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Dutch Drama and the Company's Orient

Kuruppath, M.

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Cover Page

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Author: Kuruppath, Manjusha
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Chapter Two

WHEN VONDEL LOOKED EASTWARDS: JOOST VAN DEN VONDEL'S *ZUNGCHIN* (1667)[1]

Introduction

When Xaianga, a lady of the court, recounts the suicide of the Ming royal family, her depiction of the event is tragically beautiful. The emperor Zungchin who commanded the subjects of the fifteen provinces of China now gently swayed in the breeze. He had hanged himself from a plum tree in the royal orchard suspended from a stocking. The empress Jasmine dangled by his side and princess Pao who lay dead in her bedchamber had succumbed to a stab in her chest from the emperor's dagger. This poetic end marks the demise of the three-century Ming rule of Imperial China in the play, *Zungchin*.[2] Credited to the Dutch Republic's greatest playwright, Joost van den Vondel, *Zungchin* was Europe's "first literary Chinoiserie" and Vondel's only attempt at Oriental drama.[3] And it was a contemporaneous affair that got Vondel's ink flowing. The overthrow of the Chinese dynasty in 1644 (the event he dramatized) preceded the writing of the play by a mere twenty-three years.

As the decline of empires goes, the story of the fall of the Ming dynasty is a familiar one featuring many of the same factors that brought the curtains down on the careers of great imperial dynasties before her.[4] The Ming rulers from the reign of the Wanli Emperor (r.1573−1619) onwards, displayed the same perilous reticence as might be expected of rulers of empires lumbering towards their decline.[5] Their reigns were marked by soaring personal expenditure while the empire quietly suffered neglect. Famine and disease wiped out a portion

[1] An earlier version of this chapter appeared as "When Vondel Looked Eastwards: A Study of Representation and Information Transfer in Joost van den Vondel's Zungchin (1667)," in *Shifting the Compass: Pluricontinental Connections in Dutch Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Jeroen Dewulf, Olf Praamstra and Michiel van Kempen ed.(Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 91-111.

[2]The play was first published in 1667: Joost van den Vondel, *Zungchin, of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (Amsterdam: Abraham de Wees, 1667). All references to the content of the play are in keeping with this version and the work was referred to on http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/VondelZungchin1667.html.When citing the work, mention shall be made of the verse number alone.

[3]Cf. Arie Pos, "Het paviljoen van porselein: Nederlandse literaire chinoiserie en het westerse beeld van China 1250-2007" (PhD diss., University of Leiden, 2007), 98.

[4]For this section, I have relied on Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China, vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (London: Hutchinson, 1990).

[5]Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 16-21; Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 11.

of the population.[6] Those who survived were left disillusioned and willing to throw their support behind anyone who promised a better future. The economic downturn in Ming China came in the form of a contracting silk industry which had formerly flourished. The empire, in addition, was no longer in receipt of the large amounts of silver that had entered her economy as payment for the silk she exported abroad.[7] By the time the Chongzhen emperor ascended the throne in 1627, the empire balanced dangerously on a precipice. Internal rebellion mushroomed in various parts of the empire and Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong, who in the 1630s assumed leadership of these violent expressions of anti-Ming sentiment looted and pillaged the territories they subjugated.[8] The weakness of the empire in the period was such that Li and Zhang were able to usurp Ming authority in Shaanxi, Henan and Sichuan and become rulers in their own right.[9]

While these factors sapped the vitality of the empire, some more swiftly than others, the true nemesis of the Ming Empire lay beyond the frontiers of the empire − in Manchuria. Nurhaci, a Jurchen tribesman of vision and tenacity, united the various tribes in the region under his able leadership. In 1616, he established a dynasty known as the latter Jin. By 1621 the Manchus had captured the Chinese territory of Liaoyang and following the death of Nurhaci, his successors Hong Taiji (r.1626-43) and Dorgon (1612−50) who took on the mantle of leadership in 1643 displayed a comparable if not greater desire for expansion than their illustrious predecessor.[10] When Ming armies failed to prevent the Manchus from penetrating the Great Wall, Chinese cities fell one after another to the latter. In June 1644, when the Ming army could no longer face the Manchu forces, and Peking was still recovering from the invasion of the rebel leader Li Zicheng, the Manchus burst into the imperial city and inaugurated the Qing chapter of Chinese history. In subsequent decades, the rest of the empire accepted Manchu suzerainty. All contesting political and military entities that questioned the legitimacy of Manchu rule in the form of rebellion and wars of resistance waged by Ming loyalists, and provincial secession, were gradually crushed. In 1683, Manchu authority extended as far as Formosa (present-day Taiwan) situated off the coast of the Chinese mainland, when the successors of Cheng Zhenggong (referred to as Coxinga in the VOC records) who had forced the Dutch East India Company from the island in 1662 were themselves driven out.

[6]Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 20-21.
[7]*Ibid.*, 19-20.
[8]*Ibid.*, 22.
[9]*Ibid.*
[10]Dorgon played the role of regent until the Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644-1661) who was six years of age at the time of his father's death in 1643 attained majority.

"Qing," the name chosen by the Manchus for their dynasty, means "pure" but the political revolution in China was one that was sullied beyond imagining.[11] The empire in this period experienced destruction of inconceivable magnitude and suffered a staggering loss of human life. In the six-decade-long process of regime change, China had witnessed innumerable wars, sieges, skirmishes, routs and conquests, each weaning its rulers of their grip over the vast empire. It was without doubt the capitulation of Peking in 1644 with the death of the Chongzhen emperor that dealt a deathblow to the Ming dynasty's claims of kingship to China. All subsequent opposition that the Manchus had to suppress to ensure that their claims to suzerainty over the empire stood uncontested was merely the last contortion of a dying empire.

In a span of two months, the capital city witnessed two conquests and the establishment and fall of two dynasties. In April 1644, as the news of the rebel Li Zicheng's advance towards the imperial city reached the Chongzhen emperor, his court was plagued by indecision. Although fervently deliberated, proposals for the emperor's flight to the southern city of Nanjing were not carried out and the last attempts to muster together an army to confront the aggressor frittered away. By the evening of 24 April, the eve of Li's takeover of Peking, when the mood in the capital at the impending overthrow of the dynasty swung from apprehension to helplessness, the royal palace witnessed a bloodbath. Members of the imperial household who had not taken flight were either put to the sword by the emperor, or took their own lives just as the emperor did the following morning. Li's tryst with kingship was brief, and his exit from Peking was as swift as his entry had been. He fled the imperial city in June on realizing that his army stood no chance against the superior arms of the Manchus, which had been strengthened by their alliance with the Ming general Wu Sangui, who changed sides on learning of Li's capture of Peking. On 6 June 1644, the city passed into Manchu control.

"One's Company, Two's a Crowd": Representation in *Zungchin*[12]

Vondel's play chronicles this tale of dynastic fall, the suicide of the royals and the ensuing persecution of that group of European observers in China who witnessed the revolution at close proximity – the Jesuits. It melancholically envisions the last and fateful night of

[11]For reference to the meaning of term "Qing," see Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 206.
[12] The quote is Andy Warhol's.

