to all human actors involved. As my focus is on knowledge production occurring under the umbrella of the VOC's operations, the material discussed will primarily be concerned with actors under employment of Jan Compagnie. This means that when looking at knowledge of tea, other sources (primarily those of Portuguese and Jesuit origin) will take a backseat, and only make an appearance where there are instances of cross-pollination to be discussed. Still, it should be emphasized that while we maintain a focus on the VOC, this will not be a *Dutch* history: on the contrary, many of the Company's officers we will come across in the history of tea were not from the Dutch Republic at all.

Finally, I will maintain a limited yet broad understanding of 'science' in this thesis. Limited, because I have chosen to concentrate on natural and medicinal knowledge of tea. This primarily entails information that would in present day be referred to as botanical, pharmaceutical, and agricultural sciences. Had this study been given the space and time, it could have surely benefitted from the inclusion of other kinds of knowing, specifically social, cultural and technological knowledges.⁹ At the same time, my understanding of 'science' will be broad, because in my attention for natural science, I have chosen to equate 'science', 'knowledge', and 'information' to each other, in accordance with the movement away from traditional to less run-of-the-mill notions of what should constitute the 'Science' in History of Science. This thesis is not the right place for involvement in this important theoretical discussion. Still, as my

⁶ For an example, see Erika Diane Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁷ In addition to the focus on the British history of European tea trade, even those studies who do focus on the VOC's share in the history of tea often prioritize the eighteenth century, as trading activity was of a much higher frequency in this time period. This is reflected in for example Yong Lui's *The Dutch East India Company's Tea Trade with China, 1757-1781* (Boston: Brill, 2006).

⁸ For example, Rappaport claims in the 1660, the Dutch "seemed to have little sense of what to do with the commodity and were unhappy about being forced into the tea trade." (Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire*, 31). As we will see, this is inaccurate.

⁹ Just to give you an idea, apart from natural knowledge of concerning the plant and its product, a fair number scholars displayed a similar interest in the social function of tea drinking, tea drinking practices, and the equipment necessary for its preparation. See for example Christine A. Jones, "Exotic Edibles: Coffee, Tea, Chocolate, and the Early Modern French How-to," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 623-653; and Woodruff D. Smith, "From Coffeehouse to Parlour: The consumption of coffee, tea and sugar in north-western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," in *Consuming Habits*, ed. Jordan Goodman, Andrew Sherrat and Paul Lovejoy (London: Routledge, 2007), 142 – 157.

research is unquestionably operating with the tools provided by these historiographical developments, and indebted to other research that has been conducted in the same tradition, I will briefly address the nature of these developments in Section 0.2.

Methodology

The early modern sources used throughout this thesis can be broadly divided into two categories. Firstly, there are the documents pertaining to the travel knowledge directives issued by the Company to its employees, commonly taking the form of official charters or instructions. A lot of this material has survived, but perhaps due to the sheer size of the VOC archives they have been given relatively little attention. While a few scholars have discussed the VOC regulations in their research, they usually have done so in service of other scholarly purposes, and commonly in Dutch. This thesis will contribute to the recent upswing in academic attention for VOC knowledge directives as epistemic objects, primarily by inventorying which specific archival pieces are of particular interest here to begin with. While the existing literature refers to some of these archival pieces, finding them is not so easy: references are sometimes incomplete, archives may have moved locations, and even if you do find the correct source, reading it proves a whole other challenge, as transcriptions are rarely provided. In order to chip at the confusion instead of adding to it, I have opted to provide this thesis with an elaborate appendix, which includes an overview and transcriptions of the relevant passages discussed in Chapter I. In this way, I hope to give the curious reader a chance to further explore the primary source material as they choose.

A second kind of primary material of concern to us are the documents carrying knowledge from Asia to the Dutch Republic. In doing so, I have chosen to foreground one kind of material manifestation of knowledge, namely the written word. This mainly includes printed publications (travelogues, atlases, descriptive compilations), journals, manuscripts, and to a lesser extent, correspondence. This means that, regardless of their value to the history of science, other kinds of sources such as maps and artwork will take a backseat for the most part. A chronological compendium of the printed source material addressed in Chapters II and III is provided in a separate appendix.

0.2 Theory

Situating ourselves in history of knowledge

In the twentieth century the meaning of terms such as ‘science’ and ‘technology’ came to be under scrutiny, culminating into the twenty-first century rise of history of knowledge, otherwise known as *Wissengeschichte* or *Lieux de savoir*, existing alongside the more ‘traditional’ history of science, as a distinct historiographical field or as a loose bundle of ideas, depending on whom you ask.¹⁰ This has opened up the discussion to include kinds of knowledges previously excluded by means of (now often discarded) dichotomies, such as that between ‘European science’ and ‘indigenous knowledges’.¹¹ One of the most prominent fruits of this new approach

¹⁰ Johan Östling et al., “The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge: An Introduction,” in *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations into the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018).

¹¹ For a thorough discussion of this topic, see Ladislaus M. Semali and Joe L. Kincheloe (eds.) *What Is Indigenous Knowledge?: Voices from the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

has been the attention it has garnered to the circulation of knowledge. Sociological and philosophical approaches such as those of Bruno Latour and his actor-network theory added stress to the social environments in which science occurs.¹² Jacques Derrida pointed to the inherent twining of meaning and materiality. Historians started to analyze circulation with increasing depth, heeding factors such as locality, materiality, mediality, and accessibility in their historical reconstructions, as well as letting go of the convention to search for fixed origins of particular ideas or inventions.

My approach taken in this thesis is in large part indebted to the fruits of *Wissensgeschichte*, and is situated in many of the same domains. Two formative ideas from the study of knowledge circulation have informed my research to such a large extent that they should not go unmentioned. First of all, my approach has been inspired by understandings of science as being an inherently communicative practice, particularly those ideas voiced by James A. Secord. In his seminal keynote address and essay *Knowledge in Transit* (2004), Secord stresses the need for shifting attention from the *making* of knowledge to its *motion*. To move the field of history forward, Secord argues, historians need to put more emphasis on the way knowledge moves after its inception. Of regarding knowledge-making as a communicative practice, he writes:

To do real historical work, this perspective needs to be not only explicit but also foundational. This means thinking always about every text, image, action and object as the trace of an act of communication, with receivers, producers and modes and conventions of transmission. It means eradicating the distinction between the making and the communicating of knowledge. It means thinking about statements as vectors with a direction and a medium and the possibility of response. The most important task is to make our understanding of science as a form of communication – which is a commonplace in the theoretical literature – really work within the narratives we write.¹³

Secord recognizes that this approach is not novel in the field of history, but calls for more consistent use of it. While nowadays such consistency is still only sporadically prioritized by authors, Secord's essay has been extremely influential in raising awareness among historians that circulation needs to be at least taken into account.¹⁴ Indeed, recent studies seem to be more attentive to the locality of knowledge. An exemplar of this movement is *Putting Science in its Place* (2003), in which David Livingstone's makes a compelling case for acknowledging the inescapable impact of place on science.¹⁵

A second idea foundational to the approach of this thesis stems from adjacent advancements in the exploration of the role of power in knowledge-making. Aided by the frameworks provided by postcolonial theorists, historians have drawn attention to the ways in which political, military and societal power often affects the flow of knowledge, and may furthermore distort it.¹⁶ This is recognized for example at the influential Zentrum Geschichte des Wissens, when its members Philipp Sarasin and Andreas Kilcher write in the 2011 annual:

¹² See Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987)

¹³ James A. Secord, "Knowledge in Transit," *Isis* 95, no. 4 (December: 2004), 661.

¹⁴ Östling et al., *Circulation of Knowledge*, 11.

¹⁵ David Livingstone, *Putting science in its place: geographies of scientific knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1.

Wissen entsteht und zirkuliert unter den Bedingungen komplexer Machtverhältnisse. Es kann zu wertvoll sein, um freiwillig weitergegeben zu werden, oder nützlich im Kampf gegen Mächtige. Wissen kann zurückgewiesen werden, weil es Bestehendes untergräbt, es kann verzerrt und verfälscht zirkulieren. Wissen ist nicht unschuldig und rein, seine Wahrheiten gelten nicht notwendigerweise immer und für alle.¹⁷

With similar regard to the importance of power, Steven Shapin has argued that social authority enables trust, which, as a key ingredient of credibility, is imperative for establishing of matters of fact.¹⁸ Much more can be – and has been – said about these and adjacent theoretical developments.¹⁹ For now, I would like to turn to their manifestation in literature concerned with the twining of science and commerce. In recent years, some fascinating work has appeared written from these perspectives. Of particular interest to us are the relatively recent ambitions to better understand how travel knowledge was produced and communicated along the information networks established by long-distance corporations. For instance, Miles Ogborn has investigated knowledge-making under the EIC, advocating a different mode of interpretation: instead of only looking at ‘travel writing’, it is more productive to also consider ‘how writing travels’.²⁰ When it comes to the VOC, travel writing produced under its operations first started to receive attention at the start of the twentieth century from the direction of literary studies. In 1908 the Linschoten-Vereeniging was founded which, inspired by the British Hakluyt Society and driven by a climate of modern imperialism, nationalism and an increasing interest in foreign cultures, strove to make available the large quantity of journals and travel reports produced under the VOC.²¹ Literary critic Conrad Busken Huet was the first to point out their value for Dutch literary history in his 1912 book *Het land van Rembrand*, an influential and extensive study of the seventeenth-century history of the Netherlands.²² Other scholars from literary studies would follow, for example professor of Dutch literature and History Gerrit Kalff in 1910 and Gustaaf Armandus van Es in 1948. More recently, Marijke Barend-van Haeften has been one of the most prominent literary historians to investigate the subject of VOC journals. In one of her articles, she clears the air around the different kinds of travel writings that exist and are often confused with one another.²³

¹⁷ Philipp Sarasin and Andreas Kilcher, “Editorial,” in *Nach Feierabend: Zürcher Jahrbuch für Wissensgeschichte 7, Zirkulationen* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2011), 10.

¹⁸ Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁹ I have found Raj’ work on the construction of knowledge in South Asia (mostly India) to be one of the most predominant recent works. See Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Other insightful examples following this trend but not directly pertinent to the subject matter of this thesis can be found in Ralph Bauer and Marcy Norton, “Introduction: entangled trajectories: indigenous and European histories,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 26, no. 1 (April 2017), 1-17.

²⁰ Ogborn, *Indian Ink*, 32.

²¹ Henk den Heijer and Cees van Romburgh, *Reizen door de eeuwen heen: 100 jaar Linschoten-Vereeniging (1908-2008)* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2008).

²² Busken Huet praises these journals as important sources for literary and linguistic study, as they were often written by men who had had little formal education and thus are a unique window on the vernacular language of the time. See Marijke Barend-van Haeften *Oost-Indië gespiegeld: Nicolaas de Graaff, een schrijvend chirurgijn in dienst van de VOC* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1992).

²³ Marijke Barend-van Haeften, “Van scheepsjournaal tot reisverhaal: een kennismaking met zeventiende-eeuwse reisteksten,” *Literatuur* 7 (1990), 222-228.

For all of the focused studies on travel and literature, only recently, with the increased attention for different kinds of knowledge, knowledge-making and knowledge producers, historians have taken up the topic of travel and commerce with specific regard for scientific developments. But why?

Relevance: why does it matter?

The more open attitude towards what constitutes the history of science does not just widen the range of research opportunities, but also adds depth to the historical enterprise, allowing for more layered and meaningful analyses.

Take the matter of objectivity. Objectivity, and particularly its historical emergence, has been of great interest to historians of science over the last decades, yielding interesting answers and even more interesting questions pertaining to the origin of objectivity, its association with ‘modernity’, and the possibility of an intertwined relationship with the history of subjectivity as well as related matters such as fact, epistemic virtues, and moral authority. The fruits of these endeavors may help us to better understand travel writing as a source of scientific information. For example, in untangling the complicated and contingent history of objectivity, Lorraine Daston has pointed out that next to ontological and mechanical aspects, a third strand of objectivity can be recognized in *aperspectival objectivity*, which is about eliminating individual (and sometimes group) idiosyncrasies.²⁴ In her article, Daston uses Thomas Nagel’s definition of the term, regarding it as a method of understanding that “a view or form of thought is more objective than another if it relies less on the specifics of the individual’s makeup and position in the world, or on the character of the particular type of creature he is.”²⁵ Interestingly, Daston locates the origins of *aperspectival objectivity* not in the natural sciences but in eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic philosophy. Only when communication became a factor of greater importance in science, especially in collaborative efforts that crossed boundaries, training and skill, *aperspectival objectivity* came to be recognized as a scientific value. Daston considers these changes to be in full swing from the middle decades of the nineteenth century onwards, although she does mention in passing that science had been a collaborative matter from the seventeenth century onwards.²⁶

As I will show, elaboration on the view purported by Daston is warranted, as she seems to have a particular kind of ‘science’ in mind – one that is done by ‘scientists’, emerging in nineteenth-century universities. However, when considering sixteenth- and seventeenth-century long-distance networks as knowledge-producers, the temporal scale of communicative ‘scientific’ labor increases considerably as well. In addition, the very nature of these knowledge networks – spread out over vast distances, reliant on many individuals producing reports, journals, maps and sharing skills and experiences – a kind of *unintentional* *aperspectival objectivity* seems to arise. Although claiming that the VOC regarded it an epistemic virtue seems to me too bold of a statement, the care with which the VOC regulated its knowledge production and its repetitive demand for more material (and copies thereof) does indicate that *aperspectivity* was part of its creed, albeit in a primal form. Take Daston’s argument that in the eighteenth century ‘the distances and sheer numbers of writers and readers spanned by the new networks of scientific

²⁴ Lorraine Daston, “Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective,” *Social Studies of Science* 22, no. 4 (November, 1992), 597-618

²⁵ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4-5

²⁶ Daston, “Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective,” 602.

communication had undermined the old rules of trust and trustworthiness.²⁷ While this is not a false statement at all, the idea that long distances and credibility were at odds with one another was certainly no novelty to the eighteenth century; we will see attempts at countering these epistemic uncertainties through administrative regulations in Chapter I, and come across similar issues of trustworthiness ‘at play’ in Chapters II and III.²⁸

Heeding this importance of travelling and communication while returning to Francis Bacon, Julie Solomon has argued that he had the attitude of travelers and merchants in mind when he proposed new ways of knowledge production, characterizing his orientation as one of a certain awareness that distancing oneself from one’s own interests and viewpoints, while simultaneously allowing space for those of their overseas trading partners, would yield the most commercial success.²⁹ Solomon calls this attitude ‘disinterested interestedness’, and while it has proven to be an extremely useful concept in studying the history of objectivity, it also confirms that, while seventeenth-century trading journals usually fall out of what is commonly understood to be the scope of this history of objectivity – usually starting in the eighteenth century – they can be regarded as belonging to a realm of ‘primeval scientific methods’.

Thus, the methods employed and epistemic concerns experienced by seventeenth-century journal makers and the companies they worked under reveal interesting parallels to those of their more ‘scientific’ eighteenth-century successors. Still, caution is warranted: their trajectories are parallel, but not equal to each other. While regulation, standardization and ‘disinterested interestedness’ give off strong suggestions of some kind of ambition towards ‘objectivity’, divergencies from these paths indicate that in reality the scientific information acquired along the lines of these global knowledge networks often served very ‘un-scientific’ purposes such as economic profit and religious conversion, and could (and would) be abandoned if necessary. The Jesuits active in China are an excellent example of this. Driven by their missionary objectives, they were often accused of providing an embellished picture of China in their accounts, as can be recognized in Fortune’s remarks. As we will see in Chapter III, similar accusations were made by contemporaries in instances of enthusiasm regarding the health benefits of tea, which some suspected to be rooted commercial interests rather than fact. As a consequence, Emily Teo writes,

fact and fiction were not self-evident categories in the context of early modern travel writing, but became juxtaposed and defined in relation to each other as audiences expressed anxiety about the veracity of travel accounts, and began to establish strategies to distil reliable information from a cacophony of travel reports.³⁰

Indeed, while increased global networks allowed for more communication to take place, corroboration by multiple credible witnesses in the same account was often unattainable. And

²⁷ Ibid., 611.

²⁸ Notably, the same tendency to exclude corporate scientific knowledge production can be seen in a later work by Daston and co-author Peter Galison: in the importance of regular journal keeping as an instrument in knowledge production is recognized in regards to eighteenth-century observation and the scientific self, but again is only referring to European scientists operating from the continent. See Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 235-236

²⁹ J.R. Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making. Francis Bacon and the Politics of Inquiry*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 107-110.

³⁰ Emily Teo, “Hyperbole in Early Modern Missionary Travel Accounts of China,” *Past and present*, no. 16 (2022), 262.

while the credibility of eye-witness accounts were held in high regard, conflicting observations, a lack of supporting testimony, and blatant fraud would often put audiences in a difficult position. As Barbara Shapiro has argued, reader skepticism resulting from these issues of credibility surrounding travel writing can be regarded as having played a major role in the expansion of the concept “fact”, at least as far as it concerns the intellectual developments in England, as action was taken (most importantly by the Royal Society) to foster the accumulation of natural observations abroad and their subsequent compilation into trustworthy histories. Thus, travel writing seems to have been an important factor in the development of “fact” from primarily relating to human actions to inclusion of natural phenomena as well, ultimately paving the way for later notions of “scientific fact”.³¹ This thesis deals with the same natural fact-finding efforts of the early modern period, but shifts the focus from “science for science’s sake” to “science for commercial sake”.

³¹ Barbara Shapiro, “Discourses of Fact: Chorography, Description, and Travel Reporting,” in *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550 – 1720* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 63-85.

Prologue: setting the scene

Over the first few decades of its existence, the VOC managed to establish its presence at crucial locations throughout East Asia, through diplomacy and/or force. Three of these centers in particular became pivotal junctions for knowledge of tea to flow along, and therefore require a closer look: Batavia, Japan, and, to a lesser extent, Formosa.³² The Dutch established their headquarters for Asian trade in all kinds of goods in Batavia in 1619, which soon functioned as a ‘stable’ axis around which the increasingly complex commercial, political, and administrative operations could revolve. It also gave the Dutch a unique opportunity of connecting with the Chinese, as significant Chinese settlements had been present on Java and the rest of the Indonesian archipelago for a few centuries at that time.³³ Under pressure of the Dutch, who forcefully compromised their operations wherever they seemed fit, Chinese merchants would eventually centralize their trade at Batavia, which included their tea sales.³⁴

Attempts at establishing more direct trade with the Chinese on mainland China proved to be a much more demanding, yet principal challenge to the VOC. After all, gaining direct access to China had been the main objective of the *Voorcompagniën* in the 1590.³⁵ The Dutch attempted to expel the Portuguese from Macau by force in 1622, but failed. Over the next two years, the Company tried arduously to persuade the Chinese authorities to evict the Portuguese from Macau and grant them free trade instead. Yet Chinese officials saw sea commerce as a necessary evil, and had little interest in starting any commercial relations with the Dutch, as the Spanish and Portuguese had done their best to show their Dutch competitors in a bad light.³⁶ To make matters worse, the ‘diplomatic’ strategy chosen by the Dutch – performing numerous raids on the Fukien ports – proved to be unsuccessful in persuading them otherwise. The Chinese authorities fended off the attacks, and eventually the Company retreated.

³²It goes without saying that a lot of other fascinating stories can be told outside of this geographical focus. For examples pertaining to the VOC’s operations in contemporary India, see Meera Gopurapillil Muralidharan, “Knowledge-Making Endeavours of the Dutch East India Company in Malabar, 1663–1795” (PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2021); Malavika Binny, “Plants, Power and Knowledge: An Exploration of the Imperial Networks and the Circuits of Botanical Knowledge and Medical Systems on the Western Coast of India Against the backdrop of European Expansionism” *Global Histories* 1, no. 1 (December 2016), 3-20.

³³ In 1371, the Chinese emperor prohibited his subjects to sail overseas. Consequently, the overseas trading communities, many of which were located in the Indonesian archipelago, became permanent merchant settlements. The ban was only lifted in 1547. For more on these Chinese merchant communities, see Wang Gungwu, “Merchants without Empire: The Hokkien sojourning communities,” in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 – 1750*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 400-421.

³⁴ Harold J. Cook, “Truths and Untruths from the Indies,” in *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 186.

³⁵ Robert Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters: The Development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Shipping Network in Asia 1595-1660* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 33.

³⁶ Cook, “Truths and Untruths from the Indies,” 206.

For the remainder of the seventeenth century, the VOC attempted to gain free access to China's market through different, more cordial methods, notably by sending embassies to the Chinese court on six different occasions between 1655 and 1685. Yet ultimately access to China's south-eastern ports was denied, and the VOC needed to find different ways of gaining a toehold in the region. This chiefly meant making use of the already existent Chinese trade network between the mainland and the Indonesian archipelago.³⁷ Another way to facilitate trade was by setting up quarters, first briefly on the Pescadores and in 1624 on Formosa, at the demand of the Chinese state. Formosa was formally outside of China's jurisdiction, and had been in use by both Chinese and Japanese smugglers for some time when the Dutch arrived. Over the next few decades, the VOC gradually expanded its authority over the island and the surrounding trade, and in 1633 a durable trading link with Fuchien was established.

Formosa's Chinese population and proximity to the mainland provided the VOC with valuable commercial opportunities. It allowed for a triangular trade between China, Formosa and Japan to arise, albeit still in large part dependent on (sparingly granted) permission by Chinese officials. Perhaps even more fruitful were the Company's partnerships with the Chinese pirates roaming the Taiwan Straits, allowing not only for smuggling and commercial trade but also for additional attempts at diplomatic relations with (and sometimes, violent attacks against) the Chinese state, as pirates were sometimes deployed by the Chinese government as translators and even ambassadors.³⁸ Furthermore, the island of Formosa itself also provided the VOC with commercial opportunities. For example, Dutch governor Verburgh went to great lengths to bring the production of certain Chinese commodities to Formosa, which would mean more independence from the whims of the Ming authorities and possible alleviation from poverty for inhabitants. He permitted the cultivation of sugar by the Chinese, and even tried to establish silkworm-breeding, in the hopes that this knowledge would be transferred to the Formosans.³⁹ Neither enterprise was a success, mostly because Formosans preferred their old methods of cultivation over the plough-centered technologies promoted by the Dutch.

The VOC's presence on Formosa was relatively short-lived when compared to its Japanese operations. From 1609 onwards, the Dutch had started to build a presence in Japan, by persistent diplomatic efforts and tactical religious moderation, culminating in the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1639, marking the start of a long Dutch hegemony: until 1853, they would be the only Westerners allowed to be present in and trade with Japan. Under tight regulation by the Japanese government, the exceptional economic position did not only come with commercial advantages, but also allowed for technological and scientific exchange to take place, all centered around the island trading post Deshima.⁴⁰ Even though Company personnel was

³⁷ Leonard Blussé, "No Boats to China. The Dutch East India Company and the Changing Pattern of the China Sea Trade, 1635-1690," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 1 (1996): 51-76.

³⁸ Tonio Andrade, "The Company's Chinese Pirates: How the Dutch East India Company Tried to Lead a Coalition of Pirates to War against China, 1621-1662," *Journal of World History* 15, no. 4 (December 2004), 415-444.

³⁹ H.H. Chiu, "The colonial 'civilizing process' in Dutch Formosa 1624-1662," (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2007), 195-196.

⁴⁰ One of the more fascinating by-products of this scientific exchange has been what has come to be known as *rangaku*, or "Dutch learning", a concerted effort by Japanese scholars to learn Dutch in

only sparingly granted permission to enter Japan (usually for meetings with the shogun), Deshima offered the VOC a unique opportunity to gather knowledge of Japan, its produce, and its people. As we will see in Chapter II, much of the initial information of the properties of tea was in fact derived from the accounts of officials stationed in Deshima. In addition, it presented the Company with another opportunity to spy on the Chinese trade. For example, a 1696 diary held at Deshima mentions the death of a certain Tarroyemon, who had apparently been enlisted as an undercover agent to inform the VOC on developments in Chinese trade.⁴¹ And while the Dutch worked hard to find replacement for their informant, Japanese authorities were just as determined to prevent any more spying activity in the future, even binding their personnel to a blood oath swearing not to reveal trade information to the Dutch, nor to the Chinese. As such, the Japanese-Dutch early modern trading relation is simultaneously characterized by successful economic cooperation and profound (and justified) distrust, Japanese officials even going so far as to advise VOC officers who spoke Japanese *too well* to leave out of fear of them eavesdropping on conversations, as well as being able to verify the accuracy of what Japanese-Dutch interpreters asserted.⁴²

In the midst of these geographical nodes of trade settlements cooperation and mistrust went hand in hand. Intelligence was therefore of crucial importance. Take the case of the English. In the late 1610s, Jan Pieterszoon Coen was violently trying to push the English out of the spice trade on Java, until word came in 1619 of a treaty agreed upon by the States General and King James I two years earlier. Collaboration between the VOC and the EIC ensued, but only on the surface, as each side remained suspicious of the other.⁴³ Indeed, the partnership did not hold up for long: in 1623, the Dutch discovered that a Japanese soldier had been spying for the English, and the ruthlessness of their retaliation (torture and executions) put a definite end to the Anglo-Dutch collaboration in the Indonesian archipelago.

The vast and expanding network of the VOC was not only facilitating the accumulation of political and strategic intelligence, but that of natural and cultural knowledge too. Some remarks on the people behind the production and circulation of these knowledges seem necessary. First of all, it is easy to conflate VOC and Dutch history, but equating them does not do justice to the reality of the Company's workforce, which was made up of a large variety of nationalities.⁴⁴ Until around 1660, about 65 percent of the recruited soldiers and 35 percent of the remaining workforce were foreigners, leading the Amsterdam admiralty to the observation that "wars waged at sea by this country is for the most part fought by foreign mariners".⁴⁵ In addition,

order to study Western technology and science. For further reading on this topic, see Grant Kohn Goodman, *The Dutch Impact on Japan, 1640-1853* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

⁴¹ Leonard Blussé et al., *The Deshima Diaries: Marginalia 1740-1800* (Boston: Brill, 2015), xx.

