

The China Trade of the V.O.C. in the 18th Century¹

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1. HISTORICAL SURVEY

Before 1729

It is a remarkable fact, that the trade of the Dutch East India Company (V. O. C.) with China during the 18th century has received as yet hardly any scholarly attention at all, although for the Company its importance was far greater than it had ever been during the 17th century, a period which has been the subject of several studies.²

When in 1662 Taiwan was lost for the V. O. C. as a basis for trade, several attempts were made to deal directly with South China. None of these had the desired effect. A constant and reliable supply of Chinese goods of the right type and quality had not materialised. However, the need for the V. O. C. to seek its own ways to China soon became considerably less pressing, for in about 1674 the Chinese authorities began to reduce their export-restrictions, and then abolished them completely in 1683. This led to an intensive and regular traffic by Chinese junks on Batavia, so that henceforth all the Chinese goods the Company needed could be obtained in Batavia, without extra expense or risk and at prices that were practically the same as in Canton. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Government in Batavia in 1689 gave up all attempts to obtain trade concessions for the Chinese coast.

In this China trade tea had become an article of great importance, besides other Chinese products such as porcelain, lacquer wares and drugs. In the middle of the 17th century the habit of drinking tea was considered something eccentric in Europe unless done for medical reasons. But it became popular in many strata of society towards the end of that century. From a cultural-historical point of view this was a highly interesting development. In the houses of wealthy people tea-rooms were furnished: rooms devoted to the drinking of tea in the company of guests. Such rooms had specially designed furniture (tea-table, tea-stand). Porcelain tea-sets were stored in porcelain-cabinets. There they remained visible and could be admired (together with the other porcelains in the household) standing behind glazed doors.

Lesser people took their tea in public tea-houses. Socially, women took advantage of this fashion of drinking tea. They were able to move more freely, because attending tea-circles

had become a respectable and popular way of passing the time.³

All this caused a considerable increase in the demand for tea, at the time still exclusively grown in China. The enormous profits realised on the European markets from tea motivated a number of Companies to try and obtain their tea directly from China, thus obviating uncertainties of the intermediate trade. The V. O. C. however, for the time being, continued to trade via the established channels, relying on the supply brought by Chinese junks to Batavia. On the average fourteen junks arrived there each year, and the tea was shipped on to the Netherlands in a single vessel.⁴

The ill-effects of this cumbersome method were not slow to appear. Competitors bought ever larger quantities of tea, and brought them to Europe more quickly than the V. O. C. could. Also the quality was better, partly because they shipped tea in chests lined with lead foil.

Two reasons finally convinced Heren XVII to change their policy. Firstly there was stagnation in the traffic to Batavia in the years 1718-1722, when no junks arrived from China, owing to internal troubles there. The Portugese in Macao undertook to supply Batavia during this period, but they were more expensive. Secondly there was increasing competition from merchants in the Southern Netherlands, who in 1723 had formed the Company of Ostend. Already in 1718 they had begun to trade with China, and the excellent tea they had imported became a serious threat to the V. O. C., even on the internal market of the Northern Netherlands.⁵ Heren XVII tried in many ways to put an end to their competitor in the lucrative tea-trade. In 1719 they had ordered the Government in Batavia to obtain from Canton as much tea as they could manage, so that, by dumping large quantities, the price in Europe could be lowered. It is interesting to note that, in spite of the difficulties caused by the lessening supply through Chinese junks, the Government in Batavia still refused to deal directly with China. The main reason was that it did not want to antagonize the influential Chinese colony in Batavia which was too powerful in the pepper trade. All the Government did was to buy as much tea as could be obtained-which was not enough to saturate the European tea-market. However, international political pressure finally stopped the activities of the Ostend Company in 1727. As soon as this happened, the Chamber of Amsterdam urged Heren XVII to better start dealing with China directly, before other competitors seized the initiative. Heren XVII agreed, and, since in the past Batavia had been so stubborn, decided to act without consulting the Government there. In 1728 two ships were prepared, the 'Buuren' and the 'Coxhorn'; only the 'Coxhorn' sailed, the 'Buuren' being prevented to do so by frost.⁶

Direct trade 1729-1734

This direct trade with China lasted until 1734. The Chamber of Amsterdam sent two ships each year, joined in 1731 and 1733 by another two of the Zeeland Chamber. They

sailed to China without staying over in Batavia, much to the annoyance of the Government there, which had no control over this trade.

Because the Netherlands had little to offer the Chinese by way of trade (small quantities of lead and Leyden cloth were the only goods shipped out), the merchants had to pay in silver. Each ship carried about *f* 300,000. — in minted and unminted silver, which constituted a considerable stress on the cash-flow of the Company. Also, since no cargo was carried on the out-voyage, the entire expense of the venture had to be found in the profits of the return journey. This made the other Chambers, particularly that of Rotterdam, reluctant to join: they considered direct trade too expensive.

Fortunately, the Chamber of Amsterdam which had started the China trade as an experiment, kept a very careful and detailed account of her part of the venture, which has survived. From this the following figures could be extracted:

Table 1 Financial survey of the China trade 1729-1734 in *f* (Amsterdam)

year	number of ships	costs of return-cargo	proceeds at auction	total expenses	net proceeds
1729	1	284.902	708.968	99.593	324.473
1730	1	234.932	545.839	98.731	212.176
1731	2	524.933	1.143.442	195.394	423.115
1732	2	562.622	1.237.515	232.359	442.534
1733	2	448.349	1.239.037	225.188	565.550
1734	1	304.450	752.693	90.796	357.448

It is clear that not so much increasing expenses as decreasing proceeds caused by ill-advised buying of inferior merchandize, were the cause of the drop in net proceeds until 1733. A matter that also caused a great deal of annoyance was extensive smuggling undertaken by ships' officers, crews and merchants alike. In order to solve these problems, and so make the China-trade which in spite of everything had turned out to be quite important more profitable, a number of suggestions were put forward in the meetings of Heren XVII.

In addition the opinion of the Government in Batavia was asked. Finally, after long discussions and extensive correspondence Heren XVII decided upon a compromise: henceforth all ships would call in at Batavia on the out-journey, which meant that they could sail with useful cargo. Silver remained the basis of the China trade. But in Batavia the ships could take in tin and spices (primarily pepper, nutmeg and cloves), the profits of which could increase the working-capital. However, the quantities of such cargo were to remain small, so as not to damage the Chinese junk trade. On the return journey the ships were to sail straight back to the Netherlands, without calling at Batavia, just as was the practice with the cinnamon-ships from Ceylon.

1735-1756

The procedure as described above was started in 1735. The Government in Batavia

organised the China trade in the same way as the trade with other parts of Asia. It appointed the merchants, decided upon the quantity of the additional goods for China, and was responsible for business in general. It had obtained permission from Heren XVII to send one ship each year to China in order to supply the needs of Batavia itself and of its inter-Asiatic trade. Gold was of prime importance to this trade: in Canton it was comparatively cheap, and Batavia needed it in order to buy cotton fabrics in India, which in turn were necessary in the spice-trade.

During the years 1744–1756 the Government also used the opportunity to set up a regular service between Canton and Surat, this in spite of the fact that Heren XVII in 1753 specifically forbade it, as no real profit could be shown and there was more than a suspicion that it was kept up for the purpose of private enrichments.