Zungchin's life.[13] The rebel leader Lykungzus lays siege to the city of Peking, which causes the troubled emperor to summon Adam Schall and his retinue of Jesuits to the court. He asks them to pray for the deliverance of the empire. While the Jesuits worry what the brewing political turmoil would spell for the future of the Christian mission in China, the court is plagued by rumours of treason, the truth of which is later confirmed. When the emperor realizes that the fall of the city is inevitable, before committing suicide he ensures the flight of his three sons so that the dynasty may not die out with him. The victorious Lykungzus assumes the throne and the spirit of Francis Xavier appears to the Jesuits warning them that the tumult is not over. He foresees the death of Lykungzus, the slaughter of the three Ming descendants and the victory of the Manchus over China. The last, he cautions, will have varying consequences for the future of the Jesuit order in the empire.

Despite the play's intractable gloom, it fails to stir the pathos that such a tragedy would normally elicit in the reader. According to P. Minderaa, this flaw stems from the fact that Vondel's *Zungchin* comprises not one but two narratives that parallel to one another in the play.[14] The fall of Ming China, he argues, constitutes the first narrative. This is populated by the royal family and courtiers who are confronted with the siege of the city and its subsequent takeover. The second narrative underscores the role of the Jesuit priests at the Ming Court, in acknowledgement of their dedication to "deliver nonbelievers from blind idolatry and shake off [their] yoke of abysmal slavery."[15] It might be assumed that the two narratives are employed by Vondel to form the contents of a singular and coherent story because both, the fates of the Ming royals and the Jesuits are intertwined. As servants of the dynasty, the Jesuits are as threatened by Lykungzus as Zungchin is. Yet the assertion that Vondel engages two narratives is evident in the direction that discussions about the play have taken among academics who have long debated whether or not Vondel's *Zungchin* is a *missie-spel*, that is a drama glorifying the labours of the Christian mission. The literary scholars J.F.M. Sterck and Jansen Schoonhoven assert that *Zungchin* is a *missie-spel* based on their study of Vondel's familial connections with the Jesuit, Adam Schall, and their analysis of the

[13]Studies which have significantly influenced my reading of Vondel's *Zungchin* are P. Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde* 79 (1963), 115-34; W.A.P Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah: Een verkenning van Vondel's dramas naar continuiteit en ontwikkeling in hun grondmotief en structuur, deel 3: Koning David-Spelen-Noah* (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1962), 951-81; Edwin J. van Kley, "News from China: Seventeenth-Century European Notices of the Manchu Conquest," *Journal of Modern History* 45, 4 (1973), 561-82.
[14]Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 118.
[15] "Om ongeloovigen, uit blinde afgodery/ Verlossende, het juk van 's afgronts slaverny." Verses 17-18.

drama.[16] Seeking recourse to the same narrative however, P. Minderaa and W.A.P. Smit choose to disagree.[17] The lop-sidedness in this discussion is hard to miss. The contention is not whether Vondel favoured the Ming or the Jesuit tale: rather, the dispute hinges on whether *missie-spel* is an appropriate descriptor for *Zungchin*. This implies an acceptance even on the part of the "anti *missie−spel*lists," that although they challenge the centrality of the Jesuit mission in the play, there is no denying their prominence in the drama. To stress the importance of this discussion when appraising the nature of representation of the "Other" in the play is to apprehend the fact that its verdict determines what Vondel's object in writing his play was and which of the two narratives he intended to privilege, his Ming or his Jesuit one.

The narrative-scape of Vondel's *Zungchin* should be revisited to determine which of the two positions best describes the drama and in addition to evaluate the role of the Chinese narrative in a play. If space allotted in the drama is an indicator of importance, the emphasis on the Chinese story is unquestionably the primary focus of the play. Yet the strength of this argument, which presumes the privileging of the Chinese narrative in the drama, weakens in the face of its overpowering Christian allegory that features in both the renditions of the Jesuit chorus and in the Ming narrative. When the Queen having borne witness to frightful predictions, perceives them to be signifiers of future catastrophe, Schall brushes aside her worry and advises her to take her cue from "Europe, enlightened from above" and to trust in the ways of the Almighty.[18]

Schall's advice to Empress Jasmine not only signals the way in which Christian metaphors lace the Ming narrative, but it also indicates, as inferred by Van Kley, that the Ming and the Chinese tales are recruited by Vondel for the fulfilment of a higher ideal: the emphasis on the doctrine of "divine providence."[19] When Vondel identifies his protagonist not so much in the Ming emperor or in the Jesuit mission but at the level of Christian cosmological abstraction in the concept of the "divine providence," its resonance is felt in the realm of characterization. Zungchin and his adversary Lykungzus assume life-sized proportions.[20] Zungchin is as repulsively miserly as he is helpless, and Lykungzus, despite his

[16]J.F.M. Sterck, "Bij het missie-tooneelspel Zungchin," in *Oud en nieuw over Joost van den Vondel: Verspreide opstellen* (Amsterdam: De Spieghel, 1932), 77-81; E. Jansen Schoonhoven, "Een missionair treurspel van Vondel," *De Heerbaan: Algemeen Zendingtijdschrift* 11, 5 (1958), 191.
[17]Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 118-19; Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 91-92, 451-52.
[18]"Doorluchtste keizerin, Europe, klaer verlicht/Van boven, bout geen hoop van voorspoet op gezicht." Verses 583-584. Also see verse 610.
[19]Van Kley, "News from China," 567, 579.
[20]For a description of Zungchin's characterization, see Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 117.On the question of Jesuit agency, see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 465, 491.

audacity in overthrowing a dynasty, still feels faint when assuming the throne. The decision to populate his play with a sombre cast of characters was presumably a conscious effort on the part of Vondel. Had the playwright inhabited his play with loud character types such as virtuous defenders of the regime and rapacious raiders, he might have deprived his protagonist, the concept of "divine providence" of attention and agency.