⁴² See the case of dr. Wagemans, as described in Blussé et al., *The Deshima Diaries*, xix.

⁴³ Cook, "Truths and Untruths from the Indies," 87.

⁴⁴ Siegfried Huigen has made the same observation, arguing for more attention towards the *European dimension* of the reception of knowledge generated by the VOC's trading networks. See his introduction to Siegfried Huigen et al., *The Dutch Trading Networks as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 3.

⁴⁵ "De oorlog te water uyt dese landen [wordt] voor een groot gedeelte met uytheemsch bootsvolck gevoert". Roelof van Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch avontuur: Duitsers in dienst van de VOC (1600-1800)* (Amsterdam: SUN, 1997), 53.

while members of local populations such traders, spies, subordinates were a vital source of intelligence, outsiders were at times permitted to travel along with Company ships, and in return would relay unique information not easily obtained by their commercial counterparts. A notable case in point is provided by none other than Martino Martini, the famous Jesuit missionary, who returned from his long stay in China in the 1650s with a returning VOC fleet, and published his now-famous *Novus Atlas Sinensis* and *De Bello Tartarico* in Amsterdam and Antwerp respectively upon his arrival in the Dutch Republic.⁴⁶ Reports of his journey show that Martini provided the VOC officers with information regarding the political situation in China, advising them to move forward with their diplomatic efforts, and that at least in some instances officers tried (and succeeded) in verifying his account:

[...] verders allegeert vooraengerode Padre datse die van Maccâo haer vrientschap mitsgaders libere negotie aengebooden hebben, twelck bij geintercipieerde brieven door den Gouverneur van Maccao geaffirmeert wort, bovendien datse hun hebben laten verluijden niet alleenlijcken de Portugeesen maer oock alle andere vreemde natien, die China in vrientschap begeren te fricquenteeren den liberen ende onbecommerden toegancq sullen vergunnen, dierhalven twijffelt ditto padre niet ingevalle de *Compagnie* in Quanton daer hij oordeelt de rechte plaetse te wesen om bij den Conincq versoeck te doen, hare ambassadeurs stiert datse niet alleenlijck sullen geadmitteert maer daerenboven de libere negotie ende onbecommerden toegancq in China sal vergunt worden.⁴⁷

Apart from strategical and commercial advice, Martino also provided the VOC with a description of China, which included maps, all in exchange for passage to Amsterdam.⁴⁸ At first glance, the collaboration between the VOC and the Society of Jesus is an odd one, given the major differences in what motivated their Asian campaigns. The VOC's military operations had even posed a threat to the Jesuit enterprise in China earlier that century: in a letter to his German colleagues in 1621, the missionary Schreck expressed his concern about the growing political tension created by the Dutch attack on the Portuguese in Macao, as it was obstructing the European correspondence so vital to the Society's mission.⁴⁹ In return, the Jesuits had been accused of sabotaging a Dutch diplomatic embassy to the Chinese imperial court between 1655 and 1657, as they were said to have spread rumors about their motives to the emperor, portraying them as Portuguese lobbyists and pirates.⁵⁰ Still, having ambitions in early-modern East-Asia was a thorny business to Europeans regardless of their intentions, and needs must.

⁴⁶ Noël Golvers, "De recruteringsstocht van M. Martini, S.J. door de Lage Landen in 1654," *De zeventiende eeuw: Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief* 10, no. 1 (1994), 331.

⁴⁷ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02 inv. no. 876, f. 488

⁴⁸ Mario Cams, "De *Novus Atlas Sinensis* van Martini en Blaeu en zijn Chinese bronnen," *Caert-Thresoor Tijdschrift voor de Geschiedenis van de Kartografie* 38, no. 4 (2019), 6.

⁴⁹ Paula Findlen, "How information travels: Jesuit networks, scientific knowledge, and the early modern Republic of Letters, 1540–1640," in *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World*, ed. Paula Findlen (London: Routledge, 2018), 73.

⁵⁰ Paul Arblaster, "Piracy And Play: Two Catholic Appropriations Of Nieuwhof 's *Gezantschap*," in *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*, ed. Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. de Jong and Elmer Kolfin (Paderborn: Brill, 2010), 136-137. Note that, according to Arblaster, these Jesuits might have thought nothing wrong of their council, as a lot of them might have considered the Dutch to be violent interlopers. I will leave further assessment of the accuracy of this characterization to the reader.

Batavia, Formosa, and Japan: these were the nodes along which people, goods and stories were able to travel. In this thesis, we will give chase to the scraps of information on tea floating along these trajectories. From the mouths of local informants and first-hand witnesses to those eagerly consuming the warm beverage in the Dutch Republic; from the hands writing accounts and drawing images to the hands holding cans of dried tea at the counter; from the eyes beholding the exotic riches of East Asia, to those eagerly reading about it in heavily embellished publications. On our way, we will see that production and circulation of knowledge were always two sides of the same coin – a coin of high value to the profit-seeking Company.

Chapter I The VOC information directives: a digest

He who commands the sea, commands the trade routes of the world.
He who commands the trade routes, commands the trade.
He who commands the trade, commands the riches of the world,
and hence the world itself.

- Walter Raleigh, advisor to Queen Elizabeth (ca. 1615)⁵¹

In this chapter, we will consider the kinds of proprietary knowledge regulations that emerged in the seventeenth century, by addressing them from three angles: context, form/flow, and content. Following developments in information directives, I will show that production and circulation of knowledge are not only entwined to each other, but also woven into the very fabric of the VOC.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, guidelines on travel journals became increasingly familiar and popular among individual travelers. Because these guidelines may likely have been read and used by those traveling under the banner of the VOC, I will start off with a brief elaboration on such non-proprietary travel writing. For further contextualization, other knowledge producers contemporary with the VOC will be discussed, as well as their knowledge-gathering methods. Then, based partly on existing historiography, the administrative structure in which knowledge-gathering regulations developed will be addressed. Lastly, I will survey the archival materials containing such instructions, and explore how they were rolled out and expanded throughout the seventeenth century. The resulting digest is by no means complete, but serves to give an impression of the primary bases the VOC's information directives tried to cover. This will provide us with a framework from which to operate in the following two chapters.

1.1 Context to text: other early modern knowledge directives

Methodology of personal knowledge production

VOC directors were not the only ones to think about how information could best be gathered. In fact, the systematization of knowledge acquired during traveling became a concern for erudite Europeans, whose virtual, long-distance network of correspondence is often referred to as the Republic of Letters.⁵² This virtual community, consisting of professors, physicians,

⁵¹ Walter Raleigh, *Judicious and Select Essayes and Observations by That Renowned and Learned Knight, Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1650), 20. Cited by Helen Rozwadowski, *Vast Expanses: A History of the Oceans* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 89.

⁵² Dirk van Miert, "What was the Republic of Letters? A brief introduction to a long history (1417-2008)," *Briefgeschiedenis* 204, nr. 5 (December 2014), 269-287.

lawyers, and other well-to-do people with scientific interests, has been under academic scrutiny for some time now, considering the period from a variety of angles such as style and feminism.⁵³ In addition, the study of the Republic of Letters has undergone exciting developments with the opportunities offered by digital humanities and big data, enabling historians to map the networks arising within the European learned societies and study them more closely.⁵⁴ In a corporate history like that of the VOC, understanding literature circulating within learned communities can be of great value, as knowledge resulting from VOC voyages would find its way to bookstores in increasing quantity – and from there, straight into the hands of precisely these learned men (and women). Moreover, VOC board members and officials often belonged to the same echelon of society, which may well make them part of *both* the virtual ‘Republic of Letters’ and the formal institution of the VOC.

Travel literature was by no means a novelty in the early modern period, yet the sixteenth-century is marked by a surge of the popularity of the genre, as new humanist educational programs started to discuss the advantages of travel to one’s intellectual development.⁵⁵ Young men were encouraged to undertake a so-called “Grand Tour” through Europe as a part of coming of age.⁵⁶ Thinkers such as Francis Bacon underscored the intellectual value of travel to youngsters and endorsed the use of diaries, prompting active logging of observations to become an increasingly common practice among travelers.⁵⁷ Apart from edification, travel also served the purpose of collecting new knowledge of foreign places. To cater to the needs of inexperienced travelers striving to bring home such knowledge, travel guides were published.⁵⁸ This kind of travel advice literature, or *ars apodemica*, advised readers on *what* matters deserved the traveler’s attention (for instance specific cultural, natural and geographical characteristics), and *how* to record these observations so that they may lead to reliable knowledge.⁵⁹

When it comes to European travel, the number of travelers increased rapidly during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. As these travelers became younger, personal development became of greater priority to travelers, pushing the acquisition of new knowledge (and the insuring of its scholarly quality) to the background. However, while reliable knowledge

⁵³ For the most influential feminist histories of the Republic of Letters, see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For scientific style, see Lorraine Daston “The Ideal and Reality of the Republic of Letters in the Enlightenment,” *Science in Context* 4, no. 2 (Autumn 1991): 367-386.

⁵⁴ Examples include Stanford University’s big data project *Mapping the Republic of Letters* and the CKCC project’s *ePistolarium*

⁵⁵ Joan-Pau Rubies, “Instructions for travellers: teaching the eye to see,” *History and Anthropology* 9, no. 2-3 (1996): 165.

⁵⁶ Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour* (London: Frank Cass, 1998)

⁵⁷ Bacon, Francis Bacon, “On Travel,” in *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral* (1625), <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A28200.0001.001>

⁵⁸ For examples of travel advice literature, see the University of Galway’s database “The Art of Travel”, <https://artoftravel.nuigalway.ie/>

⁵⁹ It should be noted that the term *ars apodemica* also refers to another (interrelated but distinct) kind of literature, namely practical guide books much alike the travel guides that are still used today. These books meant to inform readers of sights, accommodation, transportation and so forth for a particular region, and are not our main concern in this section.

production might have gradually lost relevance to amateur grand tour-travelers, the *ars apodemica* genre that had grown from this cultural development continued to be of service to those traveling to more distant areas. Methods for travel writing were often part of a cumulative process, and awareness of diversity within Europe appears to be inseparable from increased interest in non-European regions.⁶⁰ As such, they were able to transform the existing corpus of *ars apodemica* to more professional methodology to be used during commercial long-distance operations.⁶¹

Organized knowledge producers: trading companies and the Society of Jesus

As international trade expanded, diplomatic intelligence became of increasing concern to European political powers. Diplomatic reports were not only supposed to convey intelligence on foreign governments and officials, but also needed to present a complete impression of a country's history, politics, religion and geography. Such diplomatic models, pioneered by the Venetians in the sixteenth century, shared a complementary nature with the *ars apodemica* often neglected in modern research: while the former offered a model for organization and implementation, the latter supplied the categories required to document intelligence in a digestible fashion.⁶² This intersection between state intelligence gathering and personal knowledge production can be expanded by inclusion of other institutions.

Already in the fifteenth century, a number of early trading companies arose in Portugal, Castille and the Italian city-states, only to be joined by the new chartered trading companies of England and the Dutch Republic by the close of the sixteenth century. The Iberian and the Anglo-Dutch corporations came into existence at different times and were developed differently, and are often distinguished as the so-called first- and second expansion circuit.⁶³ One major advantage for the VOC and EIC was their ability to build upon trading experience and networks within the European market, allowing them to handle both intercontinental as well as intra-European trade within the same company. Furthermore, being “second” to their Iberian and Italian predecessors enabled the VOC and EIC to benefit from the competition's intercontinental experience, providing the VOC and EIC with models for information management. In a time when the development of colonial systems created a competitive environment for trading companies across Europe, such models were of vital importance to the success of Anglo-Dutch companies.⁶⁴ In combination with *ars apodemica* conventions among the privileged, a connection between formal education, travel and (economic) service to the state was able to arise, allowing for more systematic and informative methods in the production of knowledge. New institutions, most notably the Royal Society, were able to benefit from these mercantile

⁶⁰ Rubies, “Instructions for travellers: teaching the eye to see,” 154.

⁶¹ Justin Stagl, “*Ars apodemica* and Socio-Cultural Research,” in *Artes Apodemicae and Early Modern Travel Culture, 1550-1700*, eds. Karl Enekel, Jan de Jong (Boston: Brill, 2019).

⁶² David Scott Gehring, Intelligence Gathering, *Relazioni*, and the *Ars Apodemica*,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 33, no. 2 (2022): 211-232.

⁶³ Pieter Emmer, “The Organisation of Global Trade: the Monopoly Companies, 1600–1800,” *European Review* 22, no. 1 (2014): 106–15.

⁶⁴ Rubies, “Instructions for travellers: teaching the eye to see,” 139-190.

experiences in their efforts to advance the body of empirical knowledge about distant peoples and places in a systematic, “scientific” fashion.⁶⁵

Similar ambitions for this kind of knowledge can be recognized in religious institutions, especially the Society of Jesus. In total, its scientific corpus consists of around 5600 (!) publications, of which about one-seventh is dedicated to the study of geography and natural knowledge.⁶⁶ An impressive feat, especially given the fact that scientific research was never the main purpose of the Society, nor did it employ explorers with specialist training in these fields. The great scientific productivity of the Jesuit order can be attributed to its careful consideration of both the local embeddedness of knowledge as well as its distributive networks. Over time, the Jesuits founded a great number of universities and colleges, which functioned as nodal points for the ‘gathering, collation, distillation, and dissemination of much of Jesuit science.’⁶⁷ Simultaneously, overseas missions were frequently commissioned to promote the word of God among non-Christian peoples. Indeed, the incentive to travel has been present in the Society of Jesus right from its foundation by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540, who recognized the importance of missionary work as well as the organization of information dissemination. Jesuit missionaries were quickly dispatched to many corners of the world, their work facilitated by an elaborate system of communication which can be understood to have two central components: the correspondence proper of daily administration, and edifying letters, in itself to be divided into missionary reports (*relations*) and *litterae annuae*, which were compilations of reports edited and circulated from Rome in the form of general annual letters, keeping everyone informed about the most important events and developments.⁶⁸ Transmission of natural knowledge almost exclusively took place in the *Relations*, which were shorter in length, broader in range and written in the vernacular instead of the Latin used in the more formal *litterae annuae*. While new information was able to flow to Jesuits through these impressive administrative networks, notably Jesuit missionaries systematically shared European scientific and technological insights with local authorities during their missions as a means to gain goodwill and as to smooth the way for religious conversion. Thus, in the words of historian Paula Findlen, “science lubricated the wheels of faith”, paying a fundamental contribution to the security and stability of the Society’s missions abroad.⁶⁹

Although their ambitions largely diverged, the common interests of trading companies and religious institutions for the accumulation of knowledge meant that their operations occasionally met. Seventeenth-century natural knowledge production thus hinged on cross-institutional exchange of forms and practices As we will see in Chapter II, Jesuit accounts were

⁶⁵ Sina Rauschenbach, “Elzevirian Republics, wise merchants, and new perspectives on Spain and Portugal in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic,” *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 29, no. 1 (2013), 95.

⁶⁶ Harris, Steven J. “Mapping Jesuit Science: The Role of Travel in the Geography of Knowledge,” in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, eds. Bailey et al., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 213.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶⁸ Markus Friedrich, “Circulating and Compiling the *Litterae Annuae*. Towards a History of the Jesuit System of Communication,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 77 (2008), 5.

⁶⁹ Paula Findlen, “How information travels: Jesuit networks, scientific knowledge, and the early modern Republic of Letters, 1540–1640,” in *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World*, ed. Paula Findlen (London: Routledge, 2018), 61.

read by Dutch audiences with both skepticism and interest at the same time. In return, Jesuits were aware of the VOC's reach, and strove to have its employees' participate in their own knowledge production, for example by requesting them to contribute observational data in their astronomical research.⁷⁰

1.2 Charting the chartered: form and flow of knowledge management

VOC information management structures

The organization of the VOC rested upon an intricate web of networks with two central bodies. The Gentlemen XVII (*Heren XVII*) were seated in the Dutch Republic (alternating between Amsterdam and Middelburg), where they were in direct contact with six chambers located in Amsterdam, Middelburg, Enkhuizen, Delft, Hoorn and Rotterdam.⁷¹ Overseas, the High Indies Government, (*Hoge Indische Regeering*, also known as *Raad van Indië*), of whom the governor-general was the highest member, had its headquarters in Batavia, overseeing all Asian trading posts and operations. What kind of documentation travelled along the lines of this network? In 1642, Governor-General A. van Diemen expressed his concern:

[...] dat veel loffelycke placcaten ende ordonnantiën by onse voorsaten, als ons successivelycke geëmaneert, niet, gelyck behoort, geobserveert warden, vermits deselve door de placcaet-boecken wyd en syd verspreyt ende seer lang geëxtendeert synde, fastidieus ende moeyelyck om te lesen syn, ende mitsdien niet wel van yder, die 't behoort, geweten worden.⁷²

Unfortunately, Van Diemen turned out to be right: it is remarkably challenging to penetrate the wilderness of surviving documents, each with its own purpose and each circulating between different nodes of the information networks. In short, when it comes to VOC directives, the following proprietary document types can be distinguished:

- **Resolutions** (*resoluties*), recording the decisions taken by the **chief factor** and his council;
- **Instructions** (*instructies*), informing all employees of the latest regulations;
- **Charters** (*octrooien*), defining the VOC's mandate and monopoly as well as the rights and duties of its employees. Charters were not indefinitely applicable but published with a fixed term, and renewed after expiration;
- **Article letters** (*artikelbrieven*), which were supplied to crew members on board in the ship's box (*scheepsdoos*) and contained a variety of instructions to be followed during their employment. Article letters were to be frequently read out loud to the crew, and were sometimes nailed to the ship's mast, to ensure everyone was familiar with their contents;
- **Ordinances** (*ordonnanties*) and **placards** (*plakكاتen*), announcing new rulings. Placards were often compiled and published in placard books (*plakkaatboeken*);
- **Memories** (*memories*), instructing mid-to-high ranking officers on how to inform the Company directors of their journeys and observations.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 84.

⁷¹ Balk et al., *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia* (Jakarta) (Leiden & Boston: BRILL, 2007).

⁷² Jacobus Anne van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakkaatboek 1602-1642*, vol.1 (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1885-1900). v.

All incoming accounts were combined at the Batavia headquarters to form a single survey, the general dispatch (*generale missive*). In 1644, a special committee (the *Haags Besogne*) was set up and tasked with the composition of summaries (*Haags verbalen*) for all incoming documents, in an effort to better manage the rapidly increasing quantity of documentation.⁷³ In times of war, another special committee (the *Secrete Commissië*) compiled secret routes and signals to be issued to outgoing fleets.⁷⁴ The large and varied flow of regulation and information that can be observed within geographic nodes of the VOC's operative network makes it a perfect example of what Bruno Latour has defined 'a center of calculation': organizations can only function over long-distances if they are able to keep events, places and people *mobile* yet *stable* as well as *combinable*, allowing the 'combinable mobiles' to be condensed, aggregated, their quality and practical applicability improved as they are transmitted from one organizational part to another.⁷⁵

Structures in action: material studies of the VOC's information management

Awareness of the scientific value of the VOC's information administration has been growing among historians of science for some time now, and has yielded some promising results. Take C.A. Davids, whose extensive study of nautical sciences shows that from around 1650 onwards daily registers were compiled according to a standardized method.⁷⁶ Four lined journals were provided to each outgoing ship, with preprinted columns to register date, course, distance, latitude, compass variations and meteorological data. Upon arrival in Asia, each ship would have four unlined journal books at their disposal, to be used for recordkeeping during subsequent voyages between Asian destinations.⁷⁷

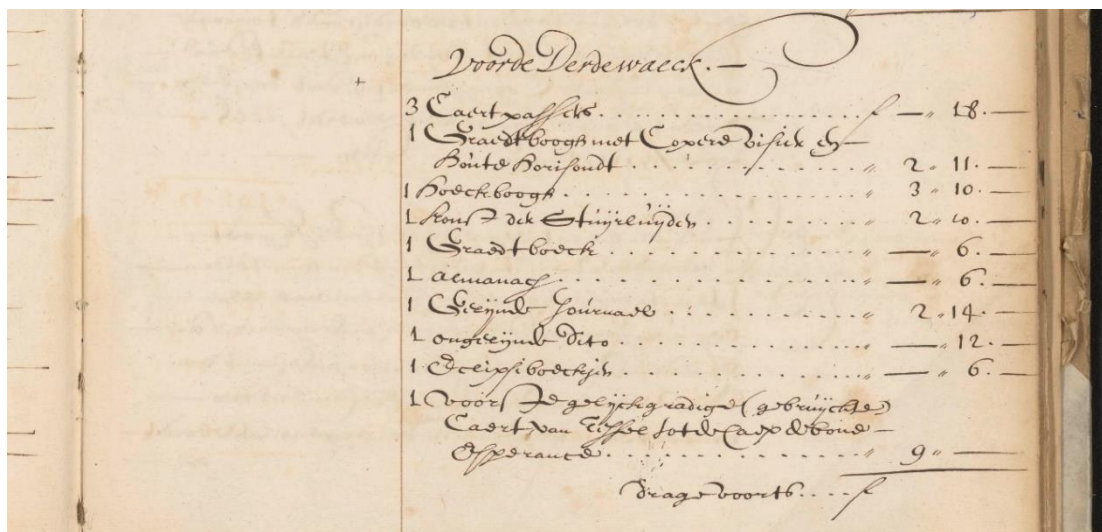


Figure 2 Detail of an inventory of necessary items for the *derdenwaeck* (second lieutenant) to bring on his journey. The list includes one lined, and one unlined journal. National Archief 1.04.02, inv. no. 103, f. 608.

⁷³ Adrien Delmas and Nigel Penn (eds.), *Written culture in a colonial context: Africa and the Americas 1500-1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 113.

⁷⁴ Balk et al., *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company*, 19.

⁷⁵ Eric Ketelaar, *Archiving People: A Social History of the Dutch Archives* (The Hague: Stichting Archiefpublicaties, 2020), 235b.

⁷⁶ C.A. Davids, "Zeeuwen en wetenschap: de ontwikkeling van de navigatietechniek in Nederland tussen 1585 en 1815" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 1986), 150.

⁷⁷ National Archief 1.04.02, inv. no. 103, f. 605-608.

Having compared a few (119!) journals, Davids notices an increasing variety of information and notation from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. As we will see, this can be explained by the fact that the VOC did install directives pertaining both content and form of knowledge throughout the seventeenth century. This content, as Adrien Delmas has shown, often went beyond navigational purposes. VOC officials were ordered to continue these daily registers on land, thus serving an important role in colonial administrations as well.⁷⁸ In addition, Delmas points out that local populations, and interpreters in particular, were essential contributors to collection of data on land.

The VOC took several steps to ensure security, efficiency and practicability of this content. In 2022, a first effort was made by Guido van Meersbergen and Frank Birkenholz to examine the steps taken by the Gentlemen XVII to ensure the safe and constant flow of information from Batavia to the Dutch Republic.⁷⁹ One important observation made by them is that generally, in the first half of the seventeenth century, the VOC laid the principal groundwork for its systems of information management, while in the next 150 years improvements were mostly made in the retrievability and standardization, for example through the growing use of marginal notes and indices. Concerning the origin and originality of this bureaucracy, the authors regularly point that many of the resulting document types have (near-) equivalents in other institutions, most notably in the aforementioned Jesuit *relations*, as well as popular travel writing.

Van Meersbergen and Birkenholz direct us to another perspective often overlooked: materiality. The VOC's information system was inherently paper-based, and as such not without its problems. A comprehensive survey of knowledge directives therefore does not only require an awareness of their existence and conceptual extent, but also includes an eye for how the material movement of these regulations: some documents traversed oceans, while others would remain stored in the safety of the VOC's offices; in some instances they were followed to the letter, in others not so much. In this shift of focus, one may easily recognize the aforementioned movement from *making* to *motion* as purported by James Secord.

1.3 Content: expounding the archives

Point of departure: before the founding of the VOC

April 2nd, 1595. A fleet of three ships and one yacht departs from Texel's harbor, carrying 249 men to an adventure that for 152 of them would turn out to be their last: the first Dutch expedition to the East Indies. In many ways, this expedition would turn out to be a failure. Illness, starvation, attacks and internal fights had plagued the crew throughout the two-year

⁷⁸ Adrien Delmas, "From Travelling to History: an Outline of the VOC Writing System During the 17th Century," in *Written culture in a colonial context: Africa and the Americas 1500-1900*, ed. Adrien Delmas and Nigel Penn (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 97-126.

⁷⁹ Guido van Meersbergen and Franz Birkenholz, "Writing that travels: The Dutch East India Company's paper-based information management," in *Trading companies and travel knowledge in the early modern world*, ed. Aske Laursen Brock, Guido van Meersbergen and Edmond Smith (London: Routledge, 2022), 43-70. In researching the matter of confidentiality in the VOC's information production, I am very much indebted to Djoeke van Netten's "Sailing and secrecy: Information control and power in Dutch overseas companies in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries," in *Information and Power in History : Towards a Global Approach*, eds. Ida Nijenhuis et al. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 157-171.

journey, and in the end the proceedings barely managed to cover the costs. Yet despite all these adversities the expedition would go down in history as a success. Not only did it prove everyone (not in the least their investors) that going to the East Indies via Cape Good Hope was a possibility, but also that the Dutch were able to take on the Portuguese, who until then had been the dominant European presence in that part of the world.