At first only two shiploads of cargo were bought in China each year: one for the Chamber of Amsterdam and the other for Batavia. In 1737 the Chamber of Zeeland joined with a ship by way of experiment. The results were satisfactory, and the trade of the Chinese junks did not appear to suffer from the increasing amounts of spices, aromatic woods and other goods shipped in Dutch bottoms from Batavia. So in 1739 Heren XVII gave permission for two ships to sail for the Netherlands yearly. This arrangement included the smaller Chambers of Enkhuizen, Hoorn, Delft and Rotterdam as well, who took their turn in fitting out the ships.

In 1742 a project by Governor General Van Imhoff was approved. It opened the possibility for private persons to ship tea from China to Batavia or directly to the Netherlands by means of V. O. C. ships. For this service ordinary freight prices were charged.⁷ The object was to set some bounds to the extensive smuggling of tea. The new scheme was a great success. For instance in 1747 no less than six ships were sent to Canton in order to deal with these private tea orders. Obviously, in spite of the enormous quantities of tea imported by the European Companies, there was still ample margin for profit in these private ventures, particularly since the greater part of the tea was subsequently smuggled to England.

However, in 1751 Heren XVII curtailed these possibilities for private trade. The cause was the establishment in Embden of the Prussian Company (it lasted, incidentally, only until 1756). This, it was feared, would be a dangerous competitor in the Northern Provinces. So Heren XVII decided to improve the position of the V. O. C. by saturating the market with tea, the same policy which had earlier and unsuccessfully been employed against the Ostend Company. Since the import of tea had to be increased, two extra ships were sent to Canton each year, to be loaded with tea, exclusively for the V. O. C. In order to guarantee the quality of the tea special tea-tasters were engaged. Curiously, however, from this time onwards complaints about the bad quality of tea increase rather than diminish. The bankers and merchants of Amsterdam greatly resented the fact that the opportunities of private freight privileges were being curtailed. One of their spokesmen was Thomas Hope, a leading

banker who was a member of a committee to advise the Stadtholder Prince William V on improvements of the precarious economy of the Netherlands. The proposals put forward by this committee included a partial retraction of the trade-monopoly of the V.O.C., in favour of more free trade. But they came to nothing because of the death of the Prince in 1751. When subsequently Hope became a representative of the shareholders of the V.O.C., he had the opportunity to criticize from the inside the company's organisation and trade-policy which he considered out of date. One of his main points of criticism was mis-management in Batavia.

Two years after J. Mossel in 1750 took up as Governor General, he produced a paper concerning the trade in Asia. He stated that the China trade was one of the few healthy branches, for which he gave full credit to the Government in Batavia.

Heren XVII left the task of answering this paper to the so-called 'Haags Besogne', an internal committee responsible for correspondence with Batavia and the factories and for the inspection of their trade-reports. Hope, in an address to this Haags Besogne in 1754, did not agree with Mossel's opinions and heavily attacked Batavia's activities, stating that, especially in the case of the China trade, profits were too low and that the quality of the Chinese goods was inferior. Moreover, Batavia had much better sell its spices elsewhere

Table 2 Financial survey of the China trade 1735-1756 in *f*

year	number of ships returned in the Netherlands	working capital in Canton	costs return cargo for the Netherlands	proceeds at auction in the Netherlands	gross profit in %
1735	-				
1736	1	822.571	365.036	608.412	66,6
1737	2	774.866	597.281	1.281.426	114,9
1738	1	587.663	393.732	680.728	73,0
1739	1	1.181.921	525.983	897.253	70,9
1740	2	1.725.004	1.075.000	1.809.372	68,5
1741	-	1.101.149	(ship wrecked)		
1742	2	1.500.022	1.043.334	1.744.928	67,6
1743	2	1.250.199	906.135	2.041.279	126,6
1744	2	1.392.410	995.288	2.098.663	110,9
1745	2	1.238.530	1.165.835	2.334.710	101,0
1746	2	1.351.674	1.228.130	2.538.901	107,3
1747	4	1.817.027	1.503.560	2.438.752	62,5
1748	2	1.485.929	1.327.821	2.364.200	78,1
1749	1	1.522.131	775.154	1.366.498	76,3
1750	2	2.231.149	1.366.760	2.459.670	80,0
1751	1	3.136.271	665.350	1.324.420	103,1
1752	4	3.356.094	1.990.488	2.956.501	48,5
1753	5	3.849.824	2.703.229	3.403.309	25,9
1754	6	4.997.461	3.480.182	3.829.805	10,1
1755	4	3.852.080	2.623.071	3.445.475	31,4
1756	4	2.752.858	2.067.312	3.978.783	92,6

than in China. He compared the current proceeds with those of the years 1729–1734, and concluded that direct trade should be re-established, so that profits from the China trade could be increased and at the same time Batavia be taught a lesson.

A check of the books of the V. O. C. confirms Hope's opinion, as table 2 shows. The V. O. C. had become China's largest European trade-partner after England. Owing to the large numbers of ships and the increasing amount of cargo sent by Batavia to China, especially after 1749, the capital involved was enormous. However, according to the rules of economics, this caused a fall in the prices realised in Canton on these South-East Asian goods. Buying tea and other commodities also became more expensive.

The gross proceeds in the Netherlands were generally lower than in the period 1729–1734, but they decreased dangerously after 1751. This was largely a result of the poor quality of the goods delivered, as many complaints show.

Faced with these problems, Heren XVII were forced to react, they could not neglect Hope's criticism, and in 1755 they followed his advice and resumed the direct trade between the Netherlands and China.

Direct trade 1757–1794

Heren XVII put the organisation of the new China trade in the hands of a specially appointed internal committee, the so-called China Commission. This Commission began to function in the autumn of 1755. It had complete powers and did not require previous approval by Heren XVII for any actions, since everything concerning the China trade had been delegated to it. Such a commission for the organisation of a single trade-branch is unique in the history of the V. O. C. It indicates the great importance Heren XVII attached to the China trade. Well-known members of the China Commission were Samuel Radermacher and subsequently Cornelis van der Oudermeulen. Hope was a member from the start. The Commission decided to send only two ships at first, because the warehouses still held an ample supply of Chinese products. They instructed the merchants whom they appointed to buy tea, silks, etc. of good quality only. They decided that the ships must call in at Batavia on the journey out, where a limited quantity of tin and spices could be taken on. Silver was to be the mainstay of the trade. Batavia was forbidden to send its own ships to Canton; any goods the Government there needed could be bought in Canton by V. O. C. merchants and shipped to Batavia by Chinese junks. On the return-journey the ships had to sail directly to the Netherlands, without a call at Batavia.

These arrangements re-juvenated the China trade. The gross profits went up as far as 160% (see table 3). External conditions were also favourable: the seven-year war between England and France (1756–1763) caused fewer European ships to sail for Canton, so that the supply of goods from China was insufficient for the European demand. The V. O. C., not involved in the war, took advantage of this situation. The Commission increased the

number of China ships to three and, after 1764, to four per year. Two of these ships were supplied by the Chamber of Amsterdam, one by Zeeland. The last one was supplied by Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn or Enkhuizen, each Chamber taking its turn. The reorganisation in 1760 of the Cantonese Co-Hong, a government-controlled affiliation of Chinese merchants with the exclusive right to deal with Europeans, also worked in favour of the Companies. Duties and rights became more clearly defined, financial risks were smaller, contracts more reliable and quality was more easily maintained.