With Zungchin and the Christian mission subordinated to the Almighty, there is little in the drama to either consider it worthy of the *missie-spel* label or be convinced that Vondel's primary interest in scripting his play was to focus on the fall of the Ming Empire. On the contrary, it is the Christian character of the drama that draws one's attention. The religious bent of the play is made more obvious when Chinese heathendom, viewed as a creation of the wily snake in the Garden of Eden, is seen as the obstacle to the proselytization efforts of the Jesuits in China.[21] Vondel moreover draws a parallel between the Middle Kingdom and Rome, and refers to China as "the Asiatic Europe," thereby regarding the Orient as malleable enough to help illustrate a European and Christian view of the world.[22] When the playwright considers an Oriental theme worthy of Christian treatment, the task of gauging the principal thrust of the drama is hardly perplexing. Vondel incorporated China into a universe that he understood and defined in largely Christian and fatalistic terms. In so doing, he endorsed the idea that Europe and Asia were similar and or even alike. Both were pawns in the hands of the Almighty and both awaited a destiny dispensed by him.[23]

Historicity in Vondel's *Zungchin*

Some tales are true, others make good drama.[24] But it required no creativity on Vondel's part to come up with the story of the Ming emperor stringing himself from a plum tree. History had already authored this script and modern-day histories conceive of the episode and the circumstances leading to it in much the same manner that Vondel does.[25] The historical script therefore is a reiteration of Vondel's own: of the rise of internal rebellion which came

[21] For Vondel's take on the Chinese religion, see Verses 409-452; Also see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 496-97.
[22] "Och kon men 't Aziaensche Euroope/ Herbaeren door het hemelsch zaet," Verses 169-170.
[23]Blue states that "this work like many of Vondel's plays was intended as a vehicle for his religious beliefs." Gregory Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission in Vondel's Zungchin," in *Western Learning and Christianity in China: The Contribution and Impact of Johann Adam Schall von Bell, S. J. (1592-1666)*, ed. Roman Malek (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica, 1998), 976.
[24] I draw this model of comparing the fictional with the historical from Balachandra Rajan, "Appropriating India: Dryden's Great Mughal," in *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macauley* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999).
[25]For an understanding of the "historical interpretation" of the set of events that Vondel reflects on, I rely on Frederic Wakeman, Jr., "The Shun Interregnum of 1644," in *From Ming to Ching: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China*, eds. Jonathan Spence and John E. Wills, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

knocking on the doors of Peking, Zungchin's decision to end his life, the short-lived interregnum of Lykungzus, and the dawn of Qing rule. Vondel's characterization of Zungchin and Lykungzus also drew from life. Modern-day interpretations acknowledge that the emperor did indeed possess some reprehensible traits and that Lykungzus did not possess the most admirable qualities.[26] Vondel's image as a stickler for conformity to historical detail however cannot be pushed too far and it is important to remember that the playwright deviates from the facts in two instances, both times recruiting the Jesuits into his story of the Ming. The Jesuits in Vondel's *Zungchin* walk the royal pavilions and comfort the anxious queen in the hour of crisis.[27] Vondel's privileging of the Society in this way can be contrasted with modern histories that all but ignore the Jesuits when discussing the twilight of the Ming Empire.[28] Secondly, noting the gradual growth of Jesuit influence in the Ming court, particularly under Adam Schall, historians would argue that the position of imperial advisor that Vondel confers on the German Jesuit is an exaggeration.[29] For Schall, who was still busy expanding the Jesuit presence in the Ming court in the 1640's, this much-coveted position could in 1644 have only been an aspiration.[30] Vondel then clearly modeled Schall's role in Ming circles on that of his subsequent station in the court of the first Manchu emperor, Shunzhi. When this Jesuit is known to have headed the department of astronomy and was supposedly a guide and councillor to the emperor who was still a young boy, Manchu rule in China inaugurated what Dauril Alden calls "the era of Adam Schall."[31] These elements display Vondel's apparent rejection of historical exactitude but before considering the extent to which the playwright wandered from the historical narrative, we must consider an entire generation of works on the Manchu conquest.

Reading *Zungchin* shortly after it was published may have triggered an inadvertent yawn because the tale of imperial collapse in China was in the 1660's decidedly stale. In

[26]See Ibid., 46-47, 67-72.
[27]Adrian Hsia, "The Literary Reception of Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* (1654) in Europe," in *Martino Martini S.J. (1614-1661) und die Chinamission im 17. Jahrhundert*, eds. Roman Malek, et al. (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2000), 118.
[28]Although studies on the Jesuits on China speak of the aid extended by the Jesuits to the Ming dynasty during the crisis decades of the 1630s and the 1640s, histories which focus on the Ming collapse hardly do so owing to the marginality of the Jesuit intervention in this historical plot.
[29]Adrian Hsia suggests that it was influence of the Jesuits at the court of Prince of Fu, a Ming who was raised to the throne in Nanjing by the Ming loyalists following the death of Zungchin in 1644 that formed the template for the Vondel's characterization of Adam Schall. Hsia, "The Literary Reception of Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* (1654) in Europe," 118. I believe the Manchu case is more convincing.
[30]Dauril Alden however notes that the Jesuit progress in Peking during the period of the late Ming was marked by a rising number of believers in the royal establishment and the participation of these missionaries in expanding the artillery supplies of the Ming army. Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire and Beyond 1540-1750* (Stanford:Stanford University Press, 1996), 143-45.
[31]Cf. *Ibid.*, 145.

tracing the history of reporting on China's regime change in the seventeenth-century Republic, Edwin J. van Kley shows that the Dutch press was smitten by Sinophilia. It closely followed the fall of Ming China for almost three decades.[32] Following the 1650 publication of the *Hollantsche Mercurius* and the Jesuit Martino Martini's *De Tartarischen Oorlog* in 1654 (a translation of his Latin work *De Bello Tartarico* printed in the same year) which broke the news of the Ming collapse to the Republic, the story is said to have become a regular feature in later accounts about China. Many publishers and authors began incorporating either parcels of Martini's text or the account in whole into their works on the empire.[33] This meant that the average Dutchman who yearned to read about the conquest in the 1660s was spoilt for choice. Athanasius Kircher's compilation of Jesuit works on China titled *Toonneel van China* (a 1668 translation of his Latin *China Illustrata*) carried a brief account of the event. Johan Nieuhof imported a modified version of the Jesuit work into his book *Het Gezantschap* (1665) which was an account of the author's travels as a member of the Dutch East India Company's embassy to the Manchu court from 1655 to 1657.[34] The Dutch translation of Johan Blaeu's *Atlas Sinensis* (1664) bore Martini's account in entirety.[35] If the source of the Jesuit dimension in *Zungchin* is thus to be found, it is to be looked for in this European preoccupation with China, which centres on the Ming collapse which preceded the writing of Vondel's play. All these works (with the exception of Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap*) came with a Jesuit label in terms either of authorship or their historical source. The implication of Jesuitical mediation in the transport of the tale to the Dutch press was the inevitable introduction of a Jesuit valorization narrative into the story of the conquest. Frequently referred to in these works amidst their descriptions of burning Chinese cities ravaged by war were updates on the numbers proselytized or the growing number of churches in the land.[36] This Siamese twin effect in these texts where the themes of conquest and Christianity were