Intelligence was key to the success of these so-called “pre-companies” (*voorcompagnieën*). It is no coincidence that around the time of its first expeditions, an impressive amount of information was put into Dutch publication in a relatively short period of time. This is most apparent in the work of printer Cornelis Claesz, who in the years prior to the establishment of the VOC produced a great number of works on navigation, trade and travel pertaining Asia.⁸⁰ Each of these served the cause of long-distance trading in its own way, addressing different kinds of audiences. For example, Waghenaer wrote the *Thresoor der zeevaart* for very practical use, regarding it a treasure chest filled with navigational information for those wishing to go abroad themselves:

Want ghelijck men in een Thresoor oft Cabinet opsluyt ende bewaert eenighe sonderlinghe ende costelijcke dinghen, om te moghen ghebruijcken als men die van doene heft: Alsoo worden in dit boeck opghesloten ende bewaert sonderlinghe saecken de zeevaart aengaende, die men sal moghen daer in vinden ende uythalen als men de selfde sal mogen van doene *ende* van noode hebben.⁸¹

The allegory of nautical facts being like a treasures and a book being a treasure chest is a striking illustration of the value ascribed to knowledge in these early stages of Dutch long-distance seafaring. What is even more noteworthy, is the fact that the treasure chest was accessible to all: with its publication, Claesz and Waghenaer had opened the chest and thrown away the key.

By contrast, the epigraph to the Apianus’ *Cosmographie* offers an excellent illustration of how publishers thought to appeal to less adventurous customers. The Dutch translation is presented in the epitaph as an inexpensive and comfortable way to learn about distant regions of the world:

Wildy de werelt met luste deurvaren,
En sonder perijckel de landen beschouwen?
Overleest dit boeck, het sal u verklaren.
Wildy de werelt met luste deurvaren,
Thuys blijvende, en u gheldecken sparen?
Soo coopt eenen, ten sal u niet rouwen.
Wildy de werelt met lusten deurvaren,
En sonder perijckel de landen beschouwen?
Want die minst cost doet, sal meest beschouwen.⁸²

⁸⁰ Waghenaer’s *Thresoor der zeevaart* (1592); González de Mendoza’s *De historie ofte beschrijvinge van het groote rijk van China* (1585/1595); Van Linschoten’s *Reys-gheschrift van de navigation der Portugaloyseres in Orienten* (1595) and *Itinerario* (1596), and Petrus Apianus’ *Cosmographie* (1524/1598).

⁸¹ Lucas Janszoon Waghenaer, *Thresoor der zeevaart* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz, 1592), vii.

⁸² Petrus Apianus’ *Cosmographie, ofte beschrijvinge der ghebeelder wereld* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz, 1598), I.



Figure 3 The treasure chest embodying the valuable navigational knowledge provided in Waghenauer's *Thresoor der Zeevaart*. Special Collections Utrecht University.

Like Apianus, Mendoza and Huygen van Linschoten also endeavored to introduce their readers to distant places, both clearly intending to put forward a positive image of China in particular. While we will save a more thorough discussion of the *Itinerario* for Chapter II, Mendoza's *Historie* is worth a brief consideration here. Based on Spanish and Portuguese accounts, Mendoza's intention in the original book (1585) was to evoke respect for the Chinese and other non-Europeans, in order to promote and stimulate missionary efforts.⁸³ Yet when the Dutch edition came around, its translator voices a very different motivation: in the preface, he observes that publishers have a lot of catching up to do when it comes to making knowledge of China available in Dutch, not for evangelical but for patriotic reasons, expressing the hope that one day the Dutch will be able to provide first-hand accounts of China themselves.⁸⁴

Mendoza's translator did not have to wait very long: the return of the first expedition to Asia in 1597 marked the beginning of an era of Dutch long-distance operations. Along came new reports on the East, which by all accounts raised as many (if not more) questions than they answered. How was knowledge regulated during these operations? What kind of intelligence

⁸³ Djoeko van Netten, "The Richest Country in the World: Dutch Knowledge of China and Cathay and How to Get There in the 1590s," in *Foreign devils and philosophers: cultural encounters between the Chinese, the Dutch, and other Europeans, 1590-1800*, ed. Thijs Weststeijn (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 32.

⁸⁴ Juan González de Mendoza, *De historie ofte beschrijvinge van het groote rijck van China* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz, 1595), 4.

was wanted, how were observations to be recorded, and perhaps most importantly, who had authority over the discoveries made? When it comes to the first expedition of 1595, no records have survived indicating the existence of any such instructions by the pre-companies prior to departure. Yet the incompleteness of the surviving pre-company archives and importance of such instructions make it plausible that that some form of control was considered. And even if it was not, the instructions that *were* given out to the crew members of the first voyage do allow for new articles to be implemented during the expedition.⁸⁵

Still, what we can say for sure is that the first proof of Company interference with the knowledge obtained during the journey can be found right upon the return of the surviving crew members. Rouffaer and IJzerman point us to the right direction in their 1929 work on the journals that were produced during the expedition.⁸⁶ In a letter written to a merchant, a commissioner complained that he had come to the harbor of Texel only two days after the return of their ships, in hopes of talking to the crew about their experiences abroad, but that by that time the crew had already been instructed not to say a word. He had

[...] alle particulariteit gevraecht, doch niet volcommelijck connen verstaen, overmidts *op eede* haer verboden.⁸⁷

The speed with which the Company had managed to relay their new policy upon arrival indicates it must have been of high priority. And they were successful: it would take nearly three centuries before their written memories would see the light of day. According to Rouffaer and IJzerman, the journals produced during the first expedition were stored away in VOC archives with such diligence, that one may confidently assume the VOC put them under a strict embargo immediately upon arrival.

If information had indeed not been regulated prior to the departure of the first expeditionary fleet to Asia, this lacuna would soon be filled. Already by the time the second expedition was to take place, on April 24th 1598, a deed of promise of confidentiality (*akte van belofte van geheimhouding*) was to be signed by merchants, skippers, and helmsmen, agreeing to a number of demands:

[...] dat alle journalen, caerten, schriften, affteykeningen van landen, steden, stromen, reden, capen ofte hoecken, hemelsteycken, cursen ende alle dependentiën van deze zeevaart op dese voyage gemact, geannoteert, geschreven ofte vercregen, getrouwelijck sullen overleveren in handen van den Admirael ofte bewinthebberen, hetzij dat zij daartoe versocht werden of niet, zonder daarvan eenige copie of kladden te mogen achterhouden of anderen mede te deelen. Dat wij oock alles so ons desen voyagie belangend alreede ontdeckt is, ofte tgene door een

⁸⁵ This provision may well have allowed for officers to command their subjects to confidentiality. See Nationaal Archief 1.04.01, inv. no. 3, article XXVIII. “”

⁸⁶ G.P Rouffaer, and J.W IJzerman, *De eerste schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Cornelis de Houtman, 1595-1597: journalen, documenten en andere bescheiden* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1929).

⁸⁷ Rouffaer and IJzerman, p. xxii. The letters they point to have since been relocated to: Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken, 0096, inv. no. 495, 7.

ervarenthey tot onser kennisse soude mogen comen secreet sullen houden, sonder daeraff niemandt tot nadelen van dese compagnie enige kennisse te geven.⁸⁸

From this deed, which is our first archival evidence of the existence of VOC information regulations, a few observations can be made. Firstly, it tells us about the scope of the sciences that the directors took an interest in during these early days of the Company's existence: nautical, astronomical and geographical information is marked confidential.⁸⁹ Secondly, apart from summarizing the different kinds of material that fall under this deed (journals, maps, notebooks and descriptions), note how no attention is given to *how* one is supposed to produce these materials – all that matters is confidentiality. Interestingly, although these instructions are explicitly concerned with journals, maps, diaries and drawings, the authors are also sure to include the 'experience' of its employees. Thus, this deed not only attempts to control the material carriers of knowledge produced during voyages, but also the gained immaterial experience.

Instructions to transmit

After its formal establishment in 1602, the VOC tried to emulate the commercial success of its predecessors, hoping to expand its operations while maintaining a regular cash flow.⁹⁰ Swift and secure dispatch of intelligence regarding political, military and commercial developments came to be of increasing importance to the success of its quickly expanding operations. It appears from very early that VOC directors understood the necessity of having a paper trail: valuable documents needed to be kept at multiple locations for safety reasons (an exemplar might get lost), and for cross-examination. This realization would soon become customary in all administrative layers of the VOC. Representing Company structures of the highest level, the first VOC charter (published in 1602), not only formally establishes the Company's monopoly in Dutch trade in Asia, but also includes the requirement of reporting:

Ende soo wanneer eenige Schepen vande reyse sullen wederkeeren sullen die Generaels ofte Commanderende over de vloote Schip ofte Schepen gehouden wesen aen ons te commen doen rapport van het succes van hunne reyse ende daervan scriftelyck Relaes soo sulcx vereyscht wordt over te leveren.⁹¹

The requirements set out by the charter were reiterated more directly to those working under the VOC. Take the merchants and assistants who were stationed in Bantam: in 1603, they received an instruction from Amsterdam, directing the head merchant to send a copy of all accounts and journals with each ship returning to the Dutch Republic.⁹² Furthermore, they

⁸⁸ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.01, inv. no. 34.

⁸⁹ These terms are a presentist understanding of the kinds of information referred to in the deed, which many seventeenth-century scholars would probably have regarded to be appurtenant or belonging to cosmography. For a contemporary contemplation on the different sciences, see Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* (London: Cassell & Company, 1839/1605).

⁹⁰ Oscar Gelderblom, Abe de Jong and Joost Jonker, "The Formative Years of the Modern Corporation: The Dutch East India Company VOC, 1602–1623," *The Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 4 (2013), 1050–76.

⁹¹ Nationaal Archief 1.04.02, inv. no. 1, f. 10.

⁹² J.K.J. de Jonge, *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch Gezag in Oost-Indië (1595-1610)*, Vol. III (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1865), 206-207.

were asked to correspond closely with nearby colleagues, and regularly advise the directors on new trading opportunities and possible hazards posed by Portuguese rivals. A more detailed instruction was released in 1607: the directors were to receive reports from employees returning from Asia, distill them into memoirs, which would then be sent to merchants and assistants for examination and, if necessary, rectification.⁹³ While a need for the verification of the information circulating among officials is acknowledged, no instructions are given as to *how* to establish an account's veracity, and what *veracity* should entail. Regardless, the explicit recognition of the value of account verification to the Company's operations at such an early stage of its existence is remarkable. In addition, it confirms the importance of horizontal knowledge circulation: information was not only to be shared with the VOC administration in the Dutch Republic, but also to be shared, read and used among officials during their employment overseas.

In 1617 the VOC further tightened information regulation, which Van Dam has attributed to the Company's continuing expansion.⁹⁴ The head merchants and merchants were to keep a journal while at their residencies logging everything that may be of interest, which was to be surrendered to the Company directors upon return to the Netherlands. These instructions are accompanied by 62 articles, in which the requirements regarding information production are quantified.⁹⁵ Article 38 is particularly noteworthy; it rules that all journals should have a copy at Bantam. This might seem like a small detail, but the explicit mentioning of the requirement to provide facsimiles hints at an apparently pressing need for paper trails in the transmission of information. For one, seafaring was risky, and having identical accounts at different locations may likely have been a matter of security. Copying all travel writing may also have been a way to trace information back to its source, allowing VOC officials to check and keep in check all of the knowledge produced and circulating under their authority. This authority over knowledge is further emphasized by article 46 of the same instruction, which now specifies that *comisen* and skippers are to provide their written reports *before* they will receive their pay – effectively holding their money hostage, with their journals as ransom. Furthermore, articles 52-53 explicitly prohibit any servant of the Company from writing letters to anyone other than the directors regarding the status of “matters” in Asia, and set out that the letters directed to the Board are to be opened only after their approval. Even the notes taken by the clergy and hospital chaplains (*sieckentroosters*) employed were to be inventoried, sealed and sent to the Company (article 55). Clearly, from this point onwards, the VOC is determined to exercise as much authority over the journals and letters produced among its employees as possible.

Instructions all the way down: article letters

So far, one important question has remained unaddressed in this survey: how were these instructions communicated to *all* of the Company's employees? For example, the abovementioned 1598 deed was signed by the merchants, skippers, helmsmen and assistants: a

⁹³ F.W. Stapel, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, Vol. I.I (The: Martinus Nijhoff, 1927), 589.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 574-589.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 590-601.

little over 20 men in total, and only a fraction of the hundreds making up the crew. What about the rest of them?

Most employees enlisted for trading missions were illiterate. To understand how instructions were disseminated to them, the so-called *artikelbrief* (article letter) may provide answers. These documents were drafted up by the Company and directed to the entire crew; a copy of the letter would be stored in the ship's chest of each departing ship, and were to be read aloud to the crew or put up on the mast, making sure everyone was aware of their duties and rights. The exact content of these letters underwent changes throughout the seventeenth century, and a number of them are archived in the Dutch National Archive.⁹⁶

Article letters are frequently referred to in literature, yet not always without inaccuracy, which mostly seems to be due to the labyrinthine nature of the VOC archives.⁹⁷ The early development of these letters is therefore rather murky. For now it suffices to say that from very early on, the VOC appears to have taken measures to ensure the dissemination of instructions throughout the entirety of its workforce, rather than just the upper ranks. The importance of these instructions seem to be recognized by the Gentlemen XVII when, in 1649, they decide article letters as well as other documents belonging to the standard contents of ship's boxes are to be printed.⁹⁸

Interestingly, article letters seem to extend knowledge regulation with ancillary punishments. One early article letter states:

Eerstelijck sullen de Cappiteijnen, ende officieren gehouden wesen, goede eenicheijt, ende correspondentie, met malcanders te houden, ende d'een, en anderen, in alle voorvallende saecken, met goede raet, ende daet te assisteren, sonder eenige questie, oft geschil te moveren, op pene om naer gelegentheijt van der saecken bijden bredden, ende chrijsraden, gestraft te werden.⁹⁹

Notably, this article only addresses captains and officers, and although punishment is mentioned, the exact penalty is not specified. Both elements seem to warrant alterations, as can be seen in a subsequent article letter from 1634.¹⁰⁰ Its 110th article states that any employee (*een yder*) who does not hand over any kind of notes or sketches made during their voyage will be penalized with three months' wages. In addition, the articles that follow heavily restrict the letter writing. Particularly article 111 is indicative of the level of security maintained when it came to knowledge that might benefit the Company:

⁹⁶ See appendix

⁹⁷ For example, Delmas seems to be under the impression that only one article letter has come into existence: see Delmas, "From Travelling to History," 107. Also, Van der Chijs wrongfully identifies the 1634 article letter to be the first, as pointed out in Hendrik Hoogenbeek, "De rechtsvoorschriften voor de vaart op Oost-Indië, 1595-1620" (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 1940), 188. Adding to the confusion, article letters were not only in use by the VOC, but also by the Dutch navy. See Marcus van Alphen, "Het oorlogsschip als varend bedrijf. Schrijvers, administratie en logistiek aan boord van Nederlandse marineschepen in de 17de en 18de eeuw" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2014), 47-74.

⁹⁸ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 102, f. 145r.

⁹⁹ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 534.

¹⁰⁰ Van der Chijs *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek* vol. 1, 339-340.

Niemant van hoedanich ampt ende qualiteyt dat hy sy, in politycque, kerckelycke ofte eenige andere bedieninge, van den minsten tot den meesten, in de dienst van de Comp. in India vaerende, en sal vermogen aen eenige syner vrienden, bekenden ofte ymant aners, selfs aen de bewinthebberer, in 't particulier eenige brieven te schryven ofte eenich advys te geven van de gelegentheyt van den handel, oorloge, comportement van eenige dienaers van de Comp. in Indiën ofte yets de Comp. concerneerende, maer alleenlyck aen de bewinthebberer in 't generael ofte aen de respective camerer, daer hy uytgevaeren is, op de verbeurte van drie maenden gage, die bevonden sal werden contrarie gedaen te hebben.¹⁰¹

This same provision can be found in an article letter which has not been dated, yet appears to postdate the 1634 one.¹⁰² In any case, it appears to expand on the above provisions and punishments, by distinguishing between different ranks in penalizing a failure to hand over journals (article XXI), prohibiting the forwarding of specimens (XXIII), detailing how letters are to be sent to the headquarters (XCIII), and by further specifying how the contents of the article letter are to be transmitted to crew members. The latter concern is shared by an article letter from 1643: the text was to be read out loud regularly to all mariners, soldiers and subjects, at least once a month or once every six weeks, “opdat een yder daervan goede kennisse mach hebben ende naar den inhoud van dien punctuelyck reguleeren”.¹⁰³ This in particular is valuable information to us: it tells us something about the kind of oral transmission of instructions, and by extension the oral performance of control and its social dimension, that can be so very hard to reach for historians. Embedded in these policies was the realization that, in order for authority to be successfully exerted, crew members needed to be reminded of these prohibitions continuously. Moreover, where other kinds of regulative documentation emphasized knowledge in material form such as letters, journals, and drawings (which were not only regarded stable carriers of knowledge, but also more easily controllable), the above article also explicitly concerns advice of any kind, which would therefore also include verbal knowledge transmission. This may serve as an indication that the VOC was aware that any employee could leak information, irrespective of their social standing or literacy.

Instructions regarding publication

In 1619, a new charter is issued, likely as an addition to the original one from 1602. The original is lost, but we know of its existence because it is included in a 1748 inventory.¹⁰⁴ Van Dam's work offers a more elaborate account of the charter:

[...] vermag deselve alleen in dese landen te maken, doen maken, drukken en uytgeven de journalen, lees- en paskaarten, of andere beschrijvingen, memoriën en afbeeldingen der Oostindische navigatiën, of van d' eylanden, daer om en by gelegen, met verbod aan alle ingesetenen, de voorsch. journalen, lees- en paskaarten of andere beschrijvingen, memoriën en afbeeldingen der voorsch. navigatiën, of van de eylanden daar by om of gelegen, in 't geheel of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 339.

¹⁰² Nationaal Archief, 1.10.69, inv. no. 21, 27.

¹⁰³ Jacobus Anne van der Chijs *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek* vol. 2, 1642-1677 (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1885-1900), 57-58.

¹⁰⁴ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 22.

ten deele, in 't groot of in 't kleyn, na te maken of na te drukken, in eeniger hande sprake en te verkopen, sonder consent van bewinthebberen [...].¹⁰⁵

This specific concern for the publication of knowledge had been previously absent in the VOC's regulations. As we will see in the next chapter, this heightened preoccupation with publication restrictions can well be seen as a response to the increase in publications in the earliest decades of the VOC's existence. Over the next few decades, the number of publications (and their popularity) grew, and the Company continued to prioritize confidentiality. Still, this should not be read as a full prohibition to print or publish material: with permission, publishers could continue to bring out new books containing knowledge accumulated under the authority of the VOC.

Over time, the VOC's attitude towards the confidentiality of information changed. Around the 1650s, a gradual shift seems to have occurred, indicating that the Board realized that knowledge should not only be acquired, but also be made available (to a certain extent) in order for the Company to benefit from it. This is why, in 1655, officials in Batavia proposed the composition of an atlas of the Indonesian waters.¹⁰⁶ Although the atlas would never be published, by 1670 most of its maps and descriptions had been finished, which indicates that the publisher Joan Blaeu must have been given access to the VOC archives in the meantime. Still, Blaeu was not given a free pass at all information. In fact, the States General had prohibited him from publishing anything about the discoveries made during the Le Maire voyage in 1617.¹⁰⁷

Instructions directing attention

In 1643, a detailed instruction was printed.¹⁰⁸ Barend-van Haften interprets the additions as indicative of a discontent regarding the quality and scope of the available information.¹⁰⁹ This observation appears to be based on the erroneous assumption that this is the first edition of this particular memory. Although 1643 does appear to be the first time it appeared in print, the actual instructions were drafted up in 1614, and have reappeared in several different memories since then without substantial alterations.¹¹⁰ It is the first time we see the VOC actively exercising control over the composition and systematization of journal content. From now on, in writing their reports, officers were to include the following six “main points” (*hooftpoincten*):

1. Eerst op de gelegentheijt ende situatie vande plaetse daerse geweest sijn ofte ten dienste gelegen hebben vande *compagnie*.
2. Ten anderen op de politie ofte regeringe der selver
3. Ten derden op den handel traffycq, ende principaele neeringe aldaer
4. Ten vierden op de vruchten vande landen
5. Ten vijffden op de vijantsmacht ende gelegentheijt ende correspondentie indeselve plaets

¹⁰⁵ Stapel, Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge, 82-83.

¹⁰⁶ Barend-van Haften, *Oost-Indië gespiegeld*, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Adrien Delmas, “From Travelling to History,” 115. For more information on Blaeu, see Djoeke van Netten, *Koopman in kennis: De uitgever Willem Jansz. Blaeu in de geleerde wereld (1571-1638)*, (Zutphen: Walburg, 2014)

¹⁰⁸ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 11050

¹⁰⁹ Barend-van Haften, *Oost-Indië gespiegeld*, 64.

¹¹⁰ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 312 1614, f. 53-55. An overview of reappearances has been included in the appendix, as well as a full transcription of the original 1614 version

6. Ten sesden op de macht ende gelegentheijt vande compagnie ter selver plaetse¹¹¹

Each of these components were followed by a detailed explanation, stating exactly what should be made noted. For the purposes of this thesis, the topic of “products” (*vruchten*) are worth closer examination. From the specifications, we learn that the required information entails flora (specifically mentioned are trees, seeds, wheat, rice), fauna, kinds of wood and other building materials, as well as the state of technological sciences and crafts.

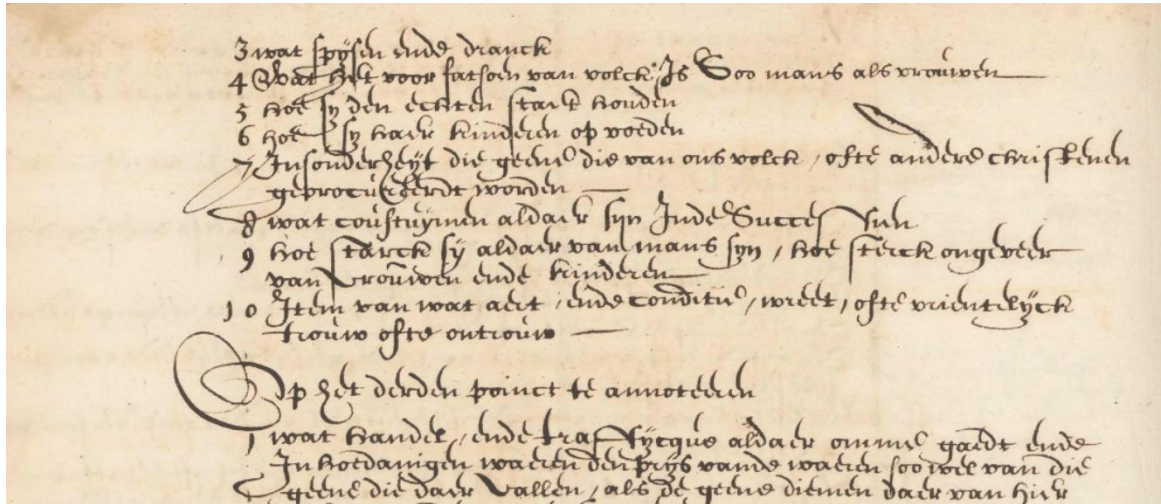


Figure 4 Detail of the 1614 instruction, elaborating on which matters one should make note of during employment overseas. Note that the top line says “wat spijsch ende dranch”. Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 312, f. 54.

In addition to produce, the memory also inquires into the kind of soil encountered in these foreign lands, likely for agricultural purposes. Interestingly, the topic of correspondence, which played such a crucial part in the VOC’s administration, is not further elaborated upon in this memory. To me, a likely explanation for this can be found in the fact that, as we’ve seen, VOC employees were already subjected to a variety of official directives that included the regulation of correspondence. As for the memories, their main implication for the production of knowledge is that they seem to have directed the gaze of employees, thus extending the Company’s authority beyond matters of form and confidentiality, into the realm of content. Pointing to the breadth of interests, Van Meersbergen and Birkenholz argue that the memory added degrees of uniformity, combinability and comparability to the otherwise chaotic corpus of observations. Moreover, looking at the memory from a wider context, they even understand the document to rank “among the key epistemological tools developed by any of the early modern trading companies.”¹¹² As they have shown, there have been several expeditions were undertaken based on promising reports, for example of gold and silver supposedly located in the east of Japan.

Conclusion

Through its growing trading networks, the VOC received more and more knowledge on different parts of the world. The Company, in part inspired by other knowledge producers, understood the value and power of this information. In a time when access to the East was

¹¹¹ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 312 1614, f. 53

¹¹² Van Meersbergen and Birkenholz, *Writing that travels*, 50-51.

limited, costly and dangerous, but also carried huge commercial potential, any observations were of value to the development of the company's enterprise. As such, during the seventeenth century, it developed a strong corpus of directives to enhance the control over gathered knowledge.

This digest shows that many of these knowledge directives seem to concern either content, transmission, or security of gathered knowledge. Furthermore, while attention for knowledge regulation is continually present in VOC documents from the start, a steady expansion of the instructions can be seen to have taken place through the addition of important elements.

In the next two chapters, we will take a closer look at to what extent these directives appear to have impacted the natural knowledge accumulated under the VOC's jurisdiction in practice. By tracking the directionality of these regulations, not only will we see how these networks functioned outside of the paper reality of the VOC's extensive administration, but also the way these regulations were sometimes expanded in scope or depth according to changing priorities. As a result, while knowledge directives were dictated top-down, the resulting knowledge itself would often move not only down-top, but also horizontally – or even not at all.

Chapter II Tea flows: Overseas knowledge networks in action

We send the presents ahead and then go to the castle. I offer the presents to the Shogun and after that we are summoned a second time before the Shogun (who conceals himself behind blinds), councilors and priests; we are asked to take off our coats, to walk around, to sing and dance and to speak Japanese; which we were not able to, with the exception of Wagemans who could say "chia jaracenti" (bring tea).