The period 1760–1780 was marked by regular progress. Gross profits averaged slightly over 100%, increase in trade did not appear relevant and no serious problems occurred. In Canton the E. I. C. and the V. O. C. were the leading companies. The Swedes, Danes and French remained far behind with rarely more than two yearly ships each. The arrangement with Batavia also worked well. The China Commission had soon realised that the 'Indische Goederen' could not be left out; in fact, the proceeds on these products had come to represent about a third of the working capital involved. Perhaps this smooth state of affairs made the Commission less alert than necessary in these changing times. There were no reactions to the increasing number of English ships calling at Canton (including many Country Traders); neither did anybody worry that the entire Company became financially more and more dependent upon the proceeds of the China trade.

The fourth English War (1781–1784) brought an abrupt end to this situation. Since the Netherlands were at war with England, ships could not be sent to Canton anymore. In fact, at the beginning of the war four ships were captured by the English on the home journey, an event which caused an enormous loss (estimated at £7,000,000.—). In Canton there was no trade at all in 1781 and 1782: no capital or goods were supplied by the Dutch. But the commodities which the Chinese merchants delivered according to contracts had to be paid. For this purpose money had to be borrowed from them at a rate of over 1% per month. Soon after the war was over, it became clear that the V. O. C. had lost its prominence and lacked the resources to regain its former position.

The English Commutation Act of 1784 reduced the tax on tea in England from over 100% to 12%. The E. I. C. obtained a monopoly for the import of tea simultaneously. These events influenced the China trade of the V. O. C. Firstly, there was the well-organized tea-running by private Dutch merchants, who had always bought large quantities of teas from the V. O. C. The lower taxes in England took the profit out of their smuggling operations and the V. O. C. lost a number of regular customers. But because the E. I. C. was unable to supply the English demand, it had to look elsewhere in Europe for tea. The China Commission accordingly tried to increase the tea-import of the V. O. C. and to turn Amsterdam into the European centre for the tea trade. No less than six ships per year were sent to China. But in Europe silver was expensive. Moreover, the V. O. C. was already in debt to the States General and could not borrow much more. As a stop gap, the Commi-

ssion tried to increase the percentage of Batavian goods sent to China, but this policy met with strong opposition in Batavia. Next to pepper, tin had always been in great demand, constituting up to 60% of the Batavian cargo for China. But precisely during these years tin was in short supply, largely because the Sultan of Palembang had discovered the possibility to sell it more profitably to the English.⁸

The government in Batavia was not in a position to pay more or alternatively to use military force against the Sultan to meet his contracts. It was therefore impossible to assemble the goods required for China. Some of the China ships did not even leave Batavia, and the amounts of tea that reached Amsterdam fell greatly short of what had been ordered. In Canton, difficulties also abounded.⁹ The E. I. C. did all in its power to become independent of others in its tea-trade. It had its own problems in financing the trade, but it had as advantage that it had never defended its monopoly position as rigorously as the V. O. C. had done. The English were able to call in the so-called Country Traders: merchants, who, in a regular trade between Canton and India, had made fortunes in tea, cotton and opium.

These traders invested their profits in Canton in bills of exchange on the E. I. C. Consequently the E. I. C. was able to call on much more cash than the V. O. C., which had always forbidden Dutch private trade in Canton. And since the E. I. C. could pay cash, it got first pickings with the Chinese merchants and opportunities to thwart the V. O. C., leaving only goods of inferior quality behind. The weakness and vulnerability of the V. O. C. became apparent during this crucial period in other fields as well. In management and material the V. O. C. was behind the times. As compared to the English, its ships were old-fashioned as was the training of the ships' officers. Its charts were outdated, its ships had flandered in places that had been marked 'dangerous' on English or French charts.

The China Commission evidently realized the necessity to modernize. They ordered a new type of ship to be designed and built especially for the China trade. But these and other measures were too little and came too late to save the day. The E. I. C. required only a few years to come out on top. Round 1787 it was not exceptional to find in the roadstead of Whampoa thirty or forty English ships against only four or five of the V. O. C.. The ambitious plan to make Amsterdam the European centre of the tea trade had come to nothing. The rapid rise of the American China trade had damaged the V. O. C.'s tea market from another angle. In 1789 the China Commission accepted the bitter realities and curtailed the China trade to two ships per year.¹⁰

For the V. O. C. as a whole, this drastic reduction was nothing less than disastrous. The expenses to keep up Batavia and the inter-Asiatic trade were gigantic and the proceeds were only small. Canton had been one of the few factories to show profits. These decreased markedly, as is shown in table 3. Although the China Commission tried to stimulate the trade and even sent an embassy to Peking in 1794/1795 so as to obtain better trade conditions¹¹, there is no doubt that the V. O. C. in China had become a third-rate trading partner whose

Table 3 Financial survey of the China trade 1757-1794 in *f*

year	number of ships returning in the Netherlands	costs of return cargo for the Netherlands	proceeds at auction	gross profits in %
1757	1	570.727	1.484.294	160,3
1758	2	1.195.075	2.993.712	150,6
1759	3	1.883.629	3.818.340	102,8
1760	3	1.803.274	4.408.820	144,5
1761	2	1.213.001	2.906.903	139,7
1762	3	1.965.732	4.274.053	117,5
1763	3	1.253.503	2.873.678	129,4
1764	4	3.360.627	6.455.602	92,2
1765	4	2.752.841	4.894.917	77,8
1766	4	1.373.676	2.425.749	76,6
1767	4	2.434.115	4.558.419	87,3
1768	4	2.599.217	4.583.855	76,4
1769	4	2.362.553	3.654.480	54,7
1770	4	2.405.232	4.620.000	92,2
1771	4	2.442.769	5.342.819	118,7
1772	4	2.255.148	3.976.631	76,3
1773	4	2.299.212	4.077.539	77,4
1774	4	2.274.204	3.814.822	67,7
1775	4	2.263.529	3.909.843	72,8
1776	4	2.451.597	3.666.312	49,6
1777	4	523.825	947.978	81,0
1778	2	754.315	1.533.120	103,3
1779	3	1.876.799	3.909.609	108,3
1780	-	(ships captured by the English)		
1781	-	(no Dutch ships in Canton)		
1782	-	(no Dutch ships in Canton)		
1783	1	823.802	1.221.432	48,3
1784	3	2.378.995	4.060.253	70,7
1785	4	2.604.895	4.416.194	69,5
1786	5	4.538.034	5.487.999	20,7
1787	4	2.075.796	2.240.446	7,9
1788	4	4.039.114	4.413.848	9,3
1789	5	4.327.372	5.038.283	16,4
1790	1	591.962	734.467	24,1
1791	2	1.534.680	2.668.576	73,9
1792	3	2.269.758	2.511.416	10,6
1793	-	(ships confiscated by the English)		
1794	-	(ships prevented to return by the war)		

heyday was irrevocably over. The Company had outlived itself and went bankrupt during the French occupation of the Netherlands in 1795.