[32]Van Kley, "News from China."Another work which revisits the history of China in Dutch print prior to the writing of Vondel's *Zungchin* is Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*.This section is indebted to both these works.
[33]*Hollandse Mercurius, het eerste deel* (Haerlem: Pieter Casteleyn, 1650), 25; Martinus Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch* (Delft: Jacob Jacobz Pool, 1654). The work was originally published in Latin as *De bello Tartarico historia* (Antwerp: Balthasaris Moreti, 1654). All subsequent citations made from the work refer to the Dutch translation.
[34]Athanasius Kircher, *Toonneel van China* (Amsterdam: Johannes van Waesberge, 1668). The work was originally published in Latin as *China monumentis qua sacris quà profanis, nec non variis naturæ & artis spectaculis, aliarumque rerum memorabilium argumentis illustrata* (Amsterdam: Johannes van Waesberge, 1667). All subsequent citations refer to the Dutch translation: *Toonneel van China*. The complete title of Nieuhof's account reads *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1665).
[35]Joan Blaeu, *J. Blaeus Grooten atlas, oft werelt-beschryving, in welcke 't aertryck, de zee en hemel wordt vertoont en beschreven, deel 9* (Amsterdam: J. Blaeu, 1664).
[36]See Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 159, 173, 197; Also see *Hollandtsche Mercurius* 5 (1654), 117.

seemingly inextricable from one another was therefore reproduced wholesale by Vondel. To contend that Vondel relied slavishly on the historical record in writing *Zungchin* is wrong, for the playwright also had a significant part to play. What makes us certain that Vondel the playwright was a determinant in fashioning the contents of his drama is that no precedents can be found for his fabrication of Schall's access to the inner circle of the Ming emperor. This perhaps had to do, as Sterck suggests, with Vondel's personal motivations; his status as a fresh convert to Catholicism or his shared Cologne connections with Schall.[37] Furthermore, the story of China's political woes had whetted public interest in the fall of Ming China to the extent that another playwright, Antonides van der Goes, also picked up his pen to tailor news of the episode for the stage and Van der Goes had a different story to tell, in both substance and spirit.[38]

Two Playwrights, One Tale

Authored in 1666, a year before Vondel's *Zungchin* was published, Van der Goes's *Trazil of overrompelt Sina* appeared posthumously in 1685.[39] *Trazil* begins where *Zungchin* ends. *Zungchin* captures the epic fall of the Ming dynasty. *Trazil* chronicles its aftermath where the protagonist, the rebel Trazil (who in Vondel's play is called Lykungzus) briefly savours kingship before the Tartar Xunchi seizes the capital and reveals his plans for world domination. Strange as it seems that two playwrights should simultaneously dramatize a historical event that occurred in another part of the globe for the stage, the plays differ markedly despite their common plot. The two playwrights were led to recreate the fall of the Ming Empire for the very reason that the political turmoil in China captured so much print space in the Dutch Republic. The Chinese throne saw three occupants in an astonishingly short span of time. The monstrosity of the spectacle where an emperor forced himself into the embrace of a noose and the culprit responsible for the emperor's act of cowardice ascends the throne only to swiftly part with the imperial trophy and meet with the same fate he dispensed

[37]Both Vondel and Adam Schall were from Cologne. Sterck, "Bij het missie-tooneelspel Zungchin," 77-81. Scholars place the playwright's conversion to Catholicism as having taken place somewhere between 1638 and 1641. Some literary histories classify Vondel's literature as having been products of two phases: the pre- and the post-conversion phases. See Frank Baur, *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden, deel 4* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Teulings, 1948); Frank Baur, *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden, deel 5* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Teulings, 1952).

[38] For works published on China in the period, see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 452-55.

[39]The work referred to in this context is Joannes Antonides van der Goes, *Trazil of overrompelt Sina* (Amsterdam: Jan Rieuwertsz, 1685). For my reading of the play, I employ that version of the play found at http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/Trazil.html. Accessed on 25th May 2013. When citing the work, mention shall be made of the verses alone. My appraisal of *Trazil* has been significantly influenced by J.C. Brandt Corstius, "Zungchin en Trazil," *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 93 (1946).

to his predecessor undeniably left a lasting impression in the minds of those acquainted with the episode. Had there been yet another deposition, accession to the throne in China might have been seen as akin to a child's game of musical chairs. This capriciousness of fate that the fall of the Ming Empire was a bitter reminder of, prompted Vondel to champion the notion of "divine providence" in *Zungchin* with uninhibited furore. As J.C. Brandt Corstius notes, Van der Goes was more moved by the profanities of the conquest and *Trazil* is tainted with blood, seasoned with vengeance, and infested with treason.[40] The divine is however not banished entirely from Van der Goes's literary canvas. God is invoked, rebuked, appealed to, and slandered. In *Trazil*, the Almighty is still the prime mover of events in the mortal world, but for Van der Goes, the machinations of God are not the only explanation for the course of events in China. God to him is the principal agent among many. That Van der Goes's conception of China proceeds on very different lines than Vondel's is revealed in his treatment of the Jesuits. The Jesuits are certainly not Van der Goes's protagonists, and their characterization in the drama is not clear-cut.[41] He features them as martyrs while audaciously juxtaposing this sympathy-evoking image of the Jesuits with tales of their inglorious deeds. Sketching the nature of the mission in Peru, Mexico, and Panama, Van der Goes alleges that they "drenched the land with blood and packed the sea with corpses."[42] These acts, he notes, constituted casualties in the Jesuit pursuit of Christian souls. Van der Goes thus lavishes the Jesuits with praise just as he scalds them with criticism.

Van der Goes's stark ambivalence towards the Jesuits is striking but more noteworthy is the global dimension of his drama. He harks back to the fate of kings like Montezuma in the Americas, alludes to the plight of the Christians in Hirado, Japan, and makes reference to the early Dutch voyagers who set out to chart a route to Asia through the Arctic Ocean. Apparent in all three instances is his keen grasp of world history and *Trazil* as a result offers its audiences brief visitations to various parts of the globe during their excursion to contemporary war-torn China. When transforming a subject that was geographically constrained into one which addressed contemporary world concerns, the playwright's masterstroke lies in the manner in which he concludes his play. The curtains fall on the Manchu ruler Xunchi, fresh from his victory over Peking confessing that his thirst for glory can only be quenched with his elevation to the status of world conqueror. Xunchi's pronouncement is evidently concocted to

[40]According to W.J.A. Jonckbloet, Van Lennep did not regard the play as one for the faint-hearted. The gore and macabre contained in the drama is such. W.J.A Jonckbloet, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde, deel 4: De zeventiende eeuw* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1890), 359; Pos, "Het paviljoen van porselein," 102.
[41]Brandt Corstius, "Zungchin en Trazil," 66; Pos, "Het paviljoen van porselein," 102.
[42]"Het land met bloet gemest, de zee gepropt met lijken." Verse 887.