- Hendrik Dijkman, VOC chief at Deshima, diary entry April 6th, 1701¹¹³

Introduction

Over the course of its existence, the Company traded more than one hundred different kinds of goods from Asia.¹¹⁴ In this chapter, I will turn to one of these products – tea – in order to investigate how natural knowledge flowed along both the physical trade networks as well as the administrative infrastructure laid out by the VOC. Were the Gentlemen XVII able to maintain authority over the content, transmission and security of information? In this chapter, I will discuss the this knowledge network through three central themes: interconnection, confusion and collaboration.

2.1 Interconnection

Proprietary value and early tea knowledge circulation

The VOC greatly (and often illicitly) benefitted from knowledge acquired by other organizations, which played a vital role in its establishment in 1602. This is best embodied by Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerario, Voyage ofte schipvaert van Jan Huygen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien*, (1596). This book is illustrative of the vivid knowledge circulation occurring at the close of the sixteenth century. Importantly, it is the first place where tea is mentioned in Dutch, and its publication in English translation (1598) contains the first use of the English word *tea*. Never having seen the plant firsthand, and having traveled to neither China nor Japan, the descriptive information on these regions were based on different sources – which he managed to access in surprising number and variety.

As a young man, Van Linschoten came under service of the Portuguese, spending most of his time at Goa, where he managed to amass political and scientific information on all parts of Asia. This knowledge was largely provided to him by Portuguese sources. General geographical information was accessible to him from the manuscript atlases of Fernão Vaz Dourado, a prominent Portuguese cartographer, while the *roteiros* (documents circulating among

¹¹³ Blussé et al., *The Deshima Diaries*, 4.

¹¹⁴ Els M. Jacobs, "Aziatische Produkten," in *Varen om peper en thee: Korte geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1991), 83-90.

Portuguese sailors) provided him with more sensitive data.¹¹⁵ More contentious sources included the charts kept by the Portuguese in their secret archives in Goa, which Van Linschoten meticulously and illicitly copied, as well as a fair number of journals, which he managed to get his hands on by making clever use of political unrest between European nations.¹¹⁶

Van Linschoten was able to extend his horizon beyond India to other parts of Asia as well through personal connections. His personal fidelity seems to have been to the nordic Europeans he encountered, a notable example being his relationship with Dirck Gerritsz Pomp, who is also known as “Dirck China” for being the first Dutchman to have been to this part of Asia. Pomp was in service of the Portuguese too, and when he met Van Linschoten in India, he told him all about what he had seen and experienced in China, providing the basis of the *Itinerario*’s section on the Far East.¹¹⁷ Notably, while Pomp was likely Van Linschoten’s prime tea informant, the description given does not concern Chinese, but Japanese tea.¹¹⁸ The scientific value of these personal relationships are further reflected in the publications on China that became available to the Dutch public. In 1592, Lucas Jansz. Waghenaer’s pilot guide *Thresoor der zeevaart* appeared, which was the first printed text with a clear goal of Chinese trade (as opposed to personal curiosity). In it, Pomp is cited as the main source, while other parts were most likely written by Van Linschoten and delivered to Waghenaer by Van Linschoten’s mother.¹¹⁹

The value of the *Itinerario* to the operation of the pre-companies is not to be underestimated. One of its three books, the *Reys-gheschryft vande navigatien der Portugaloyers in Orienten*, was published ahead of the other ones so Cornelis de Houtman could bring it with him on the First Voyage the Indonesian archipelago in 1595. For the Second Voyage each ship was provided its own copy of the complete version, and the journals kept on this journey show that the *Itinerario* was read in detail and used to interpret what was encountered on the way.¹²⁰ It was also essential in the promotion of long-distance trading operations ahead of the VOC’s establishment in 1602, as descriptions of Asian products – such as tea – gave investors an informed idea of the trading opportunities provided by long-distance corporations.¹²¹

The *Itinerario* was not the only source of information for the pre-companies. Earlier, we have come across corporate espionage as a proven method of knowledge accumulation, and Dutch traders were by no means innocent of this practice. For example, Cornelis and Frederik de Houtman, were sent by one of the pre-companies to Lisbon to gather information on sailing

¹¹⁵ Arun Saldanha, “The Itineraries of Geography: Jan Huygen van Linschoten's "Itinerario" and Dutch Expeditions to the Indian Ocean, 1594–1602”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 10, no. 1 (2011), 158.

¹¹⁶ Charles Mckew Parr, *Jan van Linschoten: The Dutch Marco Polo* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 165.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹¹⁸ Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerario, Voyage ofte schipvaart van Jan Huygen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz. op ‘t Water (1596), 35-36.

¹¹⁹ “Gheschreven uyt den mont van Dirck Gerritz, die daer vierentvintich Iaren verkeert ende ghehandelt heeft, over gheheel Indien.” Lucas Jansz. Waghenaer, *Thresoor der zeevaart*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz, 1596), f. 197. Also see Van Netten, “The Richest Country in the World,” 36.

¹²⁰ Saldanha, “The Itineraries of Geography,” 150; 172.

¹²¹ Trude Dijkstra, *Printing and Publishing Chinese Religion and Philosophy in the Dutch Republic, 1595-1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 32.

to the East. As a consequence, they have become known as spies, although some of their contemporaries emphasized the ‘diligence, gifts and meals’ required to make operations such as these successful, considering it fair exchange rather than theft.¹²² And in 1613, the VOC got a taste of its own medicine when one employee by the name of Leuen Martson, who was based on the Moluccan island of Bacan and thoroughly dissatisfied with the working conditions, decided to take matters into his own hands and knock at the door of the English.¹²³ In his journal, captain John Saris reports:

He made known unto me the hole state of there business heare in the Mollocos and at Japan, with promise to deliver me the Coppye verbatim out of the Companyes Journall kept by him [...] I intreated him kindlye, and labored with him for what benyfityall intellygence I can get, for advance of our Trade in these parts [...]¹²⁴

The success of the *Itinerario*, as well as the brain drain suffered from desertions, explains why the VOC was so quick to install knowledge regulations: instances such as these had shown directors the valuable yet perishable nature of information.

Jesuit liaisons

One of the earliest European records of tea can be found in *Historiarum Indicarum* (1558) by the Jesuit Giovanni Pietro Maffei, which provides readers with information on Japanese tea culture. Maffei never travelled to the East, but acquired the information for this book from the archives in Rome and Portugal, as well as his own correspondence with missionaries in India and Japan.¹²⁵ Over the next decades, other Jesuit accounts of tea would follow, often providing information on the plant’s cultivation, botanical attributes, and medicinal use.¹²⁶ Perhaps the most influential Jesuit account of tea was provided by Martino Martini, whom we have encountered in the prologue. His description, provided in the section on Hoeicheu of his *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655), is a comprehensive one.¹²⁷

¹²² Van Netten, “The Richest Country in the World,” 39.

¹²³ Van Meersbergen and Birkenholz, “Writing that travels”, 43.

¹²⁴ Ernest Mason Satow, *The Voyage of Captain John Saris to Japan, 1613* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1900), 24-25.

¹²⁵ Christopher Francese, “A Forgotten Masterpiece of Latin Prose: Maffei’s *Historiae Indicae*,” *The Classical Outlook* 94, no. 4 (2019), 192.

¹²⁶ Sometimes this information was of a more conjectural nature. For example, in his 1616 book *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu*, Matteo Ricci speculates tea might already be growing in Europe. For the translation of this particular section, see Louis Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci, 1583-1610* (New York: Random House, 1953), 16-17.

¹²⁷ I am not sure which contemporary city this is referring to. My best guess is Heqiaozhen (河桥镇, Lin'an, Hangzhou, Zhejiang), but I could not find this confirmed anywhere



Figure 5 Map of the region of Nanking, including the “Hoeicheu” region, from page 204 of the *Atlas Major*. Special Collections Utrecht University.

Addressing the ‘curious readers, and diligent herborists’, it includes the product’s preparation, drinking practices, price, and medicinal benefits.¹²⁸ The medicinal value of tea is in large part ascribed to the warm temperature of the drink, which supposedly fully eradicated several ailments such as kidney stones (*steen*) and gout (*voet-euvel*) among the Chinese population.¹²⁹ Moreover, an elaborate description of the plant’s botanical properties is given:

Dit is een kleyn blaedje, even als ’t gene, ’t welck de smack oft run der leer-bereyders voortbrengt: ja ick geloof bijna dat het seker slach daer af is; doch dit is niet wildt, maer tam, geen boom, maer een rijs, ’t welck sich in verscheydene tacken, oft eer rijsjes verspreydt, en niet veel van de smack-bloem, oft run-bloem verschilt, behalven dat de bloem van *Cha* een weynigh meer naer ’t geel treckt. In de somer geeft ’het sijn eerste bloem uyt, die weynigh reuck heeft, en daer nae in eene groene besye verandert, de welcke namaels swart wordt.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ “Men vindt nergens beter en vermaerder bladen van Cha, als hier, de welcke ick, ten dienst van de nieuwgierige lesers, en naerstige kruyt-kenners, beschrijven sal.” *Atlas Maior* IX, part 2, (Amsterdam: Joan Blaeu, 1664), 130.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

Martini refers his audience to the works of French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes for a fuller description of tea, which attests to the successful circulation of knowledge within the Society of Jesus' networks. As we will see, Martini's work was used by Dutch scholars and VOC employees as an authoritative source on all things Chinese. This may be attributed to the fact that Martini's *Novus Atlas Sinensis* was published in Amsterdam by Joan Blaeu, a renowned and influential figure in the city council and the VOC itself. Martini's account was translated into Dutch and appeared as volume IX of the *Atlas Maior*. In preparation, Martini and Blaeu had spent one month together in 1654 to edit the manuscript, showing that collaboration between Jesuit missionaries and Dutch traders was not only possible, but also could lead to great success.¹³¹

2.2 Credibility and confusion

Contriving tea: Bontius and Piso observing the unobserved

One early scholar using the VOC's trading network to advance knowledge of the botanical and medical qualities of tea was the physician Jacob Bontius. His lifelong pursuit of natural knowledge of the tropics was marked by the struggle for accurate information, as shown by Harold Cook.¹³² Of specific interest to us are the manuscripts left by Bontius after his death.¹³³ Publisher Willem Piso had access to these manuscripts, and incorporated them into his own book, *De Indiae utriusque re naturali et medica libri quatuordecim* (1658):

I was previously quite reluctant to speak about this plant, since the Chinese keep it so secret unto themselves, and if anyone asks them from where tea is obtained or where it grows, they avoid giving a straight answer, saying sometimes that it is a grass sometimes a bush, so that I was hitherto incapable of inferring anything, until our general Jacob Speckx finally persuaded me to put aside my doubts. He, who had been the most illustrious representative and overseer at our *factorij* in Japan until several years ago, stated that it was unequivocally a bush, for he had quite often observed it growing there himself. I never had the opportunity to observe the fresh green leaves of the plant myself. Yet when the dried leaves are soaked in hot water, I found them to be quite similar to comfrey leaves, but they have a dentate edge around the outer perimeter of the leaf. Moreover, they brew this Chinese herb with boiling water and then sip the hot infusion to benefit their health, and when the infusion verges on being too bitter, the well to do may add a modicum of sugar. Moreover, in China they praise this herb so highly and regard tea as a sacred plant good against all manner of ailments, affording comfort against

¹³¹ Cams, "De *Novus Atlas Sinensis* van Martini en Blaeu en zijn Chinese bronnen", 7.

¹³² Harold J. Cook, "Truths and Untruths from the Indies," 175-225.

¹³³ See Cook, footnote 139: "I came across it in the mid-1980s but only in recent years recognized its significance. My thanks to Harm Beukers for suggesting that I have yet another look at it." As far as I can tell Beukers has never used the manuscript in his own work, and while a few others have (Natalie Lawrence, *Exotic Origins*, 2015; Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, *Colonial Botany*, 2005), none of them provide a transcription of the original text. I have contacted the Bodleian library where the manuscript is kept, but unfortunately was unable to receive digital scans.

diseases. And indeed, verily I admit that it must be said that it is without a doubt most conducive to good health.¹³⁴

Piso's publication of Bontius' manuscript writings showcases the biggest problem faced by Bontius and others with a scientific interest in tea: how to learn anything about a plant that cannot be studied in person? The above section showed that Bontius still made efforts to obtain empirical evidence concerning the plant's botanical properties by working with what he had, viz. the dried tea leaves traded from China and Japan. As this method yielded little results, Bontius was forced to rely on others. He is known to have made extensive use of indigenous informants, as he stipulated that western medicinal knowledge was of little applicability to tropical diseases.¹³⁵ Yet when it came to tea, Indonesians had as little experience as the Europeans working under the VOC, which meant that Bontius needed to turn to Java's Chinese community with his questions. Mutual suspicions between Bontius and the Chinese would often complicate the determination of the reliability of information; Bontius described them as "the most avaricious and crafty wretches on the face of the earth".¹³⁶ To make matters worse, Bontius found Portuguese studies such as those of Garcia da Orta to be untrustworthy too.¹³⁷ It is telling therefore, that it would eventually be another VOC officer (general Speckx) to confirm the botanical constitution of the plant to him, rather than a Chinese informant or a scholarly source produced under another trading company.

Just like the case of tea's first Dutch mentioning, looking at early visual depictions lays bare the frailty of knowledge networks. Piso's *De Indiae utriusque* contains one of the first images of tea in a Dutch source.¹³⁸ Notably, this image was absent in Piso's earlier *Historia naturalis Brasiliae* (1648), of which *De Indiae utriusque* was the second and enhanced edition. According to Cook, the drawing was provided to Piso by commander François Caron, Speckx' successor in Deshima.¹³⁹ Yet while Caron produced several works on Japan himself, none of them contained the image obtained by Piso.¹⁴⁰ This, again, confirms the dependency of scholars on the other nodes of the VOC networks. Without Speckx, Bontius would not have been able to tell if tea

¹³⁴ Translation from George van Driem, *The Tale of Tea* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 322-323. For the published original, see Willem Piso, *De Indiae utriusque re naturali et medica*, (1658). Bontius' account is incorporated as *Historiae naturalis et medicae Indiae orientalis, liber sextus*, the above citation occurring 87-88.

¹³⁵ Frans Hüsken, "Bontius in Batavia: Early Steps in Intercultural Communication," in *Cultural Styles of Knowledge Transmission: Essays in Honour of Ad Borsboom*, ed. Jean Kommers et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 56.

¹³⁶ These quotations are from the English translation. The original Latin transcription seems to put it slightly different, albeit of the same tenor. See Jacobus Bontius, *De medicina Indorum* (Leiden: Franciscum Hackium, 1642), book IV, dialogus III, 78-79.

¹³⁷ Cook, "Truth and Untruths from the Indies," 198.

¹³⁸ At least, it is the earliest I have encountered in my research.

¹³⁹ Cook, "Truths and Untruths from the Indies," 221. Note that in 1664, after his relationship with the VOC had gotten in low water, he became Director-General to the newly founded French East Indies Company, angering the VOC board. See P.J. Blok et al., *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biographisch woordenboek*, volume 8 (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1930), 255-259.

¹⁴⁰ See François Caron, *Rechte beschrijvinge van het machtigh koningrijck van Iappan* (The Hague: Iohannes Tongerloo, 1636), and François Caron, *Beschrijvinghe van het machtigh coninckrijcke Japan* (Amsterdam: Joost Hartgers, 1648). The 1636 version is a report for the VOC's new director-general of trade, Philips Lucasz, while the latter appears to be directed to a more general audience.

leaves came from trees, shrubs or plants; without Caron, who assumably sent his tea plant image directly to Piso given its absence in publications, Piso would not have been able to adorn his description of tea with an image. This also means that the networks of correspondence, as described earlier in Chapter I, were actually yielding results. Information was captured in notes and sketches, then put into circulation, finding its way to those with a need for it, who were then able to enrich and disseminate that information, finding new audiences for them, and using it to promote public interest in the VOC's operations in the East and West Indies.¹⁴¹



Figure 6 Piso's/Caron's image of the tea plant in *De Indiae utriusque re naturali et medica* (f. 88). Collection Biodiversity Library

At the same time, Bontius' case stands out as an example of the fact that early modern knowledge circulation ran all but smoothly. Not only was the publication of his *De medicina Indorum* delayed until well after his death, credibility was also a remaining concern. Piso was considered a rather untrustworthy publisher by many contemporaries, often adding material from different authors without transparent acknowledgement, doing so generously in *De Indiae*

¹⁴¹ *De Indiae utriusque* was produced at the urging of prince Maurits van Nassau exactly for promotional purposes

utriusque. Even decades later, Linnaeus got involved, “naming a genus of very spiny plants after Piso (*Pisonia*), remarking when he did so that their spines were as nasty as Piso’s reputation.”¹⁴²

Imagining tea: Nieuhof’s depictions and Valentyn’s taxonomy

Piso’s publication ethics were far from unique in the early modern period. Oftentimes, published images, while claiming to be “after reality”, were embellished, taken from other sources, or even pure invention. This becomes especially apparent in the case of tea, as direct access to the plant was so hard to achieve. Take the case of Joan Nieuhof’s *Het gezantschap* (1665). This book was published with the intention of meeting the market’s demand for descriptions of the far east, and provided readers with images of China that were plausible-looking, yet harmonious in composition. To achieve this, the work’s “realistic images” had in fact often undergone selection, alteration, and arrangement.¹⁴³ Indeed, many of the publication’s images have no basis in the journal Nieuhof had presented to the Gentlemen XVII (the so-called Paris manuscript), including the one of tea.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, it does not provide any descriptive information of the plant, which means that both the descriptive as well as the visual information were added at a later point in the publication process. Still, Nieuhof’s report does point to the fertility of China’s soil regularly, clearly with potential future trade in mind. This can be seen in his description of Nankin’s market, which he describes to be plentiful despite the city’s large population, all thanks to the areas fertile area, in which the city is located like “a pearl in gold”.¹⁴⁵



Figure 7 Sketch from Nieuhof’s journal of the Nanking market, f. 91. Collection Bibliothèque nationale de France.

¹⁴² Cook, “Trut hand Untruths from the Indies,” 218-219.

¹⁴³ Jing Sun, “The Illusion of Verisimilitude : Johan Nieuhof’s Images of China” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2012).

¹⁴⁴ Johan Nieuhof, “Journaal van zommige voorvallen, inde voyagie vande E. Heeren Pieter de Goyer en Jacob Keyser, ambassadeurs, aande grootmachtige keizer van Chyna en Tartaryen, inde jaaren 1655, 56 & 1657”. Compare to his description of tea in Joan Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap*, 122-123.

¹⁴⁵ Nieuhof, “Journaal van zommige voorvallen,” f. 92.

In addition to Nieuhof's account, the Gentlemen XVII were handed an official report drafted by ambassador Jacob Keijser. This report was largely in congruence with Nieuhof's account, adding to his credibility, but was also of a more commercial and political nature, and therefore remained confidential. As such, Nieuhof's publisher was not able to draw from it as he was working on *Het gezantschap*.¹⁴⁶ Still, that does not mean that *Het gezantschap* was of no interest or value to the VOC board members: contemporary book catalogues show that several of the Gentlemen XVII had acquired a copy for personal use.¹⁴⁷

So where did *Het gezantschap* get its description of the tea plant from? Like the *Atlas maior*, *Het gezantschap* borrowed from a variety of Jesuit sources, including Martino Martini's *Novus Atlas Sinensis*. Because of this, its observations generally align with those of the *Atlas maior*: in nearly identical wording, both consider it to be akin to sumac (*smack/smak*), domesticated (*niet wildt, maer tam/niet wilt, maar tam*), and not tree-like but a shrub (*rijs/heester*). However, looking at both sources side by side, *Het gezantschap* presents far more detail on the plant's botanical properties, as well as potential cultivation:

Na dat deze bloemtjes zijn afgevallen, volgt 'er een navel, waar in zwartachtigh zaat zit, dat, in d'aarde gezait, binnen den tijt van drie jaren nieuwe heesters voortbrengt, uit welker bladen jaarks een rijken oogst komt, ook op die plaatzen in *Sina* en *Japon*, daar het hagelt en sneeut, eveneens als in Hollandt. Invoegen daar groote hoope is, dat dit kruut hier te lande ook gelukkig zou kunnen angequeect worden, by aldien dit zaat, in een kasje dicht toegesloten, daar van daan overgebracht, en op schaduwachtige en vruchtbare plaatzen gezait wiert.¹⁴⁸

Whether Nieuhof had seen the plant grow himself remains unclear; the level of detail suggests he did, but as this information is absent in his journal, this cannot be confirmed. Based on the above description, I have the strong suspicion that, at the very least, he was able to consult an informant or written source, as it is claimed that new shrubs grow from seeds in three years, while Nieuhof stayed in China for only two (1655-1657). Aside from his sources, it should be noted that Nieuhof supports his stipulation of Dutch cultivation through another method, namely reasoning.¹⁴⁹

But detail does not equal accuracy. In one instance, the Jesuit Cristoforo Borri mistook the dried tea leaves for the plant's roots.¹⁵⁰ In another, Nicolaes Tulp reported that tea was also cultivated in the kingdom of Siam.¹⁵¹ This error likely arose from a mix-up between the Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya, where the Dutch observed the Siamese to drink tea which in fact was imported from China, and the neighboring Lanna kingdom, where tea was actually cultivated.¹⁵² Tulp's erroneous observation appears to go back at least until Piso's *De Indiae utriusque* and is

¹⁴⁶ Sun, "The Illusion of Verisimilitude," 284.

¹⁴⁷ Dijkstra, *Printing and Publishing Chinese Religion and Philosophy in the Dutch Republic*, 131.

¹⁴⁸ Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 123.

¹⁴⁹ Note that Nieuhof either regards cultivation in the Dutch Republic to be very likely successful, or merely has strong hopes it will be, depending on one's interpretation of "groote hoope"

¹⁵⁰ Van Driem, *The Tale of Tea*, 334.

¹⁵¹ "Crescitque tantum non in China, ac Iaponia, verum etiam in Chiam." Nicolaes Tulp, *Observationes Medicae* vol. 3, book 6 (Amsterdam: Ludovicum Elzevirium, 1652), 400.

¹⁵² Van Driem, *The Tale of Tea*, 326.

repeated by François Valentyn, thus having a lasting impact on Dutch knowledge of tea cultivation.

The most prevalent and persistent error in European tea knowledge was the general consensus among traders and scholars alike that the difference in taste and color between tea products could be assigned to them being different species, incorrectly making a distinction between “green” and “bohea” (*boey*) tea.¹⁵³ This distinction was perpetuated by Carolus Linnaeus, who, based on samples and descriptions sent to him by explorers, repeated this conclusion. It took until the 1840s for westerners to understand the falsity of this dichotomy.¹⁵⁴

Until then, the green/bohea distinction was rarely questioned, and even expanded upon. The most evident case of such expansion can be found in VOC employee François Valentyn’s *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indiën* (1724-1726). Valentyn was stationed on Java and Ambon for extensive periods of time from the late seventeenth century onwards, amassing natural knowledge on the territories under Dutch rule. In spite of his loyalty to the Company and the prestigious character of the project, Valentyn had not been provided access to the VOC’s official archives in the writing of *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indiën*.¹⁵⁵ His impressive 5,000 page exposition of the Company’s empire therefore drew from his own experience, printed material, and oral sources. The book presents the reader with a remarkably thorough description of tea, which seems to be in agreement with Nieuhof’s observations insofar as that he too claims that seedlings need to grow for three years before they can be harvested.¹⁵⁶ Still, in comparison to contemporary sources, Valentyn’s tea account excels in the number of species distinguished: eight to be exact, four being kinds of green, the other four Bohea tea. Notable is Valentyn’s recognition of scientific progress in this increased categorization of tea species: writing from an early eighteenth-century perspective, Valentyn was able to reflect upon the development of European tea knowledge.¹⁵⁷

What did all of this confusion surrounding tea matter? As discussed in the prologue, during the period in which Formosa was under Dutch authority, Company officials had tried to start local production of several commodities – but not tea, even though the land was suitable, as demonstrated by the successful tea plantations set up by the Ming settlers a mere three-and-a-

¹⁵³ One may be tempted to read into this the modern-day distinction between green and black tea, which of course we now know to be of the same species, but this would be incorrect: only in the early 1800s did it become common practice among traders to distinguish between black and green tea. For more details on developments of tea terminology, see George van Driem, *The Tale of Tea*, 135; 113.

¹⁵⁴ Sarah Rose, *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World’s Favorite Drink and Changed History* (New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 2010), 88.

¹⁵⁵ Delmas and Penn, “Written culture in a colonial context,” 117.

¹⁵⁶ “Zommige oordelen, dat de eerste blaadjens de beste Thee geven; dog de ervarentheid leerd, dat, zoo de Japanders, als de Tsjineezen, de twee a drie eerste jaren daar mede wagten [...]”. François Valentyn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indiën* vol. 4, “Beschrijvinge van den handel, en vaart der Nederlanders op Tsjina”, third book, second chapter, (Dordrecht/Amsterdam: Joannes van Braam and Gerard onder de Linden, 1726), 13.

¹⁵⁷ “Een van de beroemste gewasschen van Tsjina is de Thee, diens heilzame drank in Europa nog niet lang is bekend geweest. Daar men in de eerste tyden, Ao. 1670. en 1680. maar van Boey Thee, en Groene Thee wist, zoo heeft men in die later tyden van verscheide andere soorten beginnen te melden [...]” Ibid., 13. For a confirmation that Valentyn regarded these eight versions to be different species (rather than the result of different processing methods), see page 15.

half decades after the VOC's expulsion.¹⁵⁸ As shown by Nieuhof's and Martini's, cultivation of tea by the Dutch was at least regarded to have been within the realm of possibilities. Yet, as access to the plant and knowledge thereof remained restricted, the Company clearly was unable to capitalize on these perceived commercial opportunities. Regardless of the great number of scholarly contributions, the mechanics of verification put into place by the VOC's administrative directives, and the allowing for publication of material, mistakes seem to have been inevitable for as long as access to tea plants (and their seeds) remained limited.