The factory in Canton, however, remained an independent settlement during the occupation of the Netherlands by the French and of the Dutch colonies by the English. After the war was over (1814) the old V. O. C. factory was used as a Dutch consulate and the China trade was continued by the *Nederlandsche Handelsmaatschappij*. However, by 1822 the

trade had become so insignificant that the factory was closed down ; in 1840 the consulate was terminated.¹²

2. TRADE AT CANTON

The V. O. C. came late to Canton, a town of which several European views existed (ill. 1-4) It had to adjust to the existing rules of trade as developed during the first thirty years of the 18th century between the Chinese authorities and the European Companies. We know from archives that this presented no problems for the V. O. C.. The circumstances under which it conducted business in China differed little from what has been described by various authors for other Companies.¹³

Characteristic for the 18th century trade in China was the Co Hong, a society of merchants who, entirely in the Chinese tradition, had specialised exclusively in a single branch of trade, which in this case was the trade with Europeans.¹⁴ Hong merchants held the monopoly for this part of the Chinese exports (particularly so after their reorganisation in 1760), and were also responsible for the orderly conduct of business, payment of taxes, and the various presents due to authorities. The V. O. C. chiefly traded with Tsja Hunqua, after his death in 1770 with Inksja, Monqua and several other dealer-combines.

As a rule the China ships left Batavia in July or August. Via the Straights of Banka they sailed a North-Easterly course, using various islands for points of orientation. After passing the Paracel Islands and the Ladrons, they reached Macao in about a month. Here they applied at the Chinese customs for various permits and took in a pilot, who brought the ship up the Pearl River. At the roadstead of Whampoa they dropped anchor. Further upstream the river was too shallow for ships that drew more than 140 or 150 feet of water. Sloops and hired sampans maintained the traffic between the ships and Canton, 13 nautical miles away.

Outside the walled city of Canton the V. O. C. had a factory, next door to that of the E. I. C.. This factory was rented, for Europeans were not allowed to own real estate in China. During the first period of direct trade (1729-1734) a number of different buildings had been used, occasionally more than one at a time. In 1736, when the China trade was run by Batavia, the merchants concentrated on a large building on the quay. This remained the Dutch factory, and many pictures of it exist.¹⁵ (ill. 4) During these hundred-odd years many more or less important alterations were made to it (particularly in 1750/1751, 1762/1763, 1767 and 1772) in order to adjust it to the demands of increasing trade.

Trade was directed by a 'Head' or director, assisted by supercargas, cargas and assistants. Together they formed the 'Commercieraad', in which all decisions were made by majority vote. The books were kept by administrators and clerks, under the responsibility of director and supercargas. A special commission in the Commercieraad dealt with matters

of law and with the administration of justice.

The factory also housed a major domo, a visitor of the sick, the personal servants of the merchants, and, in the periods between 1736-1756 and 1761-1773, a military guard of fourteen men. Chinese cooks, coolies, a laundryman, a barber, various craftsmen and servants were employed as needed through a so-called Compradore. Compradores were representatives of that particular Chinese merchant or Hangist, who was directly responsible for the Company to the Chinese authorities. Compradores also supplied interpreters or 'linguas', and managed the external contacts of routine business. The ships' officers and men remained on board during their stay. Shore-leave to Canton was strictly regulated, because when violations occurred the V. O. C. was held responsible.

Since the factory often had to house in excess of forty men, it is not surprising that stringent rules for their daily activities and social conduct obtained. There was even a rule against noise-nuisance: playing the horn or the drum was forbidden after ten at night, since this was unpleasant for those asleep and the ill.

Another problem of everyday life was the fact that the Chinese authorities did not allow European women in Canton. In contrast to the practices held in Decima, contacts with Chinese women were also forbidden. This rule was rarely enforced however and 'flower-boats' enjoyed even European fame.

It was also forbidden for any European to stay behind after the ships had left in January-February. But here, too, the Chinese were willing to compromise. So from 1750-1760 and after 1763, the V. O. C. usually left a few merchants behind to wrap up current business and place the orders for the next season. These activities normally took two or three months to complete. The merchants then left for Macao, where they awaited the arrival of the next ships in a rented house.

Of all the merchandise bought in Canton, tea was by far the most important. (ill. 8-9) Two types were being distinguished: 'black tea', which had been dried, fermented and roasted, and 'green tea', which had been dried and steamed. Black tea could be kept somewhat longer than green, but for both types the rule was: the fresher it arrived in the Netherlands, the higher the price it fetched.

In the course of the 18th century there was a clear shift from the cheap black 'Boei' (Bohea) to more delicate and costlier varieties of tea. Green tea was considerably less in demand, even though it was not always more expensive; usually it totalled about 20% of the tea-purchase. The profit realised on tea in the Netherlands obviously depended to a great extent on the buying price in Canton, and this could vary considerably. Besides the quality, the international situation in Europe and the date of the auction reflected also on the price of tea. It took a downward trend as the 18th century progressed. In the first half of the century gross profits from tea averaged about 150%, in 1770-1785 only 60%. Towards the end of the century profits hardly covered expenses; in 1792 for instance, a gross profit

of only 16% was made.

Apart from tea, various other products were bought. It is remarkable to see how the choice of these did not change much over the years. There was hardly any experimenting with new products, and there was nothing like the variety of goods encountered in the Danish and French shiploads. One article that is constantly mentioned is silk fabrics. They were bought in increasing quantities from 1736 onwards.¹⁶ The Bewindhebbers were quite specific in their orders. Among some of the records are even some of the actual silk samples, sent to China as patterns for the silk-weavers to follow. To facilitate adjustments of the Chinese to the European taste, it became general practice after 1760 to have the orders for woven, embroidered or painted silk fabrics executed in or near Canton itself. Raw silk, too, was bought, starting in 1748. It served as raw material for the Dutch silk weavers, and replaced the more expensive Bengalese silk.

Profits on silks did not exceed 50% as a rule, and were often much lower. In consequence the silk trade of the V. O. C. remained insignificant compared to that of the English and the French.

An interesting side-line was porcelain.¹⁷ During the 17th century a thing of luxury, it came within reach of large groups of the population early in the 18th. This change was promoted chiefly by altering eating- and drinking-habits. During the first period of direct trade (1729-1734) more porcelain was brought in the Netherlands than in the course of the entire 17th century, and the years that followed saw further increases in sales. The V. O. C. was mainly interested in ordinary wares. The demand for these remained fairly constant over the years. They consisted of plates, tea- and coffee-wares, bowls in various shapes and sizes. They were easy to pack and yielded decent profits, up to 150 or 200% gross. The Company dealt with about fifty other types and sorts, each of which could be decorated in various ways. Blue-and-white, Chinese Imari and enamelled ware were in demand, and in Canton these could often be supplied from stock. Towards the end of the 40's it became customary to send models ('monsters') and drawings to China, to be used as patterns. In the years 1760-1780 there must have been hundreds of these. Alas, of all the drawings only one set of seven leaves has survived. (ill. 10) It is interesting to note that the V. O. C. left the trade with special types (in particular with porcelains painted in the European manner, the so-called "Chine de Commande") mostly to private dealers. The high cost of their manufacture precluded good profits. (ill. 11)

Other articles of trade included drugs, such as rhubarb, sago, curcuma, radix China, radix Galanga and anise. Then there were small quantities of lacquer ware, and, from time to time, paper hangings and fans. The V. O. C. did not buy enamelled copper ware, because the Chinese authorities did not allow their export, and smuggling could have endangered the entire trade. Gold, which was important for Batavia, was free until 1757. The V. O. C. bought it in large quantities. After 1760, when the export of gold was banned, the

V. O. C. resorted to smuggling until about 1778, when the gradual increase in the price of gold made these operations unprofitable.