stir the anxiety of its readers that Europe was now to be overrun by the Tartars. Van der Goes hoped to invoke was the same terror that the legendary fourteenth-century conqueror Tamerlane, who was also referred to as a "Tartar," was known to have struck in the heart of his contemporaries. But just as soon as the distress is provoked, it is set to rest. The Tartar discloses his intentions to "besiege the cursed Mahomet in Byzantium and sink the land of the circumcised with their crescents and moon standards in a sea of blood," thereby reassuring audiences that it is Europe's arch enemy, the Ottomans that Xunchi stands poised to fight.[43] Van der Goes's act of turning a probable foe into a friend in Xunchi's proclaimed plan to annexe the Ottoman Empire suggests that *Trazil* was a plain extension of an anti-Ottoman rhetoric for which he was already well known. His two works of poetry – "Zeetriomf der Venetianen over de Turken" published in 1666, the same year that *Trazil* was scripted, and "Nederlaeg der Turken" which followed five years later carried a similar perspective.[44] The first is an earnest prayer in support of Venice in her protracted struggle against the Ottomans in the Cretan war (1645-69), and the second is a celebration of the setback that Algerian piracy received in 1671 at the hands of a Dutch naval expedition. *Trazil* was in effect part of a literary trend intended to propagate the notion of the Ottomans as a threat to Europe that should be eradicated. If we overlook the anti-Ottoman dimension that pervades these works, what is still fascinating in Van der Goes's literary endeavour is his remarkable ability to tie two disparate but nearly contemporary events with one another – the establishment of Manchu rule in China with the war of the Venetians with the Ottomans in the Mediterranean.

The Benefits of Extensive Reading: Vondel and the Sources for *Zungchin*

Vondel in the pages of *Zungchin* may not have been as avid an armchair traveller as Van der Goes was in *Trazil* but the former certainly looked out as far as China when scouting for themes for his play. Never having left the precincts of Europe like Van der Goes, yet demonstrating in his work remarkable insight into the historical events in an empire on the other side of the globe, meant that Vondel had poured over contemporary works to find the right ingredients to mould his literary piece. Scholars have identified four works as the primary sources for Vondel's play: the Jesuit Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico*; Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*, a compilation of Jesuit reports on China; Johan Nieuhof's *Het gezantschap,*an account of the author's travels as a member of the VOC

[43] "Vervloekte Mahomet bestoken in Byzanzen,/En doen 't besnedendom, met haer gehoornde maen/En maenbannieren, in een bloedzee ondergaen." verses 2368-70.
[44]For these works of poetry, see *Alle de gedichten van J. Antonides van der Goes* (Amsterdam: Nicolaas ten Hoorn 1714; repr., 3rd).

embassy to the Manchu court from 1655 to 1657; and the Jesuit Schall's description of China entitled *Historica narratio*.[45]Although the candidature of Schall's and Kircher's works as having constituted sources have been debated, scholars unanimously agree that it was Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* that left an indelible imprint on the play.

An evaluation of the aforementioned texts reveals that the appraisals of past scholars are not wide off the mark.[46] The play bore out a general image of China as contained in these accounts. China commanded the respect of Vondel's sources as it did of other seventeenth-century chroniclers who were convinced that the empire with its civilizational accomplishments was comparable if not superior to Europe.[47] Second, the preponderantly Jesuit authorship of Vondel's sources explains the intrusive presence of the mission and Catholic motifs in *Zungchin*.[48]The play moreover came to reveal the individual impression of each of the sources that Vondel had appealed to. The prints and information in Kircher's *China Illustrata* shaped the imagery employed by Vondel in his drama and the influence of *Het Gezantschap* trickled into *Zungchin* in the form of minor narrative embellishments.[49] Of all the sources however, it is Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* that held Vondel under a spell. Perhaps the most influential account on China in the seventeenth century, *De Bello Tartarico* was first published in 1654. As David Mungello suggests, it was a work "aimed at popular appeal" and it succeeded brilliantly.[50] Its shelf life in the European print market lasted another three decades in which period it underwent nine translations elevating its author Martini into the league of "the most translated historians."[51]A compilation of loosely strung together tales of war in seventeenth-century China, the work was a snapshot of the empire groaning under the weight of conquest.

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[45]Martini, *De bello Tartarico historia*; Kircher, *China monumentis*; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*; Johann Adam Schall von Bell, *Historica narratio de initio et progressu missionis Societatis Jesu apud Chinenses ac Praesertim in Regia Pequinensi* (Viennae: Cosmerovius, 1665). Secondary studies that have considered the question of the sources of Vondel's *Zungchin* are Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission," 968-70; Sterck, "Bij het missie-tooneelspel Zungchin," 78-79; Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 452-59; Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 126-28; J.A. Worp, "De bronnen van Vondel's Zungchin," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal en Letterkunde* 22, 14 (1903), 37-44.

[46]The following discussion does not take Schall's account into consideration as past studies conclude that this work contributed little to *Zungchin*.

[47]For a laudatory vision of China, see Kircher, *Toonneel van China*, dedicatory epistle.

[48]When these Jesuit accounts freely intertwined the valorization of their evangelical mission with their knowledge about China in their accounts, Vondel, a recruit into the Catholic fold seems to have naturally followed suit. See Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 159, 173.

[49]For the list of similarities that *Zungchin* exudes in comparison to Kircher, see Worp, "De bronnen van Vondel's Zungchin," 42-44. Blue rightly sees the provenance of Vondel's play in Nieuhof's and Martini's works. Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission," 969.

[50]David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1985), 110.

[51]Peter Burke, "Translating Histories," in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Peter Burke and R. Po-Chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 140.

Zungchin's debt to *De Bello Tartarico* is enormous and the parallels between the two works have been amply demonstrated by Blue, Worp and Smit. Their examination of the literary piece reveals that Vondel was unfailingly faithful to his source and modelling his play on the basis of Martini's work in terms of plot and detail.[52]Vondel's apathy for discovering protagonists and antagonists amongst his cast was shared by Martini. His Lykungzus and Zungchin were characterized in a manner where they invited the audiences' sympathy and abhorrence at the same time.[53] Incidentally, the organizing principle of "divine providence" in Vondel's play too was a hand-me-down. This term in Martini's work that highlighted the Almighty's hand in governing the events in China was elevated to become the watchword of Vondel's drama.[54] Despite *Zungchin*'s remarkable adherence to *De Bello Tartarico*, Vondel was not averse to literary innovation and did at times deviate from Martini's work.[55] But regardless of these brief departures from *De Bello Tartarico*, Martini's work indisputably remained, as Blue aptly labels it, Vondel's "ultimate source".[56]

Batavian Holidays and Information Packages: Martino Martini and the VOC

So long as we take *Zungchin* to be Vondel's adaptation of *De Bello Tartarico*, the possibility of finding the VOC as a source for Vondel's drama appears slim. This is more so because Nieuhof's account, which constitutes the VOC's most convincing claim to being a source to the drama, also draws heavily on Martini's account. Save for a modest section in the text that can be credited to its author, *Het Gezantschap* was more a systematic compilation of detail skimmed from *De Bello Tartarico* and other influential Jesuit works on China published in the day.[57] At this juncture, therefore, when the likelihood of establishing the VOC as a source for *Zungchin* seems remote, a prudent means of investigating the role of the VOC in the making of the play would be to unearth the implicit association of Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* with the VOC but this is a daunting task. For one, the fortunes of the Jesuits and the VOC in Imperial China in the seventeenth century were very different. The Jesuit presence in China dated back to the last quarter of the sixteenth century, but it was only in the seventeenth