2.3 Collaboration

A lot of talk

Correspondence, collaboration and personal relationships were of great importance to the accumulation of natural knowledge. Here, we will explore the dimension of scientific interdependence by looking at four prominent VOC employees with an interest in tea: Willem ten Rhijne, Engelbert Kaempfer, Andreas Cleyer, and Jacob Breyne.

In 1683, German physician, naturalist and explorer Engelbert Kaempfer joined the VOC as a chief surgeon, first in Bandar Abbas, then in Batavia, and soon thereafter in Japan. His stay in Japan resulted in the publication of an impressively extensive account Japanese natural history, *Amoenitatum Exoticarum*, in 1712. Made up of 912 pages, it was one of the few accounts of Japanese flora available to the West, and undoubtedly the most evocative study of its kind by a Westerner: as his contemporary John Lawrence puts it, "reading him is like travelling over those craggy and rough mountains he went over to compose his treatise."¹⁵⁹ Importantly, the *Amoenitates Exoticae* also provides us with the first systematic study of the *camellia*, in addition to providing the reader with two images of the plant as well.¹⁶⁰ Prefacing his observations on tea, he voices his gratitude towards two people: Willem ten Rhijne, his predecessor in Japan and "honorable friend", and Jacob Breyne, whose description of tea Kaempfer considered to be "detailed and quite accurate".¹⁶¹ What characterizes Kaempfer's own tea description is his focus on the genus *camellia* (or *tsubacki/tzumacky* in Japanese), and its relation to the rest of the Theaceae family.¹⁶²

This description of tea was highly valued by Kaempfer's contemporaries, and was the main source for Linnaeus' description in his *Hortus Cliffortianus* (1737), for Kaempfer's was one of the few descriptions containing first-hand observations of the shrub. Kaempfer even managed

¹⁵⁸ George van Driem, *The Tale of Tea*, p. 105

¹⁵⁹Cited in William T. Stearn, "Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716): Pioneer Investigator of Japanese Plants," *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 16, no. 2 (1999), 110.

¹⁶⁰ Engelbert Kaempfer, *Amoenitatum Exoticarum Politico-Physico-Medicarum, Fasciculi V* (Lemgo: Hendrik Willem Meyer, 1712), 605-631 and 850-853.

¹⁶¹ "Theae historiam daturus, fortasse actum agere videar, cum Clarissimus Dn. D. ten Rhyn (meus in Japonica statione quondam antecessor & amicus honoratissimus) prolixam & satis accuratam publicaverit per Cl. Breyonium in appendice Centuriae exoticarum." Kaempfer, *Amoenitatum Exoticarum*, 605.

¹⁶² Translation from Nicholas K. Menzies, "Representations of the Camellia in China and During Its Early Career in the West," *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 34, no. 4 (2018), 455.

to get his hands on a *camellia* specimen, which was sent to Europe.¹⁶³ Kaempfer's tea description did not go unnoticed by the VOC's competition either, as an EIC officer referred to Kaempfer's *tsubacki* description when announcing the a British shipment of ten tea specimens.¹⁶⁴ In addition, he benefitted from local informants: in the introduction to his *History of Japan*, Kaempfer expresses his gratitude towards a young interpreter, who in exchange for procuring information on Japan was taught Dutch by the physician.¹⁶⁵ It appears much of Kaempfer's success can be attributed to cunning navigation of strict Japanese regulations; offering the Japanese information from a variety of sciences as well as 'a cordial and plentiful supply of European liquors', Kaempfer found them quite willing to talk about Japan's natural history – as long as they were alone with him, for fear of the Japanese government.¹⁶⁶



Figure 8 Engelbert Kaempfer's *camellia sinensis* specimen, dated 1691. Collection Natural History Museum, BM.

¹⁶³ Petra-Andrea Hinz, "The Japanese plant collection of Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) in the Sir Hans Sloane Herbarium at The Natural History Museum, London," *Bulletin of the Natural History Museum* 31, no. 1 (2001), 31 (nrs. 27.2 and 32.3) and 33 (nr. 94.6).

¹⁶⁴ John Bradby Blake to John Blake, November/December 1772. Partial citation from Menzies, "Representations of the Camellia," 452-453. Original archived at: Oak Spring Garden Foundation, John Bradby Blake Collection, Plants and Letters, 37.

¹⁶⁵ Blussé et al., *The Deshima Diaries*, xix. It should be noted that *History of Japan* was published posthumously (1727) at the initiative of Sir Hans Sloane. The work was based on Kaempfer's unpublished manuscripts, which were translated by Sloane's librarian. To be certain of Kaempfer's indigenous sources, comparison between *History of Japan* and the original manuscript would be required; as we have seen with Piso, it is not impossible that acknowledgments such as these may have been the result of a publisher's fancy rather than having actual basis in the original manuscript.

¹⁶⁶ Stearn, "Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716)," 106-107.

When Kaempfer lived in Batavia, he came to know Andreas Cleyer personally.¹⁶⁷ Cleyer served as chief surgeon at Batavia and Deshima before him, but started off his VOC career at its ‘medicinal store’ (*medicinalen winkel*) in Batavia, which was the VOC’s center for all storage and preparation of medicines in Asia, and later combined this position with the management of Batavia’s apothecary.¹⁶⁸ Working at these two facilities allowed Cleyer to accumulate personal contacts and financial wealth, improving his social status and political clout greatly. Using his standing within the Company, was able to arrange for his personal friend Philippe Couplet and his fellow Jesuits to use returning VOC vessels to send letters to Europe, which the Company allowed as a *quid pro quo* for their help with the ongoing diplomatic negotiations in China.¹⁶⁹ From 1682 to 1683, he was installed as chief of the Deshima trading post. He returned to Deshima in 1685, but was forced to leave the island in the following year under plausible Japanese suspicion of illicit trading activities. Even though his stay in Deshima was cut short, being there allowed Cleyer to further his scholarly endeavors. Still, even for a chief, access to the Company’s archives was not a given. About a month after his posting in Deshima came to an end, Cleyer complained in a letter that, while he is committed to furthering the Company’s accounts of foreign places,

das merckwürdigste derselben, als auß Tartarien, China, Japan &c. nicht so leicht is zu erlangen, in ansehung diese curiosität bey den Kafflewten so hefftig nicht in dem schwang ist, als die consideration der comercien, da sie Nacht und Tag darauff speculiren, und ihr einigstes aufmercken nehmen: Selbigs aber auß den Diarijs oder Journalen zu zihen, erfordert nicht allein große müh, sondern auch einen zugang zu denselben, der jedwederm nicht vergönnet wird.¹⁷⁰

Cleyer’s letter was directed to his friend Sebastian Scheffer, a physician based in Frankfurt am Main. Remembering the directives explicitly prohibiting the transmission of proprietary knowledge in personal correspondence, the fact that Cleyer feels comfortable doing exactly what has been proscribed, to someone with no connection to the Company, is noteworthy to say the least. Perhaps he felt comfortable expressing his scholarly discontent because it was common to do so among peers. Among his many VOC contacts was Georg Everhard Rumphius, a maritime officer-turned-administrator for the VOC on the Indonesian archipelago, famed for his contributions to Ambonese botany. The personal correspondence between Cleyer and Rumphius is revealing when it comes to the struggles faced by Company employees with scholarly ambitions:

¹⁶⁷ Eva S. Kraft, “Andreas Cleyer: Tagebuch des Kontors zu Nagasaki auf der Insel Deshima,” *Bonner Zeitschrift für Japanologie* 6 (1985), 28.

¹⁶⁸ Wim Buijze, *Leven en werk van Georg Everhard Rumphius (1627-1702). Een natuurhistoricus in dienst van de VOC* (The Hague: Wim Buijze, 2006), 229-230.

¹⁶⁹ Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey and Derek Massarella, *The Furthest Goal: Engelbert Kaempfer's Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (Kent: Japan Library, 1995), 159.

¹⁷⁰ Andreas Cleyer to Sebastian Scheffer, December 20th 1683. From Wolfgang Michel, “Ein ‘Ostindianisches Sendschreiben’. Andreas Cleyers Brief an Sebastian Scheffer vom 20. Dezember 1683,” *Dokufutsu Bungaku Kenkyū*, no.41 (1991), 71.

It is to be deplored, and makes a general's mind quite discontented, to undertake something for the learned world, because one can have so little help for it here in the country, and greed makes the studies so despised, but one must oppose it as much as it is possible.¹⁷¹

As Susanne Friedrich has shown, Rumphius' career can in fact be characterized by the Company's competing and often contradictory attitude towards knowledge: what kind of information was needed, and to what extent this information should be transmitted (and to whom), remained a subject of debate within the institution.¹⁷² By careful maintenance of his excellent reputation, he was often able to alter the interpretation of his employer's the knowledge directives. But even Rumphius could not prevent the Gentlemen XVII's refusal to have his work on Ambonese natural history published, as they deemed publication "detrimental" (*ondienstigh*).¹⁷³ It would take another 35 years for the Company to lift the embargo, and another six before the work, *Het Amboinsche kruid-boek*, would be available in print.¹⁷⁴ For Rumphius, it would be far too late: he passed away in 1702. His colleague Cleyer would be more lucky. His description and image of the Japanese tea plant did end up in publication, in the German scientific journal *Miscellanea curiosa*.¹⁷⁵

Collaboration crossing borders

Tea was not only a subject of scientific study for scholars in Asia. Even from the comfort of their home countries, scholars were able to contribute to the advancement of natural knowledge – as long as they had the right connections. An example of this is the Pole Jacob Breyne, who went to the Republic in 1653 to pursue a career as a merchant. During his stay he developed himself into a botanist as well, studying the subject at Leiden University, and in this capacity became well-acquainted with the community of botanists as well as the gardens in Leiden and Amsterdam.¹⁷⁶ During his career Breyne made several contributions to botanical subjects, including the study of tea, which appeared in his *Exoticarum aliarumque minus cognitarum plantarum*

¹⁷¹ "Es ist zu beklagen, und macht ein Generos Gemüthe ganz verdrossen, vor die gelahrte Welt etwas zu unterfangen, weilen man hier zu Land so wenig Hülf darzu haben kan, und die Geldsucht die Studia so verachtet macht, doch muß man sich so viel dargegen stellen, als es möglich ist." Rumphius to Cleyer, May 15th 1688. Cited in Michael Bernard Valentini, *Oost-Indianische Send-Schreiben*, (Frankfurt am Main: Johann David Zunners, 1714), letter XII, 58.

¹⁷² Susanne Friedrich, "The Importance of Being a Good Employee: Georg Everhard Rumphius, the Dutch East India Company, and Knowledge in the Late Seventeenth Century," *Early Modern Low Countries* 3, no. 2 (2019), 183-207.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁷⁴ Friedrich remarks that prior to this, several sections were already in proprietary circulation in manuscript form; notably, Nicolaas Witsen was one of such owners. See Friedrich, *Ibid.*, 201 (footnote 113).

¹⁷⁵ Andreas Cleyer, "Observatio LXX, De Plantis Japanensibus Isnoacky, Germ. Eysersholz/& Tzumacky," *Miscellanea Curiosa*, Decuria II, Annus VII (1689), 132-133.

¹⁷⁶ There seems to be confusion here and there about the travels of Breyne. For example, in the Global Plants database entry on Ten Rhijne, the suggestion is made that Breyne was with him as he collected his specimens at Cape Good Hope. I have seen similar errors elsewhere, perhaps due to confusion with his son Johann Breyne, also a botanist. I would just like to clarify here that Jacob Breyne never left Europe. See Natural History Museum (BM), "Ten Rhyne, Willem (1648-1700)," *JSTOR Global Plants database*, online <https://plants.jstor.org/stable/10.5555/al.ap.person.bm000032396>

centuria prima (1678; hereafter, *Plantarum exoticarum*).¹⁷⁷ His tea description was met with enthusiasm by fellow botanists such as Linnaeus, but also physicians such as Cleyer and the director of the Hortus Botanicus in Amsterdam, Jan Commelin.¹⁷⁸

Plantarum exoticarum is exemplary for the intricate connections between Dutch private gardens, botanical gardens, and the Dutch East (as well as West) India Company. Willem ten Rhijne, a physician, botanist, and old friend of Breyne's, had sent him a description and possibly some plant material of the *camellia sinensis* from his posting at Deshima.¹⁷⁹ Having served the VOC at Deshima and in Batavia where he made abundant use of indigenous sources, Ten Rhijne had become an expert on the region's flora.¹⁸⁰ Breyne was also on good terms with Johan Huydecooper van Maarsseveen, one of the Gentlemen XVII, who gifted him watercolor paintings of South African plants.¹⁸¹ In addition, the work was dedicated to his friend and patron Hieronymus van Beverningh, who was a statesman as well as the curator of Leiden University, and could connect Breyne to a large number of overseas correspondents. To maintain these scholarly relationships, Breyne gifted his contacts with personally-made herbaria, and in return, the extensive and powerful network exercised advantages: not only did it provide him with the exotic natural knowledge he needed as a Europebound botanist, it also ensured him of a readership interested and wealthy enough to purchase them.¹⁸² This was important for Breyne, who remained active as a merchant and entrepreneur throughout his lifetime, and considered his books commercial products as well as products of knowledge. To maintain full creative control, and to prevent illicit copying, Breyne locally commissioned illustrations and printed the work in his own printing house.

Clearly, during the seventeenth century, knowledge of tea would become a commodity much like the dried tea leaves themselves. The fact that Breyne was able to contribute to the body of knowledge on exotic plants such as tea without ever having to leave Europe is a testament to how well long-distance networks were able to operate in the seventeenth century. Yet Breyne too was sometimes confronted with the limitations of the VOC's regulations. For example, in a letter to Breyne, Ten Rhijne informs he was unable to procure permission to send him certain living herbs.¹⁸³ In the next chapter, we will further examine the reception of tea and knowledge

¹⁷⁷ Jacob Breyne, *Exoticarum aliarumque minus cognitarum Plantarum centuria prima* (Gdańsk: David-Fredericus Rhetius, 1678), 111-115. Also see M. de Jong et al., "The book herbaria of Jacob Breyne (1637–1697) in the collection of Naturalis Biodiversity Center (Leiden, the Netherlands)," *Blumea* 67, no. 2 (2022), 78.

¹⁷⁸ Alette Fleischer, "Traveling Salesmen or Scholarly Travelers? Early Modern Botanists on the Move Marketing Their Knowledge of Nature," in *Early Modern Universities: Networks of Higher Learning*, eds. Anja-Silvia Goeing, Glyn Parry and Mordechai Feingold (Boston: Brill, 2020), 382.

¹⁷⁹ Ten Rhijne's observations of the tea plant were added to the *Plantarum exoticarum* as an appendix. See *Excerpta ex observationibus suis Japonicis Physicis &c. de Fructice Thee*, VII – XXV.

¹⁸⁰ Louisa-Dorothea Gehrke, "Kundige inlanders – Indigenous Contributions to Jacob Breyne's (1637–1697) Work," *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 44, no. 3 (2021), 305-324.

¹⁸¹ Jos Kuijlen, "De Dantziger botanicus en koopman Jacob Breyne (1637-1697) en zijn betekenis voor de Hollandse plantkunde," *Gewina: Tijdschrift voor de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde, Natuurwetenschappen, Wiskunde en Techniek* 5, no. 3 (2012), 117.

¹⁸² Fleischer, "Traveling Salesmen or Scholarly Travelers?," 382.

¹⁸³ Willem ten Rhijne to Jacob Breyne, December 10th 1685: "[...] myn onmacht gelieven te excuseren, maer levende kryden over te schiken is door onse E.E. Heeren Meesters, om gewichtige redenen,

thereof in the Dutch Republic, and consider the ways in which stay-at-home scholars were able to (trans)form from their own desks and practices.

Conclusion

When it comes to the VOC's approval for publication, how should the difference in treatment between works such as *Het Gezantschap*, *De Indiae utriusque*, and *Het Amboinsche kruid-boek* be interpreted? It is my belief that this question has no unequivocal answer. Deciding whether or not information was deemed suited for publication was, as we have seen in Chapter I, the prerogative of the VOC's directors. Yet the archives contain no further explication of what material could and what material could not be disseminated for a wider audience. A variety of factors was at play: personal opinions and financial motivations of the directors, a scholar's social standing and connections, or the degree of influence exerted by publishers, to name but a few. For example, Paul Arblaster attributes the apparent lack of confidentiality in the transmission of Nieuhof's report to the fact that around the time of the publication of *Het Gezantschap*, the VOC barely had lost most of its foothold in China and Formosa, meaning that there could be little harm in making his observations available to the public.¹⁸⁴ The fact that publications of similar weight can be observed to have been both approved and denied further publication, serves to me as an indication that the Company's approach to proprietary knowledge requires a more nuanced interpretation. In that regard, Friedrich rightly observes two different characterizations of the VOC in modern historical research: one regarding the Company as an organization whose commercial mentality greatly enhanced scientific advancement, the other drawing a picture of the organization as being an "unwilling Maecenas", considering the scholarly material produced by its employees to be a by-product.¹⁸⁵ In my mind, a more fruitful approach to the lies somewhere in between. After all, the "VOC" is not *one* continuous and congruent entity: it existed over a long period of time and operated over long distances. Employees came and went, and so did personal motivations, financial stakes, and social relationships. Moreover, knowledge could take different material shapes, each with its own limits when it comes to how widely they could be disseminated, and how well they could be controlled. Publications, over which VOC had fairly much authority and which could find large audiences, simply cannot be lumped together with the letters and personal conversations which, although also falling under Company authority, were not as easily constrained, but also often only had a readership of one. Seventeenth-century scholars appear aware of that similar pitfalls applied to their personal situations too. This can be observed in a dispute played out between Cleyer and Ten Rhijne in the 1680s. The former accused the latter of plagiarism pertaining his treatise on tea. In letters to Breyne, Ten Rhijne defends himself, arguing the

verboden, daer ik anders bij onse E.E. Opper Regenten om aengehouden hebbe." Cited in Gehre, "Kundige Inlanders," 316. Original kept at Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, A790, fol.103v

¹⁸⁴ Arblaster, "Piracy and Play," 134.

¹⁸⁵ The first characterization is prominently present in Harold Cook's *Matters of Exchange*; exemplar for the second one is Klaas van Berkel, "Een onwillige mecenas? De rol van de VOC bij het natuurwetenschappelijk onderzoek in de zeventiende eeuw", in J. Bethlehem and A. C. Meijer (eds.) *VOC en cultuur. Wetenschappelijke en culturele relaties tussen Europa en Azië ten tijde van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Amsterdam: Schiphouwer en Brinkman, 1993), 39-58.

opposite is the case, and that in fact Cleyer is using *bis* work without proper reference to his name: “because of the tea and camphor, what I had noted from my own experience, which he flaunts in the Danish ephemerides, but he gives me the honorary title of gravissimus author, even if he does not express my name”.¹⁸⁶ Clearly concerned for his own reputation, Ten Rhijne complains to Breyne that they were “thieves of honor [...], who say about me that I have borrowed the smallest thing from Cleyer, of that what I sent or wrote to you.”¹⁸⁷ Ten Rhijne was not the only one accused of plagiarism: François Valentyn, whose (local) middlemen remained anonymous and in addition made good use of Rumphius’ manuscripts without explicit reference, also found himself in a thorny situation.¹⁸⁸

These episodes lay bare the harsh truth that the VOC’s knowledge directives were only designed to protect the Company’s rights to certain pieces of information; as a provider of this knowledge, you were only to a small degree able to keep control over your work.

¹⁸⁶ “[...] wegens de Thee en Camphor, ‘t geen ik uit eygen experientie had aengetekent, daer hy by de Deensche ephemerides mee pronkt, doch geeft my de eernaem van gravissimus author, schoon hy myn naem niet uitdrukt [...]” Willem ten Rhijne to Jacob Breyne, December 10th 1685. Cited in Gehre, “Kundige Inlanders,” 317. Original kept at Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, A790, fol.101r.

¹⁸⁷ “eer-dieven [...], die my naegeven, dat ik het minste van Cleyer ontleent hebbe, van ‘t geen ik aen UEd hebbe overgeschikt of geschreven.” Ibid., fol.101v.

¹⁸⁸ Delmas and Penn, “Written culture in a colonial context,” 120.

Chapter III Consuming knowledge: reception of tea in the Dutch Republic

In jongen en in Ouden
Is een gemeen gebreck,
Om middelmaet te houden
Zijn s' all' al veel Té geck.

- Constantijn Huygens (1673)¹⁸⁹

Introduction

Now we will shift our gaze from East Asia to the Dutch Republic. We will start by outlining how tea itself was received and consumed by the Dutch. Next, we will look at the reception of knowledge: how did the VOC, academia, and merchants handle the information received by them? To understand how knowledge was not only received but also produced in the Dutch Republic, we will then discuss the medical debate arising among physicians. Finally, we will briefly consider how the Dutch Republic may not have been an end point to the flow of information of tea.

3.1 When tea arrived: supply and consumption

The first samples of tea brought to the Dutch Republic in 1609-1610 and submitted to the Gentlemen XVII were of Japanese origin. Although no record seems to have survived, these strange leaves and powders are likely to have been sent to universities for closer inspection, because that is what happened to the subsequent batches of tea specimens. An inventory of Leiden University's anatomical theatre indicates that in 1620, the university was in the possession of Chinese tea too:

The leaves of the tae fruit, originating in China, were brought to us from the city of Bantam on the island of Java in 1618. These, boiled in water, dye it a red color, which, strained and drank warmed, wonderfully strengthens the stomach and all the viscera. However, most of it is currently kept at different locations.¹⁹⁰

While it is unclear where the specimens were moved to, the fact that it was relocated to several locations indicates that at the least they were not just collecting dust on the shelves of the

¹⁸⁹ From Constantijn Huygens, *Gedichten. Deel 8: 1671-1687*, ed. J.A. Worp (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1898), 104.

¹⁹⁰ "Taeae fructicis in China provenientis folia nos delata ex Javae insulae civitate Bantham anno 1618. Haec in aqua decota eam rubro colore tingunt, quae colata, ac calide potato mirabiliter stomachum omniaque viscera corroborat. Maer dese sijn nu meest alle op andere plaetsen ghestelt," J.A.J. Barge, *De oudste inventaris der oudste academische anatomie in Nederland* (Leiden/Amsterdam: Stenfert Kroese's Uitgevers, 1934), 66.

anatomical theatre. Between 1622 and 1628, even more Japanese tea was acquired, as the following item is mentioned to have been added to the collection during these years:

Eene groote kan ofte pot boven toeghesloten met aerde daarin Teae, is ghesonden uyt Japan, daer staet buyten op een inscriptie met letteren die men aldaer ghebruyckt.¹⁹¹

It appears the VOC quickly created a demand for tea. So quickly that by 1629, Batavian suppliers had to disappoint Dutch merchants: “Japanese cha or Chinese thee is unavailable; by next year we hope to be able to provide it.”¹⁹² In 1634, the problem seems to have ceded largely. Still, the demand appeared to have grown so rapidly that the Gentlemen XVII instructed the Council of the Indies 1637 to supply each returning vessel with a consignment of tea.¹⁹³

With the increasing demand for tea in Europe, knowledge of the product became of more valuable to the Company too. One issue in need of resolving was the decline in quality during the long journey. Fortunately, according to Kaempfer, tea, “after it is grown too old, and hath lost too much of its virtues”, could still be used as a chestnut-brown dye for silk, and was in fact sometimes shipped from China to India for that exact purpose.¹⁹⁴ Yet the VOC’s main intent with tea was obviously not to dye silks with; thirsty consumers (and stockholders) were waiting over in the Dutch Republic and elsewhere, and the higher the quality, the higher the price. Attesting to the perseverance of the issue of quality assurance is an anonymous VOC-manuscript written in the late eighteenth century, in which the anonymous author’s inventive conclusion is that the sweat of the Chinese men packing the tea is to be blamed for the spoilage of tea.¹⁹⁵

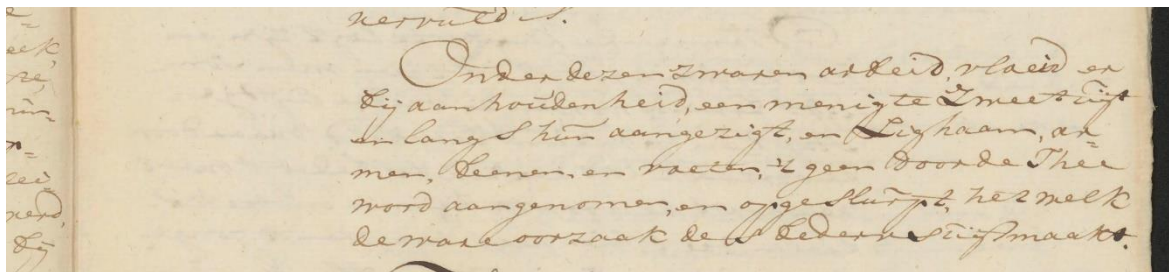


Figure 9 Detail of the anonymous report on sweaty Chinese packers. “Onder dezen zwaren arbeid, vloeid er bij aanhoudenheid, een menigte zweet uijt en langs hun aangezicht, en lighaam, armen, beenen, en voeten, 't geen door de Thee word aangenomen, en opgeslurpt, hetwelk de ware oorzaak des bederfs uijtmaakt.” Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 4570, f. 5.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹² “Jappanschen cha ofte Chineesen thee is niet te becomen; tegens aenstaende jaer verhoopen die te versorgen.” Cited in Van Driem, *The Tale of Tea*, 319-320.

¹⁹³ “Alsoo den Tee bij sommige Int gebruijck begint te comen sullen met alle schepen zoo van Chinese als Japanse eenige potten verwachten.” Ibid., 320.