For ballast, tutinage (zinc-ore) was used. Zinc was important for the Dutch arms industry: mixed with copper it produces brass. A remainder of the tin from Batavia, lead, ingots of iron, rotan and sappan wood were also used as ballast. Since the cargo-lists of nearly all the ships have survived we have exact information about the value of each item of cargo. Table 4 gives a breakdown of these, summarized in groups of five years and in six categories of cargo.

Table 4 Products bought at Canton 1729-1793 in *f*¹⁸

period	total amount	tea	porcelain	raw silk	textiles	drugs and other commodities	ballast and expenses
1729-1733	2.055.738	1.511.393	295.751	—	30.485	176.789	41.320
1736-1740	2.957.034	1.776.707	315.922	45.332	559.427	501.503	209.143
1742-1746	5.338.722	3.651.696	396.623	59.005	857.219	41.410	332.769
1748-1752	6.830.536	4.728.711	367.209	547.118	1.016.506	23.481	147.511
1753-1756	10.873.794	8.136.468	427.895	510.595	1.639.801	30.780	128.255
1757-1761	6.665.706	5.196.753	264.095	206.908	631.506	39.070	327.374
1762-1766	11.917.106	9.459.611	490.511	568.275	647.551	45.355	705.803
1768-1772	12.064.919	8.845.235	590.331	686.649	963.238	108.595	870.871
1773-1777	11.992.102	8.643.032	502.586	780.292	1.156.739	197.996	711.457
1778-1780	7.890.158	5.453.925	347.026	680.246	933.361	129.742	345.858
1783-1787	16.670.024	11.878.844	478.511	1.512.830	1.509.348	284.223	1006.268
1788-1793	15.569.684	11.844.907	417.395	870.183	1.533.054	210.676	693.469

3. COMMUNICATION AND RECORDS

Good communications with the Netherlands and Batavia were of prime importance if the Dutch merchants in Canton were to buy the right articles at the right price. In practice this left much to be desired. During the season of trade interim reports and letters from Canton were frequently sent home through Country Traders or ships of friendly Companies. The 'Bewindhebbers' in the Netherlands thus had some idea of the cargo before the ships arrived. The central document of the administration was the *Generaal Rapport* (General Report). This was drawn up after business had been concluded and sent on with the returning ships to Holland. These ships arrived in the Netherlands in the beginning of autumn. The auctions were usually held in November or December. The remaining stocks were auctioned in spring.

These reports and other documents were audited by the China Commission (up to 1757 by the *Haags Besogne*). The Commission added a commentary, which often included the prices realised at the auctions. The commentary was in the form of a letter or 'Instruction', sent on to China. It was closely connected with the so-called 'Eis', the detailed list of goods

the Bewindhebbers wished to receive from China, which was made up yearly. Consequently it took at least a year and a half before the merchants in Canton heard how their performance was rated, what profits had been realised, and how they were supposed to adjust their purchases to European demands.

For products not readily available in Canton (particularly special types of porcelain which had to be fabricated in Ch'ing-tê Chên) the situation was even worse. It could take up to three years between the order in the Eis and the arrival of the product in the Netherlands. It was therefore difficult for the V. O. C. to adjust to sudden changes of economics or taste. It could only rely on the initiative of the cargoes. However, these were frequently out of touch with developments in Europe; their choices were often simply that what their competitors bought. It is no surprise that there were more complaints than words of praise from the Bewindhebbers, under these conditions.

The greater part of the documents relating to the China trade in the 18th century has survived. They are part of the V. O. C. -archive, now preserved in the Algemeen Rijksarchief at The Hague.¹⁹

The most important documents form coherent series. The series 'Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren van China' (correspondence from China) include all the documents, which were sent from China to the Netherlands in the periods 1729-1734 and 1757-1794, the years in which there was a direct trade.²⁰ Not only letters and trade reports are included, but also the minutes (Resolutiën) of the 'Commercieraad', the daily records of the factory (Dagregisters), the cargo lists, judicial documents, financial documents (kasjournalen en Grootboeken), the Eisen and Instructies from the Netherlands and Batavia, and many other documents.

The documentation of the China trade during the period 1735-1756, when it was organised by the Government in Batavia, is scattered among the voluminous records titled 'Overgekomen Briefboeken van Batavia' (correspondence from Batavia), which is ordered per year, subdivided per tradingpost.²¹

Important information can also be found in the minutes of Heren XVII, especially from the period before 1757.²¹ After that year, the China Commission took responsibility for the China trade. Unfortunately, their minutes are only preserved for the first six years. The correspondence of the Commission with Canton is completely preserved, however.²⁰

Other material about the China trade is preserved among the records of the Chambers (f. i. in their accountancies), in the 'Aanwinsten van de 1ste Afdeling' (recently acquired documents) and in private archives such as those of Hope and Radermacher.²¹

Another very rich source is the Archive of the factory of Canton, the contents of which were originally kept in the factory.²² Partly it contains duplicates of the documents mentioned above, partly much material which can be found nowhere else, f. i. shipping lists, interim trade reports, drafts, copies of contracts with Chinese merchants, correspondence, etc.

It is clear that all these documents are a gold-mine of information about the China trade of the V. O. C., about the conditions of trade and about the way of life of the Dutch in Canton. Their very diverse nature makes it possible to use them scientifically for various kinds of studies and to evaluate them from different angles.

NOTES

1. This article is based on my doctoral dissertation 'Porselein als handelswaar. De porseleinhandel als onderdeel van de Chinahandel van de V. O. C. 1729-1794', Leiden 1978. For quantitative data and more extensive notes I refer to this thesis. An English edition is in preparation.
As a research fellow of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies of the Kansai University I like to express my gratitude to the director, Professor K. Fujimoto and especially to Professor O. Oba for their kind support. John Leopold and Barbara Harrisson, director of the Princessehof at Leeuwarden I thank for their help and assistance.
2. See for instance: W. P. Groeneveld, *De Nederlanders in China, 1601-1624*, 's-Gravenhage 1898; W. Campbell, *Formosa under the Dutch*, London 1903; J. E. Wills jr., *Pepper, Guns and Parleys, the Dutch East India Company and China 1662-1681*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1974; J. Vixseboxse, *Een Hollandsch gezantschap naar China in de zeventiende eeuw (1685-1687)*, Leiden 1946. Contemporary printed sources are: J. Nieuhoff, *Het gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham etc.*, Amsterdam 1665; O. Dapper, *Gedenkwaardig bedrijf der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Maatschappye op de kuste en in het keizerrijk van Taising of Sina etc.*, Amsterdam 1670.
A research group of the Leiden centre for the history of European expansion prepares an annotated publication of the 'Dagh registers' (daily journals) of the Zeelandia Castle (Taiwan).
3. J. R. ter Molen, introduction in: *Thema Thee*, exhibition catalogue, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam 1978.
4. See for the Batavian China trade till 1729 and the direct trade on China in the period 1729-1734: J. de Hullu, *Over den Chinaschen handel der Oost-Indische Compagnie in de eerste dertig jaar van de 18e eeuw*, in: *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis van de Taal, Land en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië*, vol 73, 's-Gravenhage 1917. For the tea trade of the Company till 1734: K. Glamann, *Dutch Asiatic trade 1620-1740*, The Hague / Copenhagen 1958, pp. 212-243.
5. Recent literature about the Ostend Company: K. Degryse, *De Oostendse Chinahandel (1718-1735)*, in: *Spiegel Historiae*, VIII, no 12, Bussum 1973; R. Baetens, *Investering en rendement bij de Generale Indische Compagnie: de handel op Bengalen vergeleken met de Chinahandel*, in: *Album aangeboden aan Charles Verlinden*, Gent 1975.
6. The voyage of the 'Coxhorn' and its trade in Canton is described by M. Vigelius, *De stichting van de factorij der Oost Indische Compagnie te Canton*, in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, XLVIII, 's-Gravenhage 1933.
7. J. E. Heeres, *De consideratiën van Van Imhoff*, in: *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië*, LXVI, 's-Gravenhage 1912.
8. J. de Hullu, *De Engelsens op Poeloe Pinang en de tinhandel der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie in 1788*, in: *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië*, LXXVII, 's-Gravenhage 1921.
9. An analysis of the trade of the several Companies gives H. Furber, *Rival empires of trade*

in the Orient 1600-1800, serie Europe and the world in the age of expansion, vol. II, Minneapolis 1976.