[52]See Worp, "De bronnen van Vondel's Zungchin," 37-42.
[53]A similar inference is made in Adrian Hsia, "The Literary Reception of Martino Martini's De Bello Tartarico (1654) in Europe," in *Martino Martini S. J. (1614-1661) und die Chinamission im 17. Jahrhundert*, eds. Roman Malek and Arnold Zingerlie (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2000), 125.
[54]Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 21-23. Blue refers to the congruence of Vondel's and Martini's works on the question of "divine providence." Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission," 969.
[55]Even in circumstances where Vondel departs from Martini's account, the playwright was most prone to consulting the other sources he had at hand. See Worp, "De bronnen van Vondel's Zungchin," 42-44.
[56]Cf. Blue, "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission," 968.
[57]Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 454-56.

century that they acquired a firm footing in the empire. By 1641, the Jesuits had converted nearly 70,000 Chinese, and with their expertise in the sciences they attained visibility in the Ming court.[58] Their efforts to bring nonbelievers into the faith were accompanied by equally pronounced attempts to publicize and disseminate information about their China mission in Europe.[59] The European reading public through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were besieged by a barrage of Jesuit accounts on China.[60] Their role as "the only westerners who could plant themselves in the empire" gave them an unrivalled access to information and made them "monopolistic conduits of knowledge between Europe and China."[61] Little surprise, then, that the story of the conquest should arrive in Jesuit packaging; they were after all the principal sources of information for Europe about the empire.

While the Jesuits occupied a comfortable position in the heart of the empire, the Dutch East India Company struggled in vain to get a footing on its periphery. The VOC initially subscribed to the misguided policy of employing force to press Ming China to open her doors to trade and engaged in acts of piracy along the Chinese coast in the 1620s.[62] These acts of aggression failed to shake the Chinese of their resolve to close their territory to Dutch traders but as a concession, they permitted the VOC in 1624 to trade in Formosa.[63] The Dutch remained eager to establish direct commercial relations with China in the next decades, but until the 1650s the uncertain political situation in the empire with the Ming-Qing conflict left the Dutch at a loss to decide the appropriate means of establishing diplomatic contact with the empire. It was only when the Qing dynasty was securely settled that the Dutch renewed their attempts to obtain trading privileges by means of embassies to Peking in 1655−56 (in which Nieuhof took part), 1666−67 and 1685−87, and intermittent trade missions to Fuzhou in the 1663−66 period.

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[58]For the number of converts in mid seventeenth-century China, see Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire and Beyond 1540-1750*, 143-44. Due to the efforts of the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci in 1601, Jesuit presence came to pervade the capital, Peking. In subsequent decades, they served in the Imperial Bureau of Astronomy, aided in the manufacture of artillery under the Ming dynasty and became advisors to the Shunzhi emperor of the Qing dynasty. Andrew Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542 to 1742* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 118-77.

[59]C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London:Hutchinson, 1977), 83.

[60]Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, book 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1564-66.

[61] Cf. J. Barten, "Hollandse kooplieden op bezoek bij concilievaders," *Archief voor de Geschiedenis van de Katholieke Kerk in Nederland* 12(1970), 75; Ashley E. Millar, "The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers between Europe and China 1582-1773: Shaping European Views of the Middle Kingdom," *Working Papers* 105, 7 (2007), 4.

[62]John E. Wills, Jr., *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666-1687* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 40.

[63]John E. Wills, Jr., *Pepper, Guns and Parleys: The Dutch East India Company and China 1662-1681* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), 21-23.

The exclusion of the Dutch from the mainland had repercussions on the character of the information about China coursed through their information networks, both in terms of what was available to the VOC through its own channels and the news that was relayed to the Dutch public by the Company. The flows of information about China into the Company circuit rose and ebbed in tandem with the VOC's direct dealings with the empire and there were demonstrably three phases of contact with China in this context. The periods of direct contact with the empire first−during the 1620s when the Dutch raided along the Chinese coast and again during the diplomatic phase from the 1650s to the 1680s−were the most productive in terms of the information crop they harvested.[64] Reports of sailing expeditions to the South China Sea, some of which, like Bontekoe's *Journael*, were published for Dutch readership, were products of the first phase of direct interaction, while Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap* was an example of the second period.[65] Although informative in their own right, in terms of what they revealed about China, the Dutch accounts pale in comparison to the Jesuit authored works. The descriptions in the early accounts tend to be rather sketchy and show none of grasp or erudition that most Jesuit works demonstrated in their descriptions of the Kingdom.[66] The interim period, from the late 1620s to the early 1650s, marked the advent of a second and significant phase for the VOC as far as news collection from China was concerned. In the absence of direct links with the empire, the Dutch found alternative sources of information procurement. Batavia was a significant destination for the Chinese junk trade throughout the seventeenth century but this trading link does not seem to have catered significantly to the Company's information needs.[67] It was instead, the trade relations between mainland China and Dutch Formosa that the Company looked to, to be informed about happenings in the Ming Empire.

[64]When the policy of confrontation yielded no spectacular gains, the Dutch saw an alternative in diplomacy. For the early tactics used by the Company, see Ibid., 22.

[65]Willem Bontekoe and Dirck Raven, *Journael ofte gedenckwaerdige beschrijvinghe vande Oost-Indische reyse van Willem Ysbrantsz Bontekoe van Hoorn* (Hoorn: Isaac Willemsz, 1646).

[66]This observation made in the context of accounts written by European traders on China in general is valid particularly in relation to the early works of the VOC. Ashley E. Millar, "Authority and Parenthood: How Facts on China's Political Economy travelled to and within Europe during the Enlightenment," *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 6, 2 (2009), 15. An exception to the rule was Cornelis Matelief, "Historische verhael vande treffelijcke reyse gedaen near de Oost-Indien en China," in *Begin ende voortgangh, van de Vereenighde Nederlantsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie, deel 2*, ed. Isaac Commelin (Amsterdam: Jan Jansz, 1646). See Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, vol. 3: A Century of Advance, book. 3: Trade, Missions, Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 469.

[67] Although the Chinese junk trade predated the Dutch presence in the East Indies, the Dutch only saw trading potential in this trading circuit from the end of the seventeenth century. It was then that the Dutch came to increasingly rely on these merchants to procure the merchandise that they desired from mainland China. This gave the junk trade a significant fillip and this trading system was to last until the mid-eighteenth century.