¹⁹⁴ Engelbert Kaempfer, *History of Japan* (London: J.G. Scheuchzer, 1727). Digital edition by Wolfgang Michel, Kyushu University (November 1997).

¹⁹⁵ Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 4570, f. 5. The document is undated, but the author mentions the “Zeeuws genootschap der wetenschappen” in the final passage, and this society was only founded in 1769.

Sweaty dock workers or not, it is not without reason that tea was colloquially referred to as a “frail damsel” (*fyne juffer*). Tea’s aroma was easily spoiled when it came into contact with other goods during transportation, which led tea traders pairing its import with that of Chinese porcelain, which did not only preserve tea’s fragrance but also served as ballast to the lightweighted tea leaves.¹⁹⁶

Despite the lengths importers had to go to in order to successfully transport this frail damsel, increasing sales and prices of tea made it very worth their while. In the first half of seventeenth century, the kind of people profiting from the beverage were often also its most devout consumers. Tea was a novelty and luxury, and was soon fueling the gatherings of the same elite that was known to invest in Company stocks. In Amsterdam, tea enthusiasm among the elite can be observed in the *Muiderkring*, a cultural circle of which the members included P.C. Hooft, Hugo Grotius, Constantijn Huygens, Joost van den Vondel, and Caspar Barlaeus, to name but a few. In their gatherings, tea was consumed in such high quantities that Huygens, in a letter to Van Baerle, jokingly referred to the literary coterie as “illustrious tea drinkers” (*illustres Tepotores*).¹⁹⁷ Notably, Willem Piso was introduced to the literary circle, who as we have seen took great scientific interest in tea in his work as a publisher.¹⁹⁸ As such, consumption, description and capitalization of/on tea appears to have at times conflated in the personal experience of some early-modern devotees.

3.2 Reception of tea knowledge

Corporate reception: making the most out of journals

Although the exact numbers are unknown, it is safe to say a massive amount of journals have been produced under the authority of the VOC. As we have seen, VOC regulations required all journals and other relevant documents to be copied and forwarded to the Gentlemen XVII. Correspondence of the board of directors shows they demanded to have all documents of importance to be sent to them in sixfold; one for each chamber.¹⁹⁹ However, overburdened by the extra workload these copies entailed, the Governor-General would usually fail to meet these demands, and in practice only the chambers of Amsterdam and Zeeland would be steadily supplied with journals and other materials, despite the many complaints of the Gentlemen XVII.

What happened to the journals after their arrival? As mentioned before, in order to process the swelling flood of incoming journals and reports, the *Haags Besogne* gathered bi-annually in The Hague to produce summaries of all documents received. Journals containing geographical information, such as logbooks, were usually processed in combination with cartographic material produced during travels and while overseas, as both were used to create new maps and

¹⁹⁶ Memorie-boek van pakhuismeesteren van de thee te Amsterdam: 1818-1918 en de Nederlandsche theehandel in den loop der tijden (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1918), 25.

¹⁹⁷ Van Driem, *The Tale of Tea*, 316.

¹⁹⁸ Cook, “Truth and Untruths from the Indies,” 212-213.

¹⁹⁹ Joyce Pennings and Remco Raben, “Introduction to the archives of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie” (The Hague: Nationaal Archief, 1992), <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02>

improve others. From 1695 onwards, to strengthen the Company's grip on this very valuable information, a special room, the *chartkamer*, was dedicated to this task.²⁰⁰ To further benefit from the VOC's growing body of proprietary knowledge, a full-time librarian was appointed in 1699. Six years prior to this, the trusted *advocaat* Pieter van Dam, who had been working for the VOC for over forty years, was commissioned with the compilation of a comprehensive company history. This commission is in a certain way a departure from the VOC's view on its own documentation as being of purely technical and practical use, but should also be seen in the light of the aforementioned effort to prevent the body of written documents bursting at the seams. His descriptions were meant for internal use only, and a very exclusive use at that: the manuscript was put in a safe in Amsterdam, and over the next century only a few copies were made.²⁰¹

Not all journals ended up where they were supposed to be. Most skippers held private archives of their own journals from previous voyages, and sometimes even included the journals of others.²⁰² This seems to go directly against VOC regulations, particularly the 1598 deed of promise of confidentiality discussed in Chapter I. This means that either the deed's legality had been terminated by the establishment of the Company, employees undermined their own promises on a large scale, or VOC directors chose not to enforce this particular directive and returned these copies to the skippers if it was thought to benefit their navigation on the next journey. Given the fact that directors too were known to have had copies made of journals received by the board for private use, the latter explanation sounds most plausible to me.²⁰³

In chapter II, a large parade of published materials on tea have been addressed. In order for them to make it to the printer, as the knowledge directives have shown, consent needed to be given by the Company. Yet the corporate reception of knowledge for publication does not end there. In fact, Company directors were part of their readership. As Siegfried Huigen has shown in a very recent publication, five administrators have made notes based on Valentyn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indiën* in their diaries, now kept at the Nationaal Archief.²⁰⁴ All five of them held high positions within the VOC, and none of them had any personal experience with overseas trade. In addition, as members of the *Haags Besogne*, they were based in The Hague, which means they could not access Pieter van Dam's company history in Amsterdam. They therefore relied on descriptive publications to provide a frame of reference from which to operate in the compilation of the incoming correspondence material into a General Missive. Because *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indiën* does not provide a table of contents, several of the administrators made their own indexes (*registers*) of its subjects, in order to quickly navigate from section to section. As such, publications were of vital importance to corporate management in the Dutch Republic.

²⁰⁰ the map-making procedures of the VOC have been researched extensively by numerous scholars, and is still ongoing in initiatives such as the Explocart project. <https://explocart.eu/>

²⁰¹ Delmas, "From Travelling to History," 122

²⁰² Ketelaar, *Archiving People*, 236b.

²⁰³ B.J. Slot, 'Other archives of VOC institutions and officials', in M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs et al., *De archieven van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie. The Archives of the Dutch East India Company* (The Hague: Sdu uitgeverij, 1992), 78.

²⁰⁴ Siegfried Huigen, *Shaping a Dutch East Indies: François Valentyn's VOC Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 269-280.

Academic reception: shedding light on tea specimens

Across Asia, Company officers were collecting plant specimens with the purpose of sending them to Europe. The botanical gardens of Amsterdam and Leiden became central hubs for the collection and study of these plants, as well as the information gathered about them. According to S.J. Harris, these gardens functioned as interfaces between the VOC and the medical faculties of Dutch universities, which could benefit from the former's overseas networks in acquiring new materials for further academic research.²⁰⁵ The willingness of the VOC to share these valuable specimens with universities is indicative of their mutual dependence. Not only could the Company benefit greatly from the expertise of these universities, they also relied on them for the 'supply' of the medical personnel, which played such a vital role in the functioning of all of the VOC's operations. With an on-board mortality rate of 10-15%, and many more dying during their employment overseas, illness was a costly affair to a company looking to maximize its profits.²⁰⁶ The VOC therefore went at length to improve medical service on board of its ships, even updating the contents of medicine chests according to new pharmaceutical theories, albeit with mixed results, as ship's surgeons often embezzled these drugs.²⁰⁷ Throughout the seventeenth century, tea continued to be consumed for its purported medicinal properties and during sea voyages, tea was at times prescribed to patients affected by dysentery.²⁰⁸ In addition, it was consumed by those stationed in the Indonesian archipelago as a preventative measure.

Like the chartrooms and meeting rooms of the VOC, the botanical gardens provided a space in which incoming knowledge was received, digested and enhanced; yet the gardens were much less tightly controlled by the VOC. Harris attributes this asymmetry to the "ease of knowledge-dissemination as compared with the difficulty of knowledge collection and -concentration".²⁰⁹ Elaborating on Harris' explanation, I think the VOC's more relaxed attitude towards universities may be explained by making a distinction between availability and accessibility. Even though the VOC was apparently willing to make tea specimens available to these institutes, this does not mean that they were readily accessible to the world. To understand this, it is useful to think of tea specimens as being of the same category as the materials written in and about the Chinese language, which were collected in fairly large numbers by academic institutions towards close of the seventeenth century. While their usefulness to the study of Chinese philosophical, literary and historical treatises was essential (barely anyone in Europe was able to read Chinese), the bulk of them saw little circulation.²¹⁰ Why? Although there does not seem to be any literature to provide us with an explanation, I think much of it has to do with the fact that the kind of activity required to study these sources commonly took place in the isolated academic environments to which only few had access. Furthermore, the number of people present in Europe to provide context and clarification to these hard-to-interpret

²⁰⁵ Harris, "Long-Distance Corporations, Big Sciences, and the Geography of Knowledge," 12.

²⁰⁶ Cook, "Truths and Untruths from the Indies," 178.

²⁰⁷ Iris Bruijn, *Ship's Surgeons of the Dutch East India Company: Commerce and the Progress of Medicine in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009), 67-71.

²⁰⁸ Trude Dijkstra, "Goed voor alle gebreecken': Chinese thee in Nederlands drukwerk (1680-1750)," *Jaarboek De Achttiende Eeuw* 54, no. 1 (2022), 130-147; Bruijn, *Ship's Surgeons of Dutch East India Company*, 76.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

²¹⁰ Florence Hsia, "Chinese Astronomy for the Early Modern European Reader," *Early Science and Medicine* 13, no. 5 (2008), 420-421.

sources was extremely limited, although a select group of Jesuits present in the Netherlands were able to act as intermediaries.²¹¹

Take the work of the Dutch protestant minister Justus Heurnius, who was sent to Batavia in 1624. Missionary ambitions pertaining the Chinese community of Batavia led him to produce the first Dutch-Chinese dictionary, which, as he expressed in a letter accompanying the copy he sent to his brother at the University of Leiden, could be seen as “as a result of the excellent government of Your Honour in these places”.²¹² Heurnius, more than likely, intended the dictionary he so painstakingly put together to be used by others with sinological interests. However, as J.J.L. Duyventak has shown, only a handful of copies were created in Leiden, which remained there until 1725, when some were probably brought to England.²¹³ Only when Heurnius returned to the Netherlands in 1638 were scholars given the opportunity to really benefit from his knowledge, as now they were able to ask him in person. Yet such homecomings of travelers to Asia were a not a common occurrence: many, if not most, would never return to the Dutch Republic.²¹⁴ And while meeting Chinese visitors to the European continent may have stimulated the interest for China, chance encounters such as these were even fewer and further in between.²¹⁵ This meant that for materials in need of clarification from someone with first-hand knowledge or experience – like dictionaries, or tea specimens – the options were very limited.

Commercial reception: from mindfulness of matter to matters of the mind

As discussed before, quality assurance and product information was of great importance to the Dutch merchants selling tea in increasingly large quantities. Uncertainty surrounding tea production methods in China and the Chinese suppliers continued to be a concern well into the nineteenth century. This issue can be seen in the manuscript archives of the institution of warehouse masters (*Pakhuismeeesteren*), who were responsible for supervision of tea storage in Amsterdam. For example, one undated memo concerns a recent discovery that the mysterious iron-like sand often found on the bottom of teapot is in fact deliberately added by Chinese suppliers, as it enables them to lift the tea with magnets.²¹⁶ Other merchant theories surrounding the products received in the Dutch Republic were often fueled by ignorance regarding tea’s natural properties. Writing as late as 1836, one superintendent felt it necessary to respond to the “vulgar notion, once prevalent in this country, that the colour of green tea was derived from its being dried on plates of copper.”²¹⁷

²¹¹ Thijs Weststeijn, “The Middle Kingdom in the Low Countries: Sinology in the Seventeenth- Century Netherlands,” in *The Making of the Humanities* vol. 3, eds. Rens Bod et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 212.

²¹² Koos Kuiper, “The earliest monument of Dutch Sinological studies: Justus Heurnius’s manuscript Dutch-Chinese dictionary and Chinese-Latin Compendium Doctrinae Christianae,” *Quaerendo* 35, no. 1-2 (2005), 112-113.

²¹³ J.J.L. Duyventak, “Early Chinese Studies in Holland,” *T’oung Pao* 32, no. 5 (1936), 293-344.

²¹⁴ In the eighteenth century around 50 percent of all personnel returned, although there were large differences between ranks. For more information, see Van Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch avontuur*, 205.

²¹⁵ Thijs Weststeijn, “Just Like Zhou: Chinese Visitors to the Netherlands (1597–1705) and Their Cultural Representation,” in *Foreign devils and philosophers: cultural encounters between the Chinese, the Dutch, and other Europeans, 1590-1800*, ed. Thijs Weststeijn (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 124.

²¹⁶ Gemeentearchief Amsterdam, 549, inv. no. 192, f. 2.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 5.

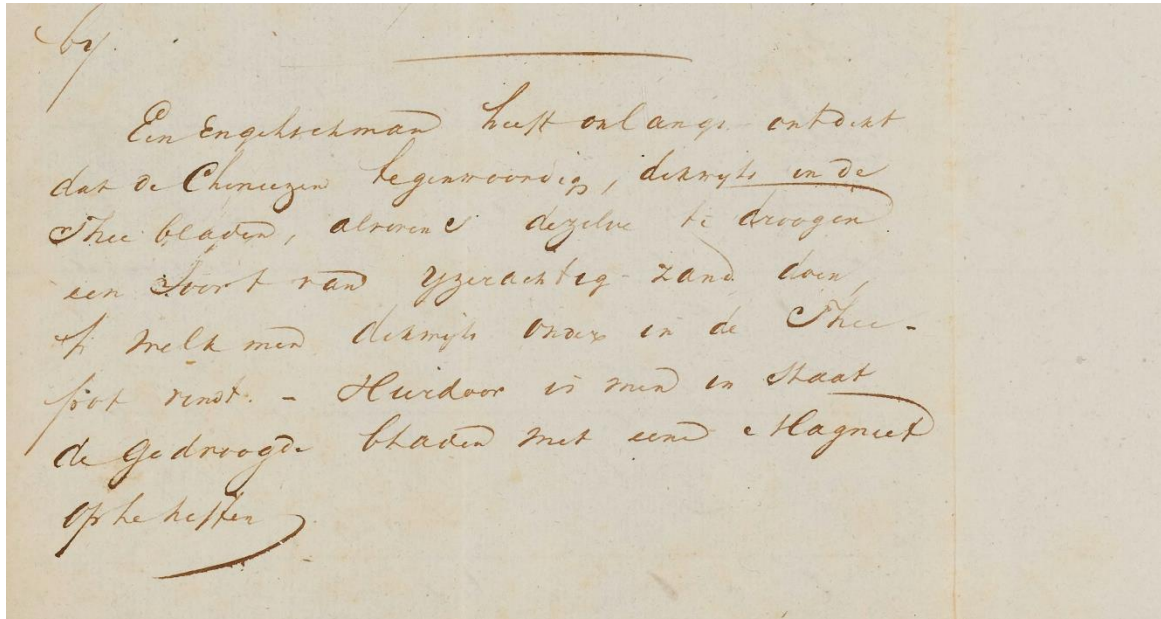


Figure 10 Detail from the report on magnetic tea. Gemeentearchief Amsterdam, 549, inv. no. 192, f. 2.

But for merchants and investors, the importance of accurate information went further than the material state in which cargo arrived. Fostered by the growing body of literature available on distant locations, a specific mercantile culture arose in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. In this culture, knowledge of other parts of the world, often acquired through trade, was in high demand among merchant-regents. Interestingly, this knowledge was not just to benefit their trading investments, but also to benefit their own growth as politicians and even philosophers, ultimately hoping to attain the ideal of *mercator sapiens*. This new approach to governance has been championed by philosopher and poet Caspar Barlaeus, who addressed the subject in a speech given in 1632. Addressing merchant-regents of Amsterdam, Barlaeus took a new approach to knowledge, arguing that commercial knowledge needs to be combined with erudition, culture, and wisdom, in order to strive for well-rounded intellectual development. An excellent manifestation of the popularity these ideas gained in the seventeenth century can be found in the *Elzevirian Republics*, a series of descriptions of European (and a few non-European) states published between 1625 and 1649. Sina Rauschenbach, in her excellent discussion of the *Elzevirian Republics*, observes that the creed of *mercator sapiens* embodied and connected several early modern attitudes pertaining the interwoven political, commercial and epistemic virtues that arose in the merchant cultures of Amsterdam.²¹⁸ In addition, Barlaeus and his kindred spirits encouraged merchants of the new generation to undertake ‘voyages of the mind’: observe instead of partake, read instead of engage, and weighing words instead of gold. This self-distancing from the physical act of trade, Rauschenbach argues, led to the ‘disinterested interestedness’ purported by Julie Solomon, and in the space created, fostered by erudite ambitions, an early-modern development towards both objectivity and a perspective of superiority can be recognized.

²¹⁸ Rauschenbach, “Elzevirian Republics, wise merchants, and new perspectives,” 81-100.

3.3 (Trans)forming knowledge: medical debates

Because of its medicinal application, and the fact that consumers needed to become acquainted with the product hitherto unknown, investigation of tea's health benefits became an essential part in scientific enquiries into the nature of the plant during the seventeenth century. The Chinese and Japanese had long endorsed tea among European visitors as a healthy beverage for mind, body and soul. Indeed, many sources point to the apparent absence of particular diseases and ailments among the Chinese and Japanese. Yet because many of these maladies were linked to climate, tea's effectiveness for patients in the Dutch Republic could not blindly be assumed based on Asian sources. Previously, I have shown how Nieuwhof argued for the possibility of cultivating rice in the Dutch Republic through reason and comparison of Asian and Dutch climates. In a similarly fashion, the minister Philippus Baldaeus reviewed both climates in order to assess the efficacy of tea in the Dutch Republic, and concludes:

De *Tee* en haar gebruyk en misbruyk is niet alleen in *China* en *Japan* gebleven, maar ook tot ons over gevlogen, en werd in de zelve veel gelt verdaan. [...] Of nu de *Tee* in *India* gezonder is, en meerder goet doet dan in *Hollant*, staat te onderzoeken, en konnen van beyde zijden gewichtige redenen by gebracht warden. [...] 't Is waar, dat in de dautijden ende Regen-maanden den *Tee* in die Gewesten zijn beste nuttigheit heft, ende byzonder goet is voor die gene die het *Asthma* ofte aenborstigheid (door de scherpe door-dringende koude dau des nachts veroorzaakt) onderworpen zijn, 't welk dan zoo veel meer mijn meynigne bevestight, dat namentlijk de *Thee* immers zo gezont is in *Nederlant* gebruykt dan in *India*. Ik wil niet staan of op eygen oordeel of ondervindinge aan my byzonder bespeurt, maar gaarn onderwerp ik my beter oordeel; doch wy zien dat by onze Medicijn-meesters verscheidentlijk daar van gesproken werd, de welken wy (als zy baarblijkelijke reden geven) 't zelve toevertrouwen.²¹⁹

The masters of medicine referred to by Baldaus were often less impartial in their wording. Yet some accounts appraising tea's medicinal were accused of being slanted because of their authors' supposed financial gains. One of the chief suspects of partisan tea scholarship was Nicolaes Tulp, a Dutch surgeon practicing in Amsterdam. The second edition of his *Observationes Medicae* (1652), which includes a chapter on tea, became so wildly popular that the steep increase in tea sales occurring in the second half of the seventeenth century has in large part been accredited to his extolling assessment of tea's health benefits.²²⁰ One of the most prominent political figures in Amsterdam, Tulp's double career in medicine and politics added authority to his name, but was also cause for suspicion, as it was rumored that he had received financial inducement from the VOC, which was still the sole supplier of tea to Europe at that time.²²¹ While such payment has never been confirmed, certainly Tulp did not just baselessly fabricate his chapter. Because of his standing, was able to draw his information from a wide

²¹⁹ Philippus Baldaeus, *Naauwkeurige beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel, der zelve aangrenzende ryken, en het machtige eyland Ceylon* (Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius van Waasberge and Johannes van Someren, 1672), 184.

²²⁰ Van Driem, *The Tale of Tea*, 324. Some nuance is warranted here, as the availability of printed material in general opened up medicinal knowledge of tea among wider audiences, especially in the decades that followed. See Trude Dijkstra, "Boiling it Down: Chinese Tea in the First Dutch Medical Journal, 1680-1688," *Jaarboek Nederlandse Boeksgeschiedenis* 30 (2023), 31-63.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 331.

variety of published material, including the aforementioned Piso, Bontius, Van Linschoten and Maffei, as well as the proprietary reports reaching the VOC.

Not everyone needed this many sources to say something about tea's medicinal properties. The moment tea arrived in the Dutch Republic, scholars of medicine were able to create their own knowledge of tea, through their own experience with the substance. As the case of Cornelis Bontekoe shows, this kind of empirical evidence did not always take away suspicions of partisanship – on the contrary.²²² In 1678, he published the *Treatise on Tea, the Most Excellent Herb*, a disquisition informing the reader of the many health benefits that may be ascribed to the consumption of tea. As a student of chemistry at Leiden University, he grew to support the unconventional idea that disease was caused by chemical processes, and should therefore be treated with pharmaceuticals instead of the surgical procedures. Later, as a practicing physician, Bontekoe made it his ambition to overthrow the medical, surgical and pharmaceutical practices of his predecessors and peers, which he considered to be archaic and outdated. In the midst of larger debates between the Aristotelian and Cartesian schools of thought, Bontekoe favored the latter, while still recognizing that even in Cartesian medicine a lot of improvement was still to be made.²²³ His critical and rebellious attitude towards the medical profession can be clearly recognized in the aforementioned *Treatise on Tea*, in which he does not shy away from referring to his confrères as being incompetent, ignorant and even deceiving.

In line with Descartes' medicinal philosophy, Bontekoe's scientific method is characterized by strong empiricist beliefs. Bontekoe stresses that his findings are based on his own experience, which not only entails observations of his patients, but perhaps more importantly his own frequent consumption of tea furthers this epistemological approach to the extreme. To him, reliable knowledge cannot be based on the words of others, be it spoken or written.²²⁴ Indeed, in the entire treatise he does not refer to any other literature, except for one time, when he refers to Kircher's *China Illustrata*.²²⁵ Moreover, Bontekoe rejects the reliability of Chinese and Japanese observations, preferring his own experiences and those of his patients over their centuries-old tea practices:

[...] maar dese conjecture [that tea disturbs the stomach, AB] word wederlegt door soo veel ondervindinge, ik sal niet seggen by de menschen van China en Japan, maar by onse Hollanders, die de THEE drinken in overvloed, sonder yets van dit imaginaire quaad gewaar te worden, [...]²²⁶

Tied to his reliance on empirical evidence and self-experimentation, as well as his preoccupation with tea's healing powers, is Bontekoe's outright refusal to discuss the subject of botanical properties, of which he has no first-hand experience. Going against the grain of what many of

²²² As far as I know, Cornelis was not related to his famous namesake, Willem IJsbrantszoon Bontekoe.

²²³ Schweikardt, "More than just a propagandist for tea: religious argument and advice on a healthy life in the work of the Dutch physician Cornelis Bontekoe (1647-1685)," *Medical History* 47, no. 3 (2003), 361.

²²⁴ Cornelis Bontekoe, *Tractaat van het excellentste kruid thee* (The Hague: Pieter Hagen, 1685), Waarschouwinge.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

his peers were trying to accomplish in the anatomical theatre in Leiden – his alma mater! – and at trading posts in East Asia, Bontekoe writes:

Onse geleerde Schryvers van de kruyden hebben een mode om als sy een kruyd beschrijven, te onderzoeken syn geslagt, soort, plaats en tijd, waar, en wanneer 't wast, alle sijne namen, sijn natuur, gedaante, wortel, bladeren, bloeyssel, saad, sijn werking, en soo veel andere schoone dingen, waar mede men een boek vervuld, 't Myne sal niets van dat alles hebben, omdat myn tijd te kostelijk is, omse soo onnut te besteden: al die schone wetenschap doet weynig of geen profijt; 't is genoeg voor de thee-drinkers, dat de Chinesen, en andere 't selve cultiveren, en in overvloed doen vervoeren tot ons, en andere natien; laat ons dit kruyd ontfangen, en van 't selve drinkende, genieten de gezondheid, die 't ons sal procureren, sonder dat wy van noden hebben meer kennisse, als die ik ontdekt hebbe in dit Tractaat. Niemand behoeft te vresen, dat de Thee hem qualyk sal bekomen, of soo veel goed niet doen, indien hy onkundig is, waar en wanneer dit kruyd wast, hoe hoog dat het Thee-boomtje syn takken opschiet, hoe de figuur van sijn bladen is, sijn bloem, en wat van die curiositeyten meer sijn.²²⁷

Clearly, any knowledge not contributing to Bontekoe's main objective, which was to convince readers that tea consumption is good for physical, mental and spiritual health, is deemed pointed and frankly inferior. Importantly, Bontekoe's intended readership consists of potential new consumers, but also of his peers. By the end of the seventeenth century, the health benefits of drinking tea were still contested among physicians. That, combined with his rebellious reputation, meant Bontekoe clearly felt the need to defend himself and his beloved tea against insinuations.

Yet in this respect, the *Treatise on Tea* did more harm than good. One clear example of the heated scholarly debate arising from it is the *Dialogue van een groote thee en tobacq suyper* (1680), which has been ascribed to Adriaan Beverland.²²⁸ The booklet describes the verbal confrontation between the physician Johan Fredericq Swetser (also known as Helvetius) and Bontekoe, taking turns at deriding each other over their respective philosophies of science. The book's intent to mock Bontekoe's medical opinions and question his expertise is not just a response to his general career as an apothecary, but appears to have been prompted by the publication of the *Treatise on Tea*.²²⁹ Apart from the criticism directed towards his philosophical convictions regarding medicine, like Tulp, Bontekoe was also accused of having received bribes from the VOC for his tea propaganda.²³⁰ Indeed, in one anonymous poem, his attack on

²²⁷ Ibid., 220.

²²⁸ Pim van Oostrum, "Trammelant rond de theestoof: over de sekse van thee (en koffie)," *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman* 29, no. 1 (2006), 63.