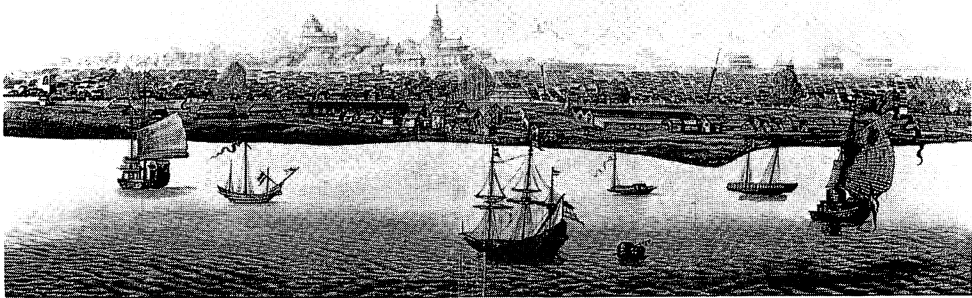
See also: K. N. Chaudhuri, *The trading world of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760*, Cambridge 1978, pp. 385-410.

10. The tea trade in the Netherlands in this period is described by (A. C. F.-L. L.) Bierens de Haan, *Memorieboek van pakhuismeesteren van de thee te Amsterdam 1818-1918 en de Nederlandsche theehandel in de loop der tijden*, Amsterdam 1918.
11. A diary of this Embassy was published by A. E. van Braam Houckgeest, *Voyage de l'Ambassade de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales Hollandaises vers L'Empereur de la Chine dans les annees 1794 et 1795 etc.*, 2 vols. Philadelphia 1797. See also J. J. L. Duyvendak, *The last Dutch Embassy to the Chinese court (1794-1795)*, in: *T'oung Pao XXXIV*, Leiden 1938, with supplementary notes in: *T'oung Pao XXXV*, Leiden 1940.
12. See for the China trade in the 19th century: F. J. A. Broeze, *Het einde van de Nederlandse theehandel op China*, in: *Economisch Historisch Jaarboek*, XXIV, 's-Gravenhage 1971.
13. For the E. I. C. the most important study is: H. B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company trading to China*, vol. I-IV, Oxford 1926, vol. V Oxford 1929. For the French China trade: L. Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident. Le commerce à Canton du XVIII siècle 1719-1833*, thesis, 4 vols., Paris 1964. For the Swedish: S. T. Kjellberg, *Svenska Ostindiska Kompagniern 1731-1813*, Malmö 1975. For the Danish: K. Larsen, *Den Danske Kinafart*, København 1932. Of the many contemporal descriptions of Canton are interesting: C. G. Ekeberg, *Ostindische Reise in den Jahren 1770 und 1771 etc.*, Dresden / Leipzig 1785; W. C. Hunter, *The Fan kwae at Canton before treaty-days 1825-1844*, by an old resident, London 1882; P. Osbeck, *Reise nach Ostindien und China*, Rostock 1765; A. Spencer, ed., *Memoirs of William Hickey*, London 1923; O. Toreen, *Ostindische Reise nach Surat, China etc.*, Rostock 1765; P. Sonnerat, *Voyage aux Indes Orientales, fait par ordre de Louis XVI depuis 1774 jusqu'en 1781 etc.*, 2 vols., Paris 1782; A. E. van Braam Houckgeest, o. c., vol II.
14. A general history of the Co Hong is described by H. B. Morse, *The guilds of China. With an account of the gilt merchant or Co Hong of Canton*, London 1909; An exhaustive study about the Hong merchants is given by Liang Chia-pin, *Kuang-tung Shih-san Hang Kao*, Shanghai 1937 (Japanese edition Tokyo 1943).
15. A tentative dating of the paintings and watercolours, depicting the European factories, gives C. L. Crossman, *The Chinatrade. Export paintings, furniture, silver and other objects*, Princeton 1972, pp. 259-265.
16. Contrary to the opinion of K. Glamann, o. c., p. 149, who says that after 1727 no Chinese silks were asked by the directors.
17. Surprisingly there exist no studies about the porcelain trade of other European Companies, based on systematic research in their records.
18. For the years 1734, 1735, 1741, 1747, 1767 and 1794 the information in the records is not complete. So these years are left out here. In 1781 and 1782 there were no Dutch ships in Canton. Tea included black teas such as 'Boey', 'Congo', 'Souchon' and 'Pecco' or 'Pekoe' and green teas such as 'Songlo', 'Hyssant', 'Tonkaay' and 'Bing' or 'Emperor's tea'. Raw silk was known in two kinds: silk from Nanking and silk from Canton, the latter being cheaper. Textiles included many varieties of woven and / or embroidered silks, as well as cotton cloth from Nanking. Under 'drugs and other commodities' are grouped the drugs mentioned, paper hangings, lacquer wares, fans, Chinese ink, mercury, gold, mother-of-pearl, borax and alum. As ballast were used the goods mentioned. The 'expenses' constituted 2 % of the total amount and covered only partly the costs of acquisition.
19. The records of the V. O. C., formerly called 'Koloniaal Archief' (K. A.) are recently re-organised and constitute the new 'V. O. C. archief' now. A concordance is available.