Apart from the vastly different situation of the Jesuits and the Dutch in the Chinese empire, which strongly influenced the independent channels of information transfer that they created, the Jesuits and the Dutch were also unlikely bedfellows. Each regarded the other as heretical, and the Jesuits for their part shared an intimate relationship with the prime antagonists of the VOC in seventeenth-century Asia–the Portuguese. The Jesuit enterprise was patronized by the Portuguese crown, thanks to which the Jesuit relationship with the Estado da India was a lucrative collaboration. They served the imperial and mercantile ambitions of the Estado as translators, interpreters and diplomats and in return, the Jesuits used the imperial and trading clout of the Estado to their advantage, particularly in cultivating their own trading interests in the region.[68] In the course of the seventeenth century, the Dutch came into conflict with the Portuguese in Asia and the former devoted their energies to transforming the character of the Asian waters from a Portuguese maritime empire into a Dutch one. Portuguese possessions across the breadth of Asia from the Moluccas and Makassar to Ceylon and Malabar fell into Company hands.[69] It was one of these confrontations that set the tone for the encounter between Martini and the VOC. The Jesuit strayed into Dutch captivity.

Amidst the alternating positions of war and uneasy peace that characterized the Luso-Dutch relationship in Asia in the first six decades of the seventeenth century, the 1650s saw the outbreak of a fresh round of conflict. In 1651, a decrepit Dutch ship sailing to Japara gained possession of a Portuguese vessel. At Batavia, the Dutch realized that the prize catch in this seizure was the Jesuit Martino Martini who was found aboard. The Dutch, who had until then only heard and learnt of the war in China from Chinese traders in Formosa, realized that this Jesuit who had spent long years in the empire was likely to be their most credible informant.[70] The Governor General and Council of Batavia lost no time in realizing the value of their captive and in their resolution dated 16th July 1652 resolved to grant the Jesuit passage to Europe on the next ship setting sail to Patria until which time, he was to be housed in the Dutch settlement.[71] Martini sailed to Europe in February 1653 and in the time he spent in Batavia; the Dutch culled a critical piece of information from the Jesuit regarding China. On receipt of this news there was a palpable excitement among the Dutch administrators. In

[68] See Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, vol. 3, book. 1*, 169-70; Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire and Beyond 1540-1750*, 528-67.
[69]Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*, 109-11.
[70]Much of this information concerning Martini's sojourn in Batavia and the impact the information he bartered had on Batavia was referred to in Leonard Blussé, *Tribuut aan China: Vier eeuwen Nederlands-Chinese betrekkingen* (Amsterdam: Cramwinckel, 1989), 61.
[71] NA, VOC 675, "Resolutions of the Governor General and Council of Batavia," Dated Tuesday 16 July1652, unnumbered.

December the same year, the Gentlemen Seventeen were briefed on the matter and Batavia politely added the directors could benefit from a private audience with the gentleman who was in possession of unmistakably important information and this meeting materialized with Martini's arrival in Europe in 1653.[72]

Martini's encounter with the VOC is to be seen within the larger context of VOC-Jesuit relations in the early modern period. Irrespective of the natural antagonism which existed between the two enterprises owing to their religious differences, their relationship in Asia was hardly lacking in pragmatism. As Karel Davids notes, there were numerous instances where both parties were willing to cooperate and capitalize on the strengths of the other so long as their own interests were safeguarded and furthered in the process.[73] In Martini's case, he traded information which carried prospects of significant commercial benefit for the Company in return for his safe passage to Europe and a monetary reward. The Dutch were informed that the Manchus had established their rule in China and that they had warmed up to admitting the policy of free trade and Canton was to be the destination for prospective merchants who sought to benefit from it.[74] Martini's information inaugurated a new phase in Sino-Dutch relations. The Dutch hopes of initiating trade with the empire which had hit a low in the 1630s and 1640s suddenly received a fillip. On receipt of this information the Dutch fitted out an embassy headed to the Ming court in 1655 to reap the promise of Martini's news bore.[75]

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Although not downplaying the significance of Martini's information, the VOC had kept itself informed about the Ming Empire's litany of misfortunes since their eruption decades before. In the 1630s, in what they probably regarded as an interim arrangement until the empire could be persuaded to open their ports to Dutch commerce, the VOC began trading in commodities

[72] See Reniers VII, 24 December 1652, W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneur Generaal en Raden aan heren XVII der verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, vol. 2: 1639-1655* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 606-07; J.J.L. Duyvendak, "Review of Henri Bernard S.J's Les sources mongoles et chinoises de l'atlas Martini, 1655 by Henri Bernard S.J.," *T'oung Pao* 1, 3 (1950), 200.
[73] Karel Davids, "Van VOC-mentaliteit naar jezuieten mentaliteit: De Societas Jesu als schrikbeeld, partner en ijkpunt voor de Oost-Indische Compagnie" in *Alle streken van het kompas: Maritieme geschiedenis in Nederland*, eds. Maurits Ebben, Henk den Heijer and Joost Schokkenbroek (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2010), 131-146.
[74] Blussé, *Tribuut aan China*, 61.
[75] *Ibid*.

with Chinese merchants arriving in Formosa.[76] In their correspondence with Batavia, the Company servants at Castle Zeelandia, the fortress they built on the island, were soon able to speak of heartening numbers of Chinese traders who arrived on junks from the coastal provinces of the Ming Empire to offload their shipments of silk, porcelain, rice, salt and other commodities into the Company's warehouses on the island.[77] At the same time, Formosa's commercial relations with China meant that that the island became Batavia's window into the empire. Chinese captains and merchant shipowners that made the 112-mile crossing from the mainland to the island became the eyes and ears of the Company relaying news of significant events in Ming China either orally or in written correspondence. When the VOC's expectations of being allowed to trade in China surged, they also became couriers who carried the Company's letters to the governors of the coastal provinces requesting access to Chinese ports and conveyed the often ambiguous replies of the Chinese officials back to the VOC.[78] A merchant who features in the *dagregister* of Castle Zeelandia as both courier and informant was Hambuan, "one of the Company's main sources of silk and sugar in China."[79] He was often able to offer the Dutch considerable insight into conditions on the mainland. In 1637, the Company identified him as having been a source of useful advice on "various aspects concerning the trade with Taiwan, how and in what manner the trade could be conducted, the constitution of the Chinese empire, the crops [that were grown in the empire] in the current year [and] the good prospects of a stable trade with the Chinese."[80] When Humbuan's role as informant and courier to the Company for almost a decade was tragically cut short by a

[76]The possibilities of the Dutch trading at Chinese ports and establishing a settlement on the mainland were still being vigorously pursued in the 1630s. See J.L. Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, Taiwan 1629-1662, vol. 1: 1629-1641* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986).

[77]The Company's *dagregister* which kept a record of events for 1639 for instance recorded the arrival of Chinese trading junks in Formosa and their return to China almost every other day. *Ibid.,* 452-84. Dutch presence in Formosa hinged on their understanding that if the Japanese were to part with their silver; they would do so only for Chinese silk. The importance of Japanese silver for the VOC derived from the fact that this was the chief form of payment used by the Company in their intra-Asiatic trade. Ryuto Shimada, *The Intra-Asian Trade in Japanese Copper by the Dutch East India Company during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 132.