²²⁹ "t Eerste proefstuk was sijn doorlugtig *Thee-boeck*, waer in hy de uyteschreven dictata van een Professor, volgens de leden ende omloop van het bloet, met sulcke swierige en krullige woorden in het Duyts wist te schryven, en 't geene van het losmaken der medicamenten wort geseyt, aen de deelen van den *Thee* te passen, dat elck Idioot by na geloofde, dat onse *Cornelis*, na een lange experientie van den *Thee*, wonderlijcke oraculen wist, al hadde hy se maer een jaer of twe ten hoogsten, voor henen gesien en geproeft. Syn bloed-pissen was 'er van genesen, ergo: de *Thee was voor alles puyck, ja puycks puyck*." Anonymous, "Dialogue van een groote thee en tobacq-suyper," (The Hague, n.p., 1680), 8. Available through Haags Gemeentearchief, 7000-01, inv. no. 172.

²³⁰ Schweikardt, "More than just a propagandist for tea," 357.

medicine is mockingly likened to a pen so combative ‘it well-nigh cuts off seven arms of three men.’²³¹

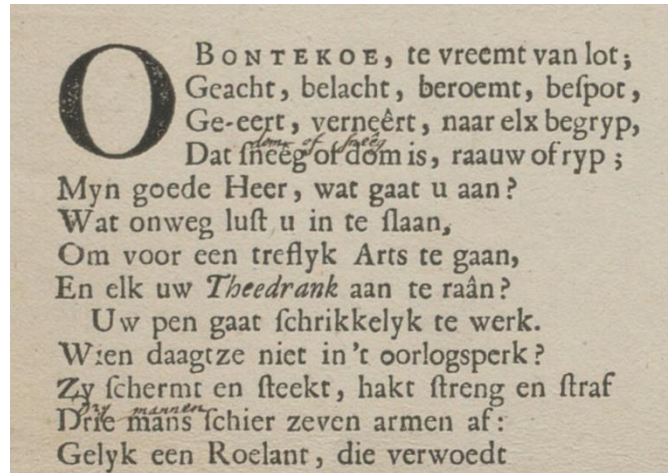


Figure 11 Section of the poem mocking Bontekoe. Regionaal Archief Alkmaar, 0850, inv. no. 493, f. 39.

Furthermore, boasting with his personal habit of drinking extreme amounts of tea himself (“50, 100 or 200 cups a day”), in a time where the excesses of tea enthusiasm received increasing cultural criticism, most certainly did not advance his case either. As the consumption of tea grew in volume, and drank by an increasingly diverse group of consumers became more diverse, drinking tea became a more frequent object of ridicule. For example, when tea drinking gained popularity among Dutch women, comedies and literary works ridiculing (female) tea enthusiasts were quick to rise to the scene.²³² This development can more broadly be recognized in the general reception and perception of Chinese material culture in the Dutch Republic, which, towards the end of the century, had come to be regarded *gesunkenes Kulturgut* by many.²³³ This changing cultural attitude towards exotic goods also affected the perception of natural knowledge in publication, at least in the eyes of some. Instead of focusing on the information truly beneficial to the VOC’s commercial and military interests, like books have degenerated into being containers for useless details. Or, as one admiral laments in his diary:

“Frankly, the way in which fine style writers render sailors’ journals is pitiful. They would blush at the stupidities and absurdities they make them say, if they had the slightest knowledge of naval terminology. These authors [publishers] take great care to cut back every detail that has to do with navigation and that could help to guide navigators; they want to make a book that appeals to the silly women of both sexes and end up writing a book that every reader finds boring and no one finds of any use.”²³⁴

²³¹ Regionaal Archief Alkmaar, 0850, inv. no. 493, f. 39.

²³² Van Oostrum, “Trammelant rond de theestoof,” 49-66.

²³³ Thijs Weststeijn, “Unease with the Exotic: Ambiguous Responses to Chinese Material Culture in the Dutch Republic,” in *Making Worlds: Global Invention in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Angela Vanhaelen and Bronwen Wilson, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 464.

²³⁴ Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *The Pacific journal of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville* (London: Hakluyt Society, 2002), 24-25.

Conclusion

The previous chapters have shown that in the continuous process of encountering, documenting, circulating and revising information of the natural world, the VOC was able to exert authority over this knowledge in varying degrees. Yet when looking at the reception of this knowledge in the Dutch Republic, it becomes clear that this knowledge also became repurposed, in a multitude of ways, and by a multitude of people. To Company employees, knowledge was of practical use, even when it was prohibited or came from popular publications instead of internal documents; to academics, specimens were laboratory items to be studied; to the *mercator sapien*, tea was an object to illuminate both wallet and mind. Most importantly, consumers and physicians alike were able to obtain knowledge of tea in a way the VOC could not exert authority over: through experience. Should the Company indeed have bribed Tulp and/or Bontekoe for their enthusiastic promotions of tea, then this should be read as an attempt to control the understanding of tea beyond the jurisdiction its knowledge directives provided.

Conclusion

Knowledge often seems to bring up associations of consumption. According to Francis Bacon, “some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.”²³⁵ In *What is the History of Knowledge?* Peter Burke has formulated that information is raw, and knowledge is cooked.²³⁶ In this thesis, I tried to make the case for a more nuanced view: knowledge cannot be simply seen as processed information, because processing happens *everywhere and all the time*. Observations and ideas about the world may be printed, scribbled, spoken and whispered. They are produced and dismantled; circulated and restrained, received and discredited. Natural knowledge often undergoes many of these things, in no particular order or direction, and with no final destination, because none of them are mutually exclusive. In the process, there is room aplenty for lies, mistakes, doubts, and, perhaps most of all: attempts at establishing authority.

Tea flows in mysterious ways. In a seemingly constant stream of events, tea has been funneled through the tangled networks, from picker to merchant to spy to scholar, through the written word, whispering hearsay, or loud proclamation. In this thesis, by example of this elusive beverage, I have shown how the accumulation of certain scientific information in the seventeenth century was both dependent on, but also in service of, trading companies such as the VOC. The seventeenth century is filled with examples of VOC employees with an active interest in the scientific properties of the plant they were consuming and trading. These examples offer a space for historians of science to investigate how the knowledge directives the VOC was so quick to establish during the first few decades of its existence were either applied or abandoned in practice.

The frustratingly simple-yet-complicated conclusion is that the VOC’s knowledge directives were both applied and abandoned. These regulations dictated what should be written, what can and cannot be transmitted, and how the security of intelligence is to be guaranteed. As such, focusing on the paper reality of the VOC available in its archives paints a picture of extreme restriction. Yet when focusing on the corpus of scientific information on tea that was brought about by the VOC’s knowledge network, an image of surprising circulation presents itself. By combining both perspectives, I have shown that a more comprehensive approach should lie somewhere in the middle: a restrictive circulation, if you will. In the end, answers to the question of what should remain confidential and what should be shared depended in part on the nature of knowledge: while botanical information was sometimes deemed too valuable to put into circulation, knowledge of the medical benefits of drinking tea were more easily shared with the public.

Scientific knowledge of tea was able to flow across the oceans by virtue of an intricate network consisting of employees, local informants, intermediaries, publishers, and universities. Sometimes this knowledge circulation would be obstructed by the same VOC that put these networks into place. Moreover, uncertainty regarding the trustworthiness and accuracy of

²³⁵ Francis Bacon, “Of Studies,” in *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral* (1625), <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A28200.0001.001>

²³⁶ Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 10.

information and their sources was of constant concern to those maneuvering this system – and rightfully so. Importantly, heeding the work of Secord, Livingstone, and their sympathizers, natural knowledge of tea should not be seen as a single, unified science, moving in a straight line from A to B, crossing all possible audiences. The inability of the VOC to fully control the knowledge accumulated by its employees can be seen as a result of this.

The more I dug my nails into the story of authori-tea, the more I realized I am only scratching the surface. To establish a truly comprehensive study of the matter addressed in here would take much more than a thesis of this size – in fact, you would soon end up in a situation alike that of the Borgesian geographers. But that is beside the point. The fact that there is room for much more research is cause for celebration: we’re not done yet! For example, as is correctly pointed out by others, while European travel accounts are getting more attention, the focus has predominantly been on the “mobile” European actors, while their interactions with and the stories of those who remained “immobile” are not always taken into consideration.²³⁷ In this regard, exciting opportunities lay ahead pertaining to the study of local informants.²³⁸

Ultimately, any kind of knowledge will and should be open to revision. This is especially true for this thesis, given the academic environment in which it came about. Whether it will come to circulate or sink to the bottom of Utrecht University’s thesis repository is something I have little authority of. All I can do is give it a push – and off it goes, down the stream.

²³⁷ Simon Schaffer et al. (eds.), *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820* (Sagamore Beach: Watson Publishing International, 2009), xiv.

²³⁸ To give one example: in early modern Japan, vastly different notions of food (and, by extension, beverage) and medicine appear to have been prevalent. “Healthy” food was understood to have as little (negative or positive) effect on the body as possible, and medicine a necessary evil to be avoided. The stark contrast with western notions of “healthy” and “unhealthy” may have had serious implications for the transmission of knowledge regarding the medicinal properties of tea between Japan and Europe. I am grateful to Joshua Schlachet for his fascinating talk on this subject (“Reddish or parish: eating and writing against medicine in Early Modern Japan”) at the 16th ICHSEA conference (Frankfurt, August 21st-25th 2023).

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Acknowledgments

Wat een genot om stil te staan bij een dankwoord...²³⁹

Writing this thesis has felt like constructing a vessel alike those of the VOC: an intimidating task, oftentimes appearing larger than myself, during which I've struck my own thumb instead of the nail more times than I can count. Having withstood a fair storm here and there, the ship that has now docked before me has carried me to many fascinating places – and who knows, will continue to do so in the future. My sincere gratitude goes to

Daan Wegener, for providing me with the necessary equipment while also offering sage advice every time I showed up with yet *another* blueprint. Without your help, this thesis would be a canoe at most;

Thijs Weststeijn, for thinking along and pointing me to new materials. Without your suggestions, I don't think this thesis would have been seaworthy;

Djoeke van Netten and Trude Dijkstra, for being so helpful in the early stages of this project. I hope you'll find it has been worth your investment;

My fellow students of room 4.14, for making me feel part of a larger fleet;

and

Hilbrand Wouters, for being the wind in my sails.

Anna Bruins, Utrecht (Zuilen), September 1st 2023



Figure 12 The galiot “Zuylen”, presumably shortly after its completion in 1658. Its transom is decorated with a depiction of the village the vessel was named after. Collection Scheepvaartmuseum.

²³⁹ Hilbrand Wouters, “Naturalizing historicizing, historicizing nature: The times of environmental history” (MSc thesis, Utrecht University, 2022), 84.

En hiermee legt de schrijver zijn pen neer en gaat languit op de grond liggen, overtuigd dat hij zijn best gedaan heeft en dat van niemand meer verlangd kan worden.

- Godfried Bomans, *De onsterfelijke Pa Pinkelman*

After vigils over several years, it happened that fatigued by long exposure and fasting, he [Darma] succumbed to sleep.

When he awoke, he cut off both his eyelids as the instrument of his sin and cast them in anger upon the ground in penance for his broken vow and as a precaution against the same thing happening in the future. Returning on the next day to the place of his punishment, he observed that by a wonderful transformation from each eyelid a shrub had grown – the tea plant.

- Engelbert Kaempfer, *Amoenitatum Exoticarum*, Observatio XIII: Theae Japonensis historia, 609-610. Translation from Latin by Steven D. Owyong

Appendix I: VOC knowledge directives

All the relevant segments from archival sources I've found for the period 1600-1700, providing instructions or restrictions regarding knowledge gathered under the authority of the VOC²⁴⁰

Overview of charters 1600-1700

- **1602 First charter establishing the VOC's monopoly for the duration of 21 years**

- Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 1 (Octrooi verleend door de Staten-Generaal betreffende de alleenhandel ten oosten van Kaap de Goede Hoop en ten westen van de Straat van Magallanes voor de duur van 21 jaar)
- Digitally accessible [here](#)
- The relevant information directives being:

Transcription Ende soo wanneer eenige schepen van de reyse zullen wederkeeren, sullen die generaels, ofte commanderende over de vloote, schip ofte schepen, gehouden wesen aen ons te commen doen rapport van het succes van hunne reyse, ende daervan scriftelyck relaes, soo sulcx vereyscht wordt, over te leveren.

- **1619 Missing charter patenting printing and publication of material**

- Described as missing in Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 22 (Lijst van de in het archief aanwezige octrooien)
- Digitally accessible [here](#)

Transcription Octroij door haar Hoog Mogenden aan d'Oost Indische Compagnie verleent, om alleen te mogen maken, doen maken, drukken en uitgeven de Journalen, Lees en paskaarten, oft andere beschrijvingen, memorien en afbeeldingen d'Oost Indische Navigatie, oft de Eijlanden daar om en bij gelegen, aangaande, de dato 12 Februarij 1619.

- Also described by Pieter van Dam in his *Beschrijvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie (1639-1701)* (1701)
- Digitally accessible [here](#) (82-83)

Text Volgens 't octroy, by den Staat aan de Compagnie verleent den 12 February 1619, vermag deselve alleen in dese landen te maken, doen maken, drukken en uytgeven de journalen, lees- en paskaarten, of andere beschrijvingen, memoriën en afbeeldingen der Oostindische navigatiën, of van d'eylanden, daer om en by gelegen, met verbod aan alle ingesetenen, de voorsch. journalen, lees- en paskaarten of andere beschrijvingen, memoriën en afbeeldingen der voorsch. navigatiën, of van de eylanden daar by om of gelegen, in 't geheel of ten deele, in 't groot of in 't kleyn, na te maken of na te drukken, in eeniger hande sprake en te verkopen, sonder consent van bewinthebberen, by verbeurte en confiscatie van de voorsch. nagmaakte of gedrukte exemplaren en daarenboven de somme van 1000 Caroliguldens, te appliceeren en derdendeel daarvan tot behoef van den armen, het tweede derdedeel

²⁴⁰ I use the term 'transcription' whenever a section has been transcribed (by me) from a handwritten original, and 'text' for sections taken directly from printed sources (either original or transcriptions appearing in later literature).

tot behoef van den officier, die de calanng sal doen en 't resterende derdepart tot behoef van de Compagnie.

- **1622 First charter renewal for a period of 21 years**
 - o Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, 1602-1795, inv. no. 2 (Octrooiverlening verleend door de Staten-Generaal voor een periode van 21 jaar, met in het octrooi aangebrachte veranderingen)
 - o Digitally accessible [here](#)
- **1647 Second charter renewal for a period of 25 years**
 - o Not accessible
- **1665 Third charter renewal for a period of 35 years**
 - o Not accessible
- **1696 Fourth charter renewal for a period of 40 years (starting 1700)**
 - o Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 7 (Octrooi verleend door de Staten-Generaal in 1602, met verlenging van 1696)
 - o Digitally accessible [here](#)
 - o The relevant information directives, appearing on f. 16, being:

Text Ende soo wanneer eenige schepen van de reyse sullen wederkeeren, sullen de Generaels of Commandeurs over de vloote, schip ofte schepen, gehouden wesen aen ons te komen doen rapport van het succes van hunne reyse, en daer van schriftelijck relaes soo sulcks vereyscht werdt over te geven.

Overview of article letters

- **1608 Article letter**
 - o Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 534 (Artikelbrief opgesteld door Verhoeff en de brede raad voor de officieren, soldaten en bootsgezellen van de vloot van dertien schepen, liggende voor Ilha de Maio 1608 feb. 6)
 - o Digitally accessible [here](#)
 - o Only knowledge directives given are in the second paragraph:

Transcription Eerstelijck sullen de Cappiteijnen, ende officieren gehouden wesen, goede eenicheijt, ende correspondentie, met malcanders te houden, ende d'een, en anderen, in alle voorvallende saecken, met goede raet, ende daet te assisteren, sonder eenige questie, oft geschil te moveren, op pene om naer gelegentheijt van der saecken bijden brenden, ende chrijsraden, gestraft te werden.

- **1629/1650 Article letter²⁴¹**
 - o Nationaal Archief, 1.10.69, inv. no. 21 (Verzameling van gedrukte en geschreven octrooien, resoluties, brieven enz. van de Staten-Generaal, Staten van Holland en Zeeland, magistraten van Middelburg betreffende de VOC)
 - o Digitally accessible [here](#)

²⁴¹ Exact year of publication unknown; the editor of this compilation has been unable to date the article letter, but suspects it was printed prior to 1650, while also pointing to an earlier article letter, seemingly suggesting actual origins may have been in 1629 (see his note in the index, as well as the handwritten note added to the letter's title page).

- The relevant information directives appear under N° 27:

Text article XXI De koopluuden ende Onder-Koopluuden sullen gehouden sijn, goede reeckeningen van hare ladinge ende lossinge, als oock van haren vorderen handel ende gebesoigneerde te houden; ghelijck mede de Schippers ende Stuyrluyden haer Scheeps-Journalen, die sy aen den Gouverneur Generael en Raden van India, oft haer Gecommitteerde aldaer, ende aen den Bewinthebberen t' haerder wederkomste in Nederlandt, t' allen tijden gehouden sullen wesen over te leveren, op pene van ses maenden gagie voor de Koopluyden ende Onder-Koopluuden, en voor de Schippers ende Stuyr-luyden van twee maenden gagie, bij den geenen te verbeuren, die daer van in gebreecke sal blijven.

Text article XXIII Geduirende 't verblijven in Oost-Indien, sal niemant, wie hy sy, vry-luyden oft in dienst van de Compaignie sijnde, geen uytghesondert, vermogen, eenighe waren, stoffen, vruchten, frayicheden oft rariteyten herwaerts over te senden, onder wat tijtel ofte pretext, ofte aen wien oock 't selve gesonden soude mogen wesen, op pene van confiscatie der voorschreven waren.

Text article XCI Sal mede een iegelijck gehouden sijn alle Journalen, Kaerten, Schriften, ofte aenteeckenine van Rheden, Stroomen, Havens, Kapen, Hemels-teecken, kourssen, mitsgaders alle appendentie van de Zee-vaert op dese voyagie gemaect, geannoteert, gheschreven, ofte verkregen, getrouwelijck over te geven in handen van den Gouverneur Generael, oft de Bewinthebberen alhier, het sy datse daer toe versocht werden, ofte niet; op de verbeurte van drie maenden gagie, ende vordere correctie nae gelegentheyd.

Text article XCII Niemandt, van hoedanigh ampt ofte qualiteyt hy zy, 't sy in Politijcque, ofte Kerckelijcke, ofte eenige andere bedienigne, van den minsten tot den meesten, in den dienst van de Compaignie in de Oost-Indien varende, sal vermogen aen eenige zijne vrienden ofte bekenden, ofte iemandt anders, selfs van de Bewinthebberen in 't particulier, eenige brieven te schrijven, ofte eenigh advijs te geven van de gelegentheyd van den handel, oorloge, comportementen van eenige dienaers van de Compaignie in Oost-Indien, ofte iets de Compaignie concernerende; maer alleenlijck aen de Bewinthebberen in 't generael; oft aen de respective Kameren, daer hy uytgevaren is; op de verbeurte van drie maenden gagie, die bevonden sal werden contrarie gedaen te hebben.

Text article XCIII Ten welcken eynde oock, ende opdat men mach weten oft het voorschreven Artijckel niet wert overtreden, niemant in den dienst oft eedt van de Compaignie wesende, op de verbeurte van de maent-gelden op de t' huys-reyse verdient, vermogen sale enige brieven uyt Oost-Indien over te brengen, ende hier te Lande bestellen; maer gehouden wesen de selve aen den Directeur Generael, ofte andere het opperste gebiet hebbende ter plaetse dae hy lest in Oost-Indien af vaert, omme naer huys te komen, over te leveren, om by hem, nevens de brieven aen de Compaignie geadresseert, in een doose geleght, ende aen de Compaignie ghesloten ende versegelt overgesonden te werden.

Text article XCIII Ende sullen alle particuliere brieven by de Compaignie gheopent, gelesen ende gevisiteert, ende by haer luyden moden in 't geheel ofte deel opgehouden, oft overgelevert werden, naer dat sy-luyden, tot dienst van de Compaignie, bevinden sullen te behooren.

Text article XCV Alle die gene, die de Justitie bevolen is, sullen gehouden wesen sorge te dragen, ende behoorlijcke toesicht te nemen, dat alle de Articulen ende Ordonantien hierinne begreepen, wel, ende volkomentlijck werden achtervolghet, onderhouden, ende d'overtreders der selver metter daet ghestrafft naer behooren.

Text article CXVIII De Koopluyden ende Schippers sullen besorgen, dat desen Artijckel-brief, soo haest de Schepen in Zee sullen wesen, ter eerster gelegentheyd van weder ende windt, ende voorts daer nae alle vier oft ses weecken, oft ten minsten, de korte marginale annotatien, ende eenige particuliere Articulen, die sy-luyden naer gelegentheyd van saecken noodig sullen achten voorgelesen, mistgaders de besondere mede gegeven geextraheerde Articulen, aen den Mast ende andere behoorlijcke plaetsen

geslagen, ende altemet vernieuwt werden; op dat het volck de selve wel in haer memorie houden, ende haer daer na te beter mogen reguleren.

- **1634 article letter**

- Jacobus Anne van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek 1602-1642*, vol.1 (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1885-1900).
- Available through the Special Collections of Utrecht University or digitally [here](#)
- The relevant information directives appears on page 339 - 340

Text article 110 Sal mede een yder gehouden syn alle journalen, caerten, schriften ofte aenteyckeninge van reeden, stroomen, havenen, caepen, hemelsteyckenen, courssen, mitsgaders alle appendentien van de zeevaert, op dese voyagie gemaect, geadnoteerd, geschreven ofte vercregen, getrouwelyck over te geven in handen van den Gouverneur-Generaal ofte der bewinthebberen alhier, hetsy datse daertoe versocht werden ofte niet, op de verbeurte van drie maenden gagie.

Text article 111 Niemandt van hoedanich ampt ende qualiteyt dat hy sy, in politycque, kerckelycke ofte eenige andere bedieninge, van den minsten tot den meesten, in de dienst van de Comp. in India vaerende, en sal vermogen aen eenige syner vrienden, bekenden ofte ymant aners, selfs aen de bewinthebberen, in 't particulier eenige brieven te schryven ofte eenich advys te geven van de gelegentheyte van den handel, oorloge, comportement van eenige dienaers van de Comp. in Indiën ofte yets de Comp. concerneerende, maer alleenlyck aen de bewinthebberen in 't generael ofte aen de respectieve cameran, daer hy uytgevaeren is, op de verbeurte van drie maenden gagie, die bevonden sal werden contrarie gedaen te hebben.

- **1643 article letter**

- Jacobus Anne van der Chijs *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek 1642-1677*, vol. 2, (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1885-1900)
- Available through the Special Collections of Utrecht University or digitally [here](#)
- The relevant information directives appears on pages 57-58:

Text article 1 In den eersten, sullen alle commisen hun reguleeren naer d'instructie, soo voor den breeden ende particulieren scheepsraadt, alsoock op het stuck vande justitie gemaect, mitsgaeders oock nae den seynbrieff, rantsoenbrieff ende generaelen articulbrieff, dien sy, nevens dese instructie, dickwyls sullen resumeeren ende den voorschreven articulbrieff de gemeene bootsgesellen, soldaeten ende andere haere ondersaeten somtyts, ten minsten een ter maent ofte ses weecken, voorlesen, opdat een yder daervan goede kennisse mach hebben ende hem naer den inhouden van dien punctuelyck reguleeren.

Overview of instructions and deeds

- **1598 Deed of promise of confidentiality**

- Nationaal Archief, 1.04.01, inv. no. 34 (Akte van belofte van geheimhouding enz., afgelegd door kooplieden, schippers, onderkooplieden, stuurlieden en onderstuurlieden).
- Digitally accessible [here](#)

Transcription Wij ondergeschreven coopluyden, schipperen, ondercoopluyden, stuerluyden ende onderstuerluyden beloven ende verbinden ons mits desen bijden eedt bij ons op den artykelbrieff gedaen dat wij alle journalen, caerten, schriften, affteyckeningen van landen, steden, stromen, reden, havenen, capen ofte hoecken, hemelsteyckenen, cursen ende alle dependentiën van deze zeevaert op dese voyage gemact, geannoteert, geschreven ofte vercregen, getrouwelick sullen overleveren in handen van den Admiraal ofte bewinthebberen, hetsij dat wij daertoe versocht werden ofte niet, sonder daeraff enige

copie ofte cladden te mogen achterhouden ofte andere mede te deelen. Dat wij oock alles so ons dese voyagie belangend alreede ontdeckt is, ofte tgene door een ervarentheyt tot onser kennisse soude mogen comen secrete sullen houden, sonder daeraff niemant tot nadele van dese compagnie enige kennisse te geven. Ende so wij dese voyagie volbracht wederom voorbij de *Cabo de bone Esperance* souden willen vaeren ons van geene andere coopluyden ofte compagnien sullen laten gebruycken dan alleen in dienste van dese compagnie, ende dat om redelick sallaris tot seggen van goede mannen hem dies verstaenden. Alles sonder arch ofte list **en** kennisse der waerheyt hebben wij dit den xxiiii april 1598 onderteeckend: [signatures]

- **1607 XVIII Instruction for merchants and other employees who will remain stationed in East-Asia**
 - o Preserved by Pieter van Dam in his *Beschrijvinge van de Oostidische Compagnie (1639-1701)* (1701)
 - o Digitally accessible [here](#) (584 – 589)
 - o Of particular interest are the following instructions:

Text sections page 586-587 By alle schepen, die na dese landen gaan, sal den opperkoopman oversenden copie van de reeckeninge ende journaal, tot die tijt toe gehouden, by hem en syne assistenten ondergeteekent; en sal daeromme 't selvige doen tydelijck prepareren en dubbelt daar af doen schryven, insonderheyt alle teerkosten en andere ongelden in deselve reeckeninge in 't lange ende breede stellen.