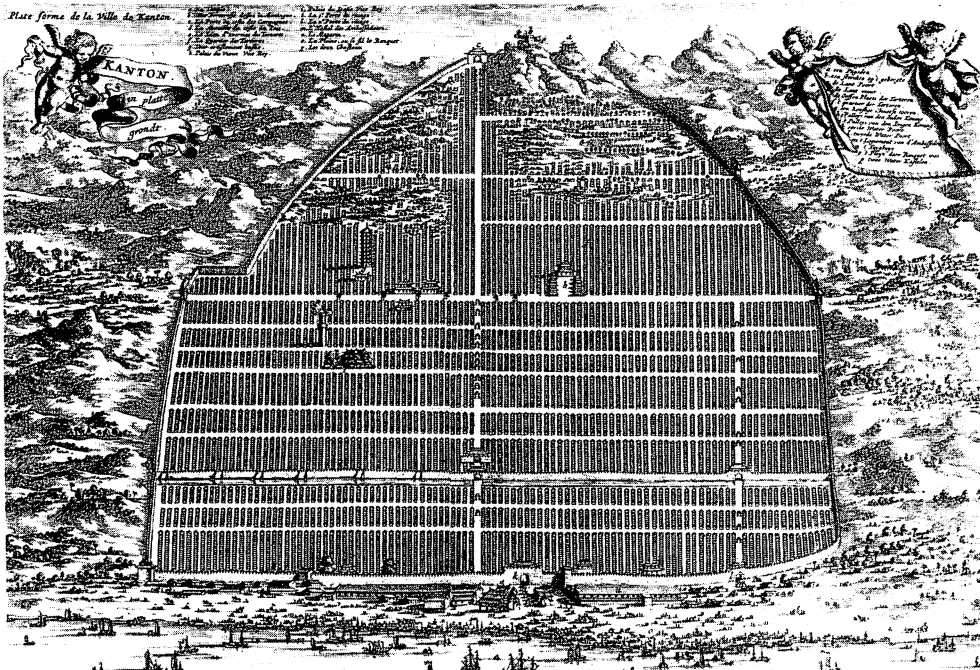
The main part of the documents relating to the China trade are micro-filmed. Copies of the films are kept at the Historiographical Institute in Tokyo: Historical Documents relating to Japan in foreign countries. An inventory of microfilm acquisitions in the library of the Historiographical Institute (Shiriyō Hensan-jo), Vol. V, The Netherlands, part V (China), Tokyo, The University of Tokyo, 1966.

20. No index available on this serie.
21. Index available at the Rijksarchief.
22. Typed index by J. L. Parani: Inventaris van het archief van de Nederlands factorij te Canton 1742-1826, A. R. A. 1972.

CANTON



1. 'Canton', drawing in ink and watercolours, 2nd half 17th century. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Coll. Leupe Suppl. 619-42



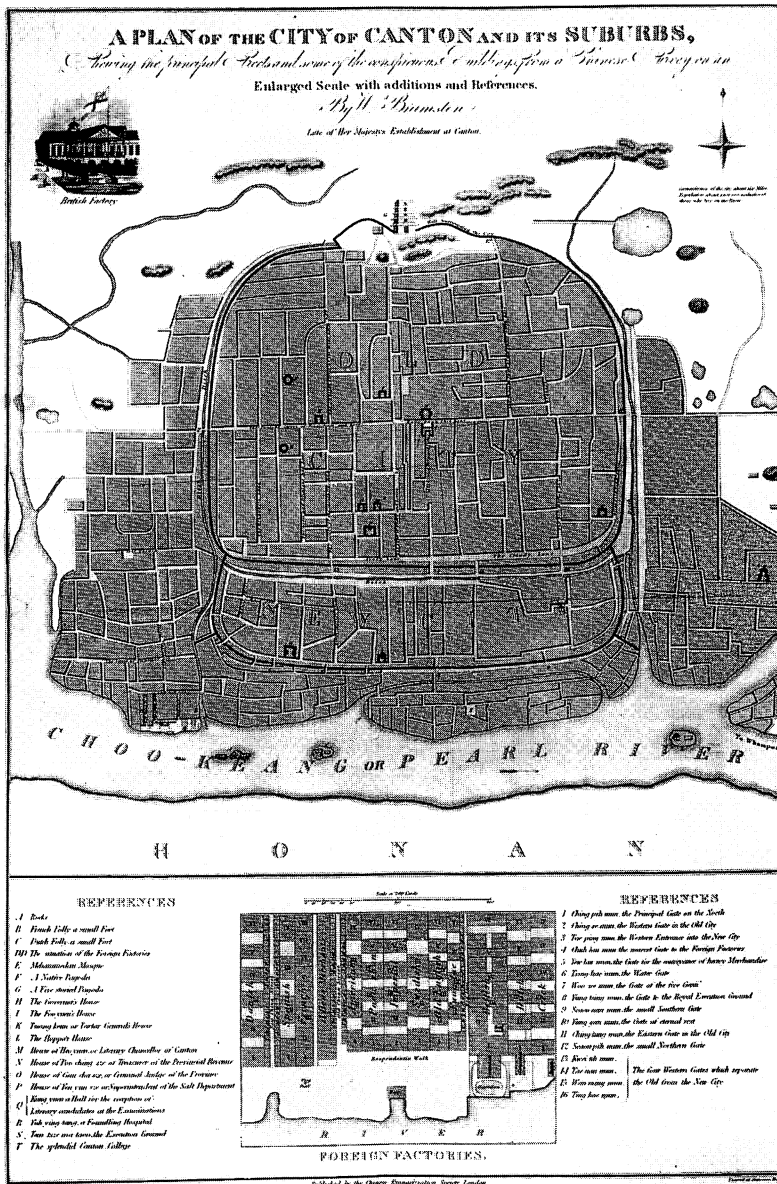
2. 'Kanton in platte grondt', engraving, end 17th century. University Library Leiden, Coll. Bodel Nijenhuis 177-179



3. Chinese porcelain saucer with a view of one of the waterforts opposite the Canton quay. 2nd half 18th century.
Groninger Museum 1978-315



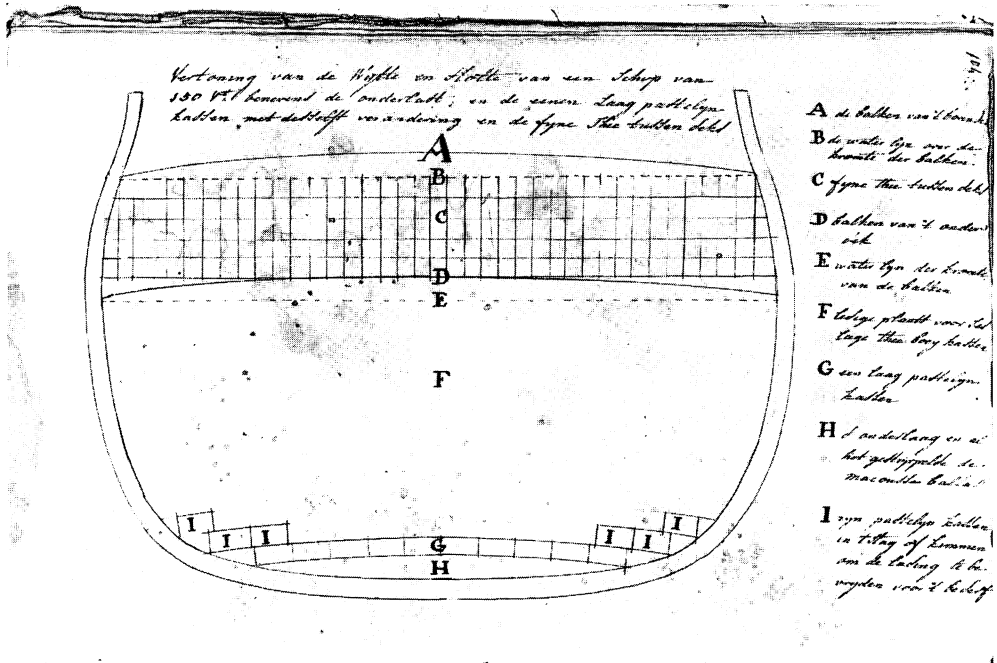
4. The European factories. Oilpainting on copper, ca. 1810
Groninger Museum 1978-366. The building with the flagpole on the right is the Dutch factory.



5. 'A plan of the city of Canton and its suburbs', engraving, ca. 1840
 University Library Leiden, coll. Bodel Nijenhuis 177-180. At the bottom
 a plan of the European factories.



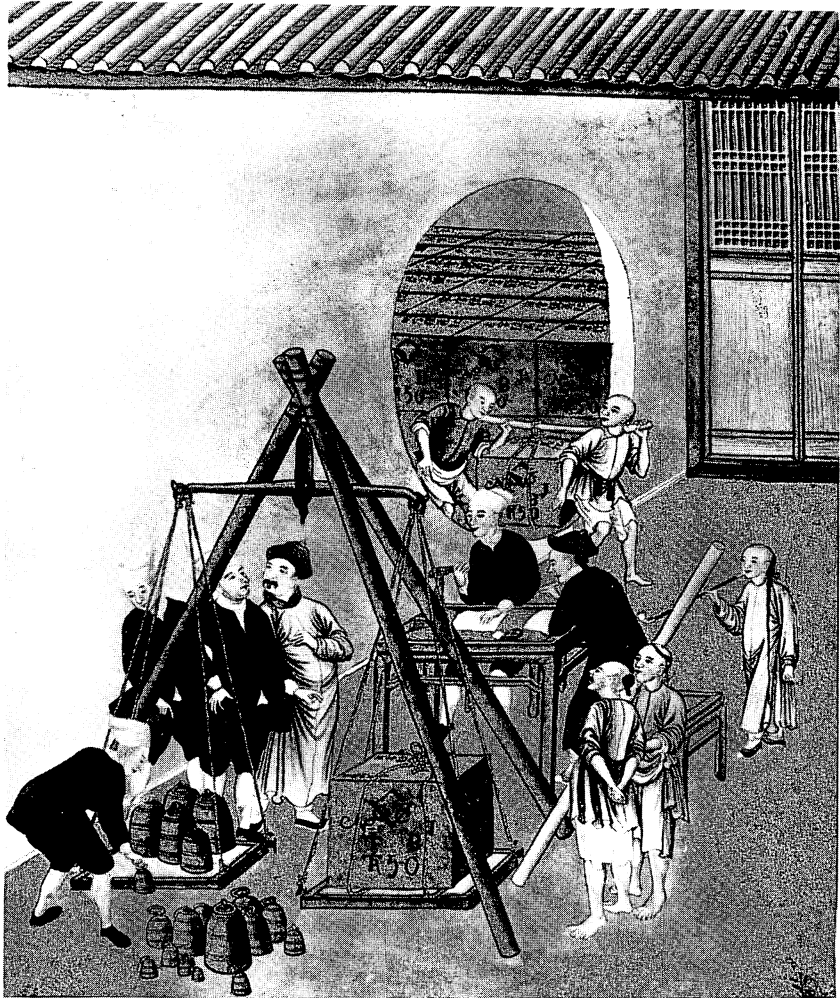
6. Dutch merchants loading Chinese merchandise, Chinese ivory plaquette, the boat painted blue and red. 1st half 18th century. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam CNO 5



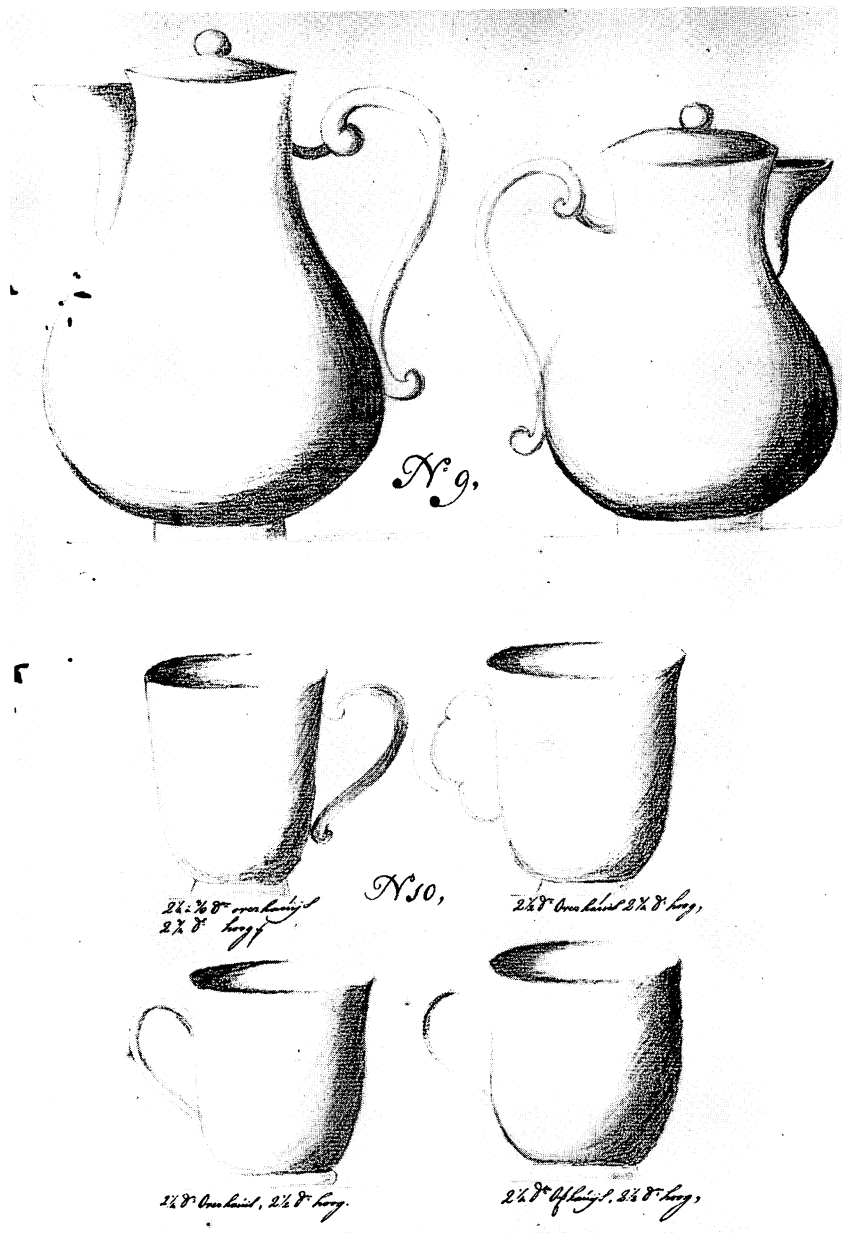
7. Scheme of loading a Dutch vessel, ink drawing, dated 1773. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Archief factorij Canton 140
 A=upper-deck B-D=between decks, storage of fine teas E-F=shipshold, storage of ordinary teas G=chests with porcelain I=bundles with porcelain H=ballast.



8. Dutch merchants attending the packing of tea. Chinese porcelain saucer, 1st half 18th century. Princessehof Leeuwarden BP 79



9. Dutch merchants controlling the weighting of tea. Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek Wien, Cod. Min. 6
On the chests can be read: V.O.C.A (msterdam), T(ea) B(ohea) Tr (Tarra)
50 (pounds) No.1 (first quality)



10. Samples of two milkjugs and four different coffeecups, sent from Amsterdam to Canton in 1758. One leave out of a series of seven.
 Algemeen Rijksarchief, Archief factorij Canton 121



11. The decoration of ready-made porcelain with enamel-colours in a Cantonese workshop. Detail of a Chinese gouache, 1st half 19th century. Coll. author.