[78]The Chitoo ("military" officer) of Haytingh, the Hayto ("admiral") of Chinchieu (Quanzhou) and the Joukick ("local administrator") of Amoy (Xiamen) were some of the officials who were in correspondence with the Dutch in the 1630s. The meanings of the titles were referred to in the glossary of Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol. 1: 1629-1641*, 508-12.

[79]Cf. Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 9 (in chapter titled "The Birth of Co-colonization"). A footnote of the Zeelandia *dagregisters* describes him as "a Chinese merchant and a confidant of the Company." Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol 1: 1629-1641*, 46 (footnote). For letters from Hambuan to the Company see Ibid., 311-16.

[80]"Met voorzeyde joncquen becomen mede schrijvens van den coopman Hambuan aen d'E. heer gouverneur geadresseert, in d'welcke aenroert diverse poincten den handel met Taywan concernerende, hoe ende in wat train d'selve moet ende can gehouden werden, d'constitutie van 't Chineese rijck, de gewassen deses jaere aldaer, de goede apparentie van eenen welgestabileerden handel herwarts over." Entry dated 4th March 1637, Blussé et al., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol 1: 1629-1641*, 311.

drowning accident in 1640, the Dutch continued to be provided with information by another merchant from the mainland named Jocksim.[81]

The long-drawn-out war that the Ming Empire was waging against the Manchus and native rebel groups was of significance to the Dutch because the destruction and mayhem that it brought with it reduced the quantity of silk and porcelain that they received in Formosa from mainland Chinese traders. As a consequence, information about the conflict featured both in the news that the merchants relayed directly to the Company in Formosa and in the correspondence from the mainland officials that these traders brought with them to the island. At a certain juncture in 1633, when negotiations for trading rights gave more than a little reason for optimism when corresponding with Ming officials, the Dutch made overt gestures of friendship "promising to…support his royal majesty (if it should please him), with new inventions of [Dutch] firearms that could cause substantial damage, a party of gunners and soldiers to use against the Tartars."[82] The offer of Dutch cooperation was put forth at a time when the empire seemed open to the prospect of the Dutch traders conducting brisk trade in their port towns. This was a proposition that seems to have died a premature death, but it nevertheless makes apparent that a Dutch collaboration with the Ming dynasty to beef up their defences when their suzerainty was under threat was seriously considered at a time when the Portuguese in Macau were known to meet China's requirements for artillery and firearms. In the information that the Chinese merchants shared with the Dutch East India Company, news of the conflict mostly concerned the increasing demand for leaders on the warfront, which caused provincial governors to absent themselves from the areas under their jurisdiction.[83] Ample evidence of political troubles in the empire also reached the Dutch in the form of news about how the state was struggling to finance their war effort.[84] When by the late 1630s, the Ming confrontation against both domestic rebels and the Manchu invaders was already hastening towards the takeover of Peking in 1644, the information that these merchants traded to the Company concerned the rapidly contracting trade amidst the destruction brought on by the war.

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[81]For news of Hambuan's death see, "Aanvullende informative voor de periode 20 maart tot 6 november 1640." *Ibid.*, 500.

[82]"…belooven wij…Zijne Coninckliycke Mayesteyt (zoo 'tselve hem aangenaam zoude zijn) met nieuwe inventiën van geschut, daar groot gewelt met can gedaen werden, partije bosschieters ende soldaaten, om teegens den Tartar te gebruyeken, secundeeren." Entry dated September 10, 1633. Ibid., 126.

[83]Entry dated 9 March 1643, J.L. Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, Taiwan, vol. 2: 1641-1648* (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1995), 56.

[84]News of the state's tottering financial situation was brought by Mandorin Limbingh who features as one of the few informants to the Company who was not a merchant. Entry dated 9th March 1637, Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol. 1: 1629-1641*, 316-17.

The Company was especially eager to keep informed about the rise of their infamous adversary, Zheng Zhilong (or Iquan to the Dutch). Born in coastal China and having lived in Portuguese Macau, Manila and Hirado in Japan, Zheng was a man of the sea and intensely familiar with China's international trading networks. He was consequently drawn into the notorious world of piracy in the Chinese seas when serving the Dutch in Formosa.[85] With time and a compelling combination of guile and enterprise, he had in the 1630s established a firm grip on Chinese commerce overseas whereby Chinese shipping to foreign shores including Dutch Formosa emanating from the province of Fujian came under his thumb. For Dutch interests on the island thus, Zheng's clout in China's maritime trade made him an individual whose moves had to persistently be logged.[86] From their post in Fort Zeelandia, the Dutch followed the news of Zheng's admission into the Ming administration when the Chinese government decided to confer a veneer of legitimacy to his activities and rid themselves of a notorious outlaw by luring him onto their side by granting him official status. When absorbed into the bureaucracy as Admiral in 1627 with charge over the naval fleet of Fujian and elevated to the position of "provincial military commander" of Fuzhou in 1636, Zheng too was ordered to redeem the empire from both local banditry and the Tartar onslaught.

In all of these circumstances, news of the battles, skirmishes, and wars that the Ming waged merely skittered in the Company's cache of information acquired from the Chinese merchants. This signalled that the principal imperial worry in the form of the rise of numerous threats to Ming suzerainty was a reality, which to the Dutch, was being played out to the distant background. The marginality of the war in these information exchanges indicated that the Dutch in Formosa were in fact, peripheral observers to whom issues that concerned the Chinese seaboard such as new official appointments in the coastal provinces and the changing imperial stance on Dutch trade in China were of greater importance than problems that plagued either the hinterland or the northern reaches of the empire, which were the theatres of local rebellion and the Ming Manchu confrontations in the 1630s and 1640s. At most times hence, the war was only fleetingly mentioned in the Dutch-Chinese interaction in Formosa. There were however occasions where the information that the merchants brought to the island was astonishingly detailed. In reference to the astounding victories amassed by the Tartars during their incursions into the empire in 1638, Jocksim's junks on March 24, the same year

[85]Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese*, 6-9 (in chapter titled "A Scramble for Influence").
[86]Blussé characterizes "the relationship between him [Zheng] and the VOC" as one of "remarkable hatred and love." According to him, "the two parties were dependent on one another but still wanted to pursue their own interests." Blussé, *Tribuut aan China*, 48-49.

mediated the relay of information to the Dutch that the upheaval in the empire was beyond containment. They also brought news of the tactics that the invading armies put to use to both win the war and capture support for their rule.[87] Also, the Company's knowledge of the takeover of Peking in the spring of 1644 (which constituted the crux of Vondel's drama) was based on "tidings that were received [in Formosa] on a daily basis."[88] The Dutch on the island learned of this momentous change no more than six months after the episode had occurred. Although Formosa's dispatch to Batavia in December the same year detailing the information that had just come into their possession framed the episode as a likely fabrication, Batavia nevertheless passed it on to the Gentlemen Seventeen in Amsterdam. The *Generale Missiven* dated 23 December 1644 carried an exceptionally brief sketch of the dynastic change