Sal oock aan de Bewinthebberen adviseren, wat nieuwe gelegentheyt van de handeling in de Oostindische quartieren by hem bekent sijn geworden: in wat manieren 't selve souden mogen in 't werck gestelt en vervolgt worden. Item hoe de saecken en affairen van de Portugesen hen in die quartieren toedraeght, ende wat tot afbreuck van henlieden en verseeckeringe onser handeling door de Bewinthebberen dient gedaan.

[...]

Ende sullen oock niet vermogen iets in dese landen te senden, nogh oock in 't particulier aan enige vrinden of andere brieven te schryven, dan alleen onder couvert van de Bewinthebberen van de Compagnie [...]

Text section page 589 Hiernevens seeckere memoriën ende schriftelycke discourssen van de handelingen ende waren, in diverse plaatsen vllende, welke by de Bewinthebberen is geannoteert ende versamelt uyt het raport en verhaal van den Admiraal, opperkoopluyden en andere personen, in deselve plaatsen geweest sijnde, welke memoriën den opperkoopman en syne assistenten dickwils sullen lesen, examineren en de waarheyt van dien nader ondersoecken, alsoock van andere plaatsen, omme daardoor Compagnies proffijt te vorderen ende met alle schepen aan de Compagnie van de gelegentheyt derselver in 't brede schryven.

d'Opperkoopluyden sullen neerstelijck hen informeren, door wat middel en in wat manieren den vryen handel in China soude mogen tweegh gebraght worden, alsmede den handel in Japan; ende ingevalle daar geen raat of remedie toe ware, asldan te letten op wat naeste plaetse men soude mogen bequamelijck ende onverhindert van de Portugesen met die Chinesen en Japonnesen handelen, ende dat de plaetse soo gelegen waere, dat men daar af en aan konde vaeren, sonder veranderinge van mousson te verwaghten.

- **1617 XVIII Instruction for VOC administrators and merchants**
 - o Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 313 (1616 apr. 11 - 1633 nov. 29. Met inhoudsopgave 1616 – 1633), f. 92 - 108
 - o Digitally accessible [here](#)

- Included by Pieter van Dam in his *Beschrijvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie (1639-1701)* (1701), which is digitally accessible [here](#) (pp. 590 – 601)
- Of particular interest are the following instructions:

Text article 30 Alle commisen, ondercommisen en assistenten in 't generaal, sullen een schriftelijk memorieboek of journaal houden, ter plaatse harer residentie, omme daarinne te annoteren het notabelste, aldaar te lande binnen haren tijt passerende, bysonder daarinne stellende 't gene daar de vereenigde Compagnie aan gelegen is, omme hier te lande komende, aan de Bewinthebberden over te leveren.

Text article 38 Sullen oock de voorsch. kooplyden besorgen, dat van de gantsche reyse, van de cours, die der gehouden ende van 't gene op de reyse gepasseert is, pertinente journalen gehouden en gemaect mogen werden en dat deselve met d' eerste schepen, nevens de resolutiën en sententiën, overgesonden werden, latende altijt eene copie of dubbelt tot Bantam, en besorgende, dat alle kaarten, boecken, brieven en teyckeningen aan Bewinthebberden mogen overgesonden en ter hant gestelt werden, volgens het 127 en 128 artyckel van den artyckelbrief.

Text article 46 De comisen en schippers sullen ter vergaderinge van de Bewinthebbers t' haerder wederkomste rapport doen van hare reyse en van alle 't gene sylieden geduyrende deselve reyse gesien en geobserveert hebben, tot dienst, schade of bate van de Compagnie dienende, waarvan de commisen oock, aler hare maantgelden t' ontfangen, een schriftelijk discours, rapport en remonstrantie sullen overleveren, daarin soveel doelnijck observerende d' ordre en aanwysigne, haarlieden by de medegegeven memorie op 't stellen van de cursen aangewesen.

Text article 52 Alle commisen, soowel als de schippers, assistenten en andere officieren en dienaren van de Compagnie, werden expresselijck verboden aan iemant anders, dan aan de Bewinthebberden, van den stant, staet en gelegentheyt der saecken in de Indiën eenige brieven te schryven.

Text article 53 Ten welcken eynde alle brieven, in conformité van 't 128 en volgende artyckel van den artyckelbrief, in handen van de Bewinthebberden eerst overgelevert, en by hunlieden – sulcx goetvinden²⁴² – geopent en gevisiteert sullen werden.

Text article 55 De nagelaten schriften en papieren van de predikanten en sieckentroosters sullen t' haerder overlyden geïnventariseert, besegelt en besloten aan de Compagnie overgesonden werden.

- **1619 Patent for the East Indian Company**

- Nationaal Archief, 1.01.02, inv. no. 12302 (1617-1623), f. verso 104 – f. 106
- Digitally accesible [here](#)

Transcription Nadien de voorschreven caerten, journalen, ende affteyckeningen der plaetsen, ende gelegentheden, hierboven gementioneert, soo door den druck, als anderssints alle de werelt geopenbaert, bekent, ende gemeengemaect worden, ende daerdoor nyet alleen alle omleggende potentaten, princen, ende republicquen, maer oock particuliere coopluyden, soo hier als elders, occasie, ende behulpsaemheit, gegeven, om d'voorschreven Oostindische navigatie, ende negotien mede bijder handt te grijpen, in der supplianten vaerwater te comen, ende hunluyden alsoo een voordeel aff te sien, gelijk sulcx dagelijcx gesien wierdt, soo in Engelandt, als Denemarcken, ende andere plaetsen meer gepractiseert, ende int werckgesteld te worden, twelck hoe schadelijck, ende bederffelijck was voor de voorschreven supplianten, ende dese vereenichde provintien conden wij selver oordeelen, die int combineren van alle de Compaignen bevonden, ende verstaen hadden de voorschreven Oostindische vaert tot welstant vandien geheel dienstelijck, ende nootsaekelijck te sijn, bijzonder nademael notoor was dat in verscheijden coninckrijcken, ende landen, geconsidereert wordende, d'inconvenienten, die uijt de publicatie vande

²⁴² Footnote by the publisher: "Lees: goetvindende"

voorschreven memorien, journalen, ende affteyckeninigen staen te verwachten, nijet alleen wel expresselijck verboden s dusdanige secreten voor den dach te brengen, ende bekent te maecken, maer oock tegens de revelateurs derselver naer behooren geanimadvereert wordt, blijkende bijde resolutie bijde raeden vande Indien te Lisbona genomen, inhoudende, ende mede brengende scherpe prohibitie aen eenen Mandel Figneredo²⁴³, meester van de stiermanschappen, ende opsiender vande pascaerten, ende anderen aldaer, geen beschrijvinge, ofte affteyckeninge vande gelegtheden vande Oost, ende West Indien te publceren²⁴⁴, ofte herwaerts over in dese landen te seynden, ende door sulcken insicht, ende oorsaecke soo waren oock Mr. Jaemes Stuwaert Engelsch stierman, hier te landt gebracht hebbende de caerte vande Noordt-west passagie, namentlijk de Straete Hudsons, ende mr. thomas Bonaerd seeckere pertinente caerte des landts Spitsbergen in haer thuyt comen tot Londen van wegen de voorschreven openingen hier gedaen qualyck getracteert geweest, sulcx dat door vreesse van gelycke ontmoetinge de Engelsche stierlyuden nyet en dorven haere pascaerten van Indien aen yemant meer vercoopen, ende mitsdien tselffde alles wel rypelyck geconsidereert, ende geexamineert zynde het scheen een gansch ongerymde, ende impertinente saecke, jae een groote faute, ende abuys, soo inlantse, als vreemde, soo geschreven, als gedruckte lees, ende pascaerten, waardoor alle de werelt geïnvideert wordt, om door de aenwysinge, ende assistentie van dien yet opde voorschreven plaetsen tot inestimable schade der supplianten, ende deser landen te attenteren, daerover dat zij supplainten om tselffde te prevenieren, ende soo veel doendelijck is te beletten, versocht ende gebeden hebben dat ons soude gelieven hun te vergunnen ende octroyeren dat niemant van deser landen ingesetenen voortaan eenige journalen, lees-, ende pascaerten, ofte andere beschryvingen, memorien, ende affbeeldingen der voorschreven Oostindische navigatien, ofte vande eylanden daerom, ende bij gelegen, sonder hunlyuden expresse toelatinge, ende consent den tijt des octroys haer supplianten bij ons verleent geduerende sal mogen maecken, ofte doen maecken, ende insgelycx te revoceren, nederhouden, ende in te trecken de octroyen die wy voor desen opde uuytgevinge van eenige der voorschreven caerten, ende andere gelegtheden, ende principalicke t'gene deselve opde publicatie der lees, ende pascaerten van Jan Huygens soude mogen hebben vergunt, ten minsten de voorschreven voor desen gegeven octroyen nyet te continueren, ofte prolongeren, maer veel eer te restringeren, ende limiteren, alles op pene van confiscatie van alle d'exemplaren, die soo hier te lande, als eders buyten de resorte van dien van eenige der ingesetenen soude mogen gemaect, gedrukt, gescreven, gedivulgeert, ende vercocht, ofte gedistribueert worden, ende bovendien te vervallen in een boete van duysent ponden van xl grooten stuck, ten behouwe, ende proffyte vande voorschreven supplianten, welcken aengemerckt, soo ist dat wy genegen wesende ter bede vande voorschreven bewinthebberen vande Oostindische compaignie, wy deselve geconsenteert, geaccordeert, ende geoctroyeert hebben, consenteren, accorderen, ende Octroyeren mits desen, omme voortaan, geduerende den tyt van het octroy by ons deselve compaignie verleent alleene inde Vereenichde Nederlanden te moegen maecken, doen maecken, drucken, ende uuytgeven de journalen, lees, ende pascaerten, ofte andere beschryvingen, memorien, ende affbeeldingen, der Oostindische navigatien, ofte vande eylanden daerom, ende bygelegen aengaende, verbiedende alle, ende eenyegelyck ingesetenen van dese Vereenichde Nederlanden binnen den voorschreven tyt des octroys de voorschreven journalen, lees, ende pascaerten, ofte andere beschryvingen, memorien, ende affbeeldingen, der Oostindische naviagtien, ofte vande eylanden daeromme, ende bygelegen, int geheele, ofte ten deele, int groot, oft int cleyne na te maecken, ofte na te drucken in eenigerhande sprake, ende te vercoopen, ofte elders nagedrukt, ende gemaect inde Vereenichde Provincien te brengen om te vercoopen, ofte elders nagedrukt, ende gemaect inde Vereenichde Provincien te brengen om te vercoopen, sonder consent vande voorschreven bewinthebberen, by verbeurte, ende confiscatie vande voorschreven nagemaecte, ofte gedrukte exemplaren, ende daerenboven vande somme van thien hondert Caroluguldens, T'appliceren een derddendeel daarvan tot behoeff vanden officier die de calengie doen sal, het tweede derddendeel tot behoeff vanden armen, ende het resterende derddendeel tot behoeff vande voorschreven supplianten, ontbieden, ende bevelen daerom allen officieren, justicieren, magistraten, ende inwoonders vande

²⁴³ More likely supposed to be Figueredo, but lacking marker

²⁴⁴ Typo in original manuscript

voorschreven Vereenichde Nederlanden, mitsgaders allen anderen dien dit eenichssints aengaen mach, dat zy de voorschreven supplianten doen, ende laten genieten, ende gebruycken tvolcommen effect van desen onsen octroye, consent, ende privilegie, cesserende alle beleth ende wederseggen ten contrarien, want wy tselve bevonden hebben alsoo te behooren gegeven onder onsen cachette, paraphure, ende de signature van onsen griffier in s'Gravenhage opten xiien dacher maent van februario xvi ende negentien.

- **1643 Instructien: Van der Chijs, Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek**

- Jacobus Anne van der Chijs *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek 1642-1677*, vol. 2, (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1885-1900)
- Available through the Special Collections of Utrecht University or digitally [here](#)
- The relevant information directives appears on pages 64-67.

Text article 28 Ende asloo door het verongelucken, verbranden ofte blyven vande schepen de boecken niet ter hant comen, alsmeede de scheepsboecken tot groot nadeel vande luyden, die in Indien de Comp. hebben gedient, omme 't selve voor te comen, sal seer noodich wesen, dat de commysen haere boecken drie ofte viermael copieeren ende met drie off vier schepen, elck een derselver boecken, soo lange over senden, totdat sy verstaen sullen, dat de schepen, waermede sy gesonden worden, in salvo waren, hier te lande g'arriveert en overgecomen sullen wesen.

Text article 38 Alle commysen, onder-commysen ende adsistenten generaelyck sullen een schriftelyck memorieboek off journael houden ter plaetse haerer residentie, omme daerinne te annoteren het notabelste, aldaer te lande binnen haeren tyt passerende, bysonder daerin stellende 't gene, dear de vereenichde Comp. aengelegen syn omme, hier te lande comende, aen de Bewinthebberen over te leveren.

Text article 46 De commysen ende schippers sullen ter vergaederinge vande Bewinthebberen t'haerder wedercompste rapport doen van haer reyse ende van alle 't geene sylieden geduerende de reyse gesien ende geoserveert hebben, tot dienst, schaede ofte bate van de Comp. dienende, waervan de commysen oock, aleer haere maentgelden ontfangen, een schriftelyck discoursrapport ende remonstrantie sullen overleveren, daerin sooveel doenlyck observeerende d'ordre ende aenwysinge, haerlieder byde mede gegeven memorie op't stellen vande discoursen aangewesen.

Overview of memories

- **1614**

- Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 312 (1614 nov. 21 - 1617 apr. 20. Met inhoudsopgave 1614 – 1617), f. 53-55
- Digitally accesible [here](#):

Transcription Memorie vant gene daer op de commisen ende andere Officiers int het stellen van haerlieden rapporten, ofte discoursen, sullen hebben te letten om de Bewindthebberen van alles punctuelijck te onderrichten.

Daer sijn ses principaele ofte hooftpointen daer op in alle discoursen principalijcken dient geleth:

1. Eerst op de gelegentheijt ende situatie vande plaetse daerse geweest sijn ofte ten dienste gelegen hebben vande *compagnie*.

2. Ten anderen op de politie ofte regeringe der selver
3. Ten derden op den handel traffycq, ende principaele neeringe aldaer
4. Ten vierden op de vruchten vande landen
5. Ten vijffden op de vijantsmacht ende gelegentheijt ende correspondentie indeselve plaets
6. Ten sesden op de macht ende gelegentheijt vande *compagnie* ter selver plaetse

In het deduceeren vant eerste point sal dienen gheleth ofte in een caert aff geteijckent oft ten minsten particulierlijck aengenwesen

1. de groottheydt
2. figure t'sij ronde ofte vierkant
3. de poolus hoochte
4. de rievieren ende haevenen, diepte, wijtte, ende cours der selver, ten oosten, westen, noorden, ofte suyden
5. Wat reeden, ende hoedanigen grondt ofte diepte oock hoe naer de Scheepen, aen tlandt ofte de forten connen er comen
6. wat ende hoe veel steden ofte dorpen
7. Ofte den grondt is vlack ofte bergachtich
8. den aert vanden grondt, cley, sandt, steenen, veen *etc.*

Indt beschrijven van tweede te letten eerst op de wereltlijcke overrichen

1. Oft het landt bij een coninck deur adelen, ofte bij de gemeijnte ofte by niemandt maer int wilde geregeert wordt
2. Wat staetmacht ende zuyte²⁴⁵, den coninck heeft
3. Wat ende hoe veel krijghsvolck
4. Wat fortten palleijsen, ende sterckte ende hoedanich de selve sijn
5. Wat incoomsten ende middelen
6. Wat vijanden en Oorloge en waerom hy d'oorloge voerd
7. Hoe hy tot onse als oock tot de prtugeesen genegen is
8. Hoe ende bij wien de Justitie in cevilen saecken wort bedient
9. Hoe in crumenele ende wat delictie daer meest gestraft worden
10. Wat haer voornaempste waepenen sijn ter oorloge

Ten anderen op de geestelijcke overicheyt

1. Voor eerst wat religie ende Godtsdienst aldaer is
2. Wat hoe veel en hoedanige kercken
3. Wat middelen *ende* incoomste de selve hebben
4. Wat priesters ende onderwien syn staen
5. Hoe sy hun tegens ons draegen int stuck vande religij
6. Wat heure principaele cerremonien syn inden godtsdienst inde dooden, inde houwelijcken ende andere principaele saecken
7. wat sy vande Christenreligie, houden en hoe sy daer toe oft tegens gesint sijn

Ten derden op de oicomonie, ofte huyshoudinge *ende* regeringe die by den eedelen ende andere particulieren gehouden wort

1. Wat voorhuijsen, end huijstraet de inwoonders hebben
2. Wat haer cleedinge en principael cieraet is
3. Wat spijsen ende dranck
4. Wat het voor fatsoen van volck is soo mans als vrouwen

²⁴⁵ Suite (entourage)

5. Hoe sy den echten staet houden
6. Hoe sy haer kinderen opvoeden
7. Insonderheijt die geene die van ons volck, ofte andere christenen geproceerd worden
8. Wat coustuuijmen aldaer syn inde successien
9. Hoe starck sij aldaer van mans syn, hoe sterck ongeveer van vrouwen ende kinderen
10. Item van wat aert, ende conditie, wreet, ofte vrientelijck, trouw ofte ontrouw

Op het derden point te annoteren

1. Wat handel, ende traffyckque aldaer omme gaedt ende in hoedanigen waeren den prijs van de waeren soowel van die geene die daer vallen, als de geene die men daer van hier ofte van andere plaetsen brengt
2. Wat scheepsvaart daer is, ende hoe veel schepen oock wat soorten
3. Wat proffijten, datter op den handel vallen, ende op welke waeren de meeste
4. Wat hout ende andere materialen datter vallen tot de scheepsbouwinghe ende toerustinghe van de schepen
5. Wat ambachten ofte neeringe aldaer te lande sijn

Op het vierde aen te teijkenen

1. Wat vruchte aldaer te lande wassen, soo van geboomte als van saedt, tarruw, rijs, *etcetera*
2. Oft het landt bequaem soude wesen tot hierlantsche ofte andere vruchten aller nu sijn
3. Watter voor vee ofte bestiael is
4. Wat voor lijftoocht voor menschen ofte beesten ende hoe dier ofte goeden coop
5. Oft er matterie ende wetenschap is om coolen, steen, calck, buspoeder, touwen, ofte anderen tot huijsen forten ende schepen noodige materialen te maeken
6. Oft men aldaer wel bestial van dese ofte andere landen soude connen plantten

Op het vijffde te beschrijven

1. de fortten
2. forcen
3. regieringe
4. macht en correspondentie
5. als oock den handel, ende traffijckque van onse vijanden inde selve landen

Op het seste particulierlijck aen te wijzen

1. Getal, forme, *ende* sterckte van onse fortten
2. Hoe veel geschuts en volck daer op is
3. Wat ammunitien van oorloge ende andere provisien als oock vande vivres
4. Hoe veel volcx en watter van ammunitien vivres schepen jachten *ende* andersins soude van noode wesen om soo wil tegens de inlanders, als tegens de vijanden verseekert te sijn
5. Wat handel *ende* traffijckq aldaer de beste is
6. Ende voorts alles dat aldaer tot nut dienst *ende* voordeel vande *compangie* mach geremarcqueerd worden.

- **Between 1614 and 1619**

- o Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 359 (Kopie-instructies betreffende de reis naar en het verblijf in Indië)
- o The pages are unmarked, but the relevant memory is digitally accessible [here](#)
- o In content no substantial alterations from the original 1614 version

- **End of 1619 / beginning of 1620**
 - Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 313 1616 apr. 11 - 1633 nov. 29. Met inhoudsopgave 1616 – 1633
 - The relevant memory is on f. 517-520, digitally accesible [here](#)
 - In content no substantial alterations from the original 1614 version

- **C. 1634**
 - Nationaal Archief, 1.10.30, inv. no. 66 (Memorie van tgeene daerop de commisen ende andere officieren in het stellen van haerluijder rapporten ofte discoerssen zullen hebben te letten op de Bewinthebberen van alles punctuelijk te onderrechten)
 - Not digitally accessible, but going by Van Meersbergen and Birkenholz, no substantial alterations from the original 1614 version

- **1643**
 - Nationaal Archief, 1.04.02, inv. no. 11050 (Memorie voor de kooplieden en andere VOC-dienaren, met voorschriften voor het opstellen van hun rapporten en de zaken die daarin moeten worden behandeld)
 - Digitally accessible [here](#)
 - In content no substantial alterations from the 1614 version, although this is the earliest printed version I could find

- **1670**
 - Jacobus Anne van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek* vol. 2, 1642-1677 (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1885-1900), 530-534
 - Available through the Special Collections of Utrecht University or digitally [here](#)

Appendix II: Tea in Dutch publications

This appendix offers an overview of the publications addressed in Chapters II and III. All of them contain descriptive information on tea acquired under the authority or with the support of the VOC. They are shown in chronological order of publication.²⁴⁶

Van Linschoten (Jan Huygen), *Itinerario* (1596)

- Tea is addressed in a description of Japan, 35-36. It is the earliest printed mention of tea in Dutch, the translation offers the earliest use of the word in English
- Just to clarify: The *Itinerario* in fact consists of three separate books: The *Itinerario* (which mentions tea), the *Beschrijvinge van de gantsche custe van Guinea*, and the *Reys-gheschrift vande navigatien der Portugaloyzers in Orienten*, which was published ahead of the other books so Cornelis de Houtman could bring it with him to the Indonesian archipelago in 1595.
- No image of tea plant

Bontius (Jacobus), *De medicina Indorum* (1642)

- Tea is described in *Dialogus VI: De fructibus, ac omnigenis oleribus, ac acetariis herbis in Iava*, 95-97
- Medical manuscripts had been sent to his brother in 1631, but publication (by Franciscus Hackius) took a long time
- No image of tea plant

Bontius (Jacobus), *Historiae naturalis et medicae Indiae orientalis, liber sextus* (1658)

- Tea is described in chapter I of liber VI: “De Herba, seu Fructice, quem Chineses *The* dicunt, unde potum suum ejusdem nominis consiciunt,” 87-90.
- This book is part of Willem Piso’s *De Indiae utriusque re naturali et medica*, which was the second edition to his 1648 work *Historia naturalis Brasiliae*. *De Indiae utriusque* reproduces the four books of Bontius’ 1642 publication *De medicina Indorum*, but adds two extra books (liber V and VI), on animals and plants
- The section on tea includes an image of the tea plant, not present in the 1648 edition of *Historia naturalis Brasiliae* or *De medicina Indorum*. It had been provided to Piso by commander François Caron

Tulp (Nicolaes), *Observationes Medicae* (1652)

- Tea is addressed in the second edition of the *Observationum Medicarum Libri Tres* (1641), 400-403. In this expanded version, book IV was added, of which the last chapter (LIX) is on tea.

Martini (Martino), uitgever Blaeu, *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655)

²⁴⁶ Some works that include descriptive sections on tea have not been addressed in this thesis, yet deserve honorable mentions: Simon de Vries, *Curieuse aenmerckingen der bysonderste Oost en West-Indische verwonderens-waerdige dingen* (1682); Nicolaes Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartaryen* (1690); Eberhard Ysbrants Ides, *Drie-jarige reizje naar China* (1702).

- Included in *Atlas Maior*, vol. IX (ed. 1664).
- There is a separate section on beverages in “Voorreden van de Sinesche Atlas”, page 12, and a section on tea specifically in “Het negende landschap: Kiagnan oft Nanking”, page 130.

Nieuhof (Joan), *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie* (1665)

- Tea is addressed in vol. I, chapter 15, 122-123. An image is included.
- Additionally, a description of tea drinking practices is provided on page 46.

Baldaeus (Philippus), *Naauwkeurige beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel, der zelve aangrenzende ryken, en het machtige eyland Ceylon* (1672)

- Tea is described in chapter XXV, 182-184.

Bontekoe (Cornelis), *Tractaat van het excellentste kruyd thee* (1678)

- The entire work is dedicated to tea and contains no images

Breyne (Jacob), *Exoticarum aliarumque minus cognitarium plantarum centuria prima* (1678)

- Japanese and chinese tea is described in chapter LII, “The Sinensium, Sive Tsia Japonensibus”, 111-115.
- Including an image of the tea plant.
- The observations on tea made by Willem ten Rhijne are added as an appendix: see *Excerpta ex observationibus suis Japonicis Physicis &c. de Fructice Thee*, VII – XXV.

Cleyer (Andreas), *Miscellanea Curiosa, Decuria II, Annus VII* (1689)

- Japanese tea is described in Observatio LXX, “De Plantis Japonensibus Isnoacky, Ger. Eyserholz/& Tzumacky”, 132-133.
- Including image of tea plant

Kaempfer (Engelbert), *Amoenitatum Exoticarum* (1712)

- *Tsubakke*'s botanical properties are described on pages 850-853, which includes an image of the plant
- A more elaborate description, which includes the wonderfully mythical origin story of tea and a discourse on tea practices, is provided in *Observatio XIII: Theae Japonensis historia*, 605-631. It includes another image of the tea plant, as well as depictions of Darma (from whose cut-off eyelids the first tea plant supposedly sprang) and tea equipment
- Tea is also addressed throughout his *History of Japan* (London, 1727), for example on pages 82-83 and 304. In line with the rest of the book, it is more concerned with cultural and social practices pertaining to tea, and therefore an elaborate description of its natural properties is absent. The original manuscripts are kept at the British

Library, Sloane MS 2919/2929 (as well as a few others), but I have been unable to procure scans of them

Valentyn (François), *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën* (1726)

- A description of tea is given in vol. 4, third book, second chapter, 13-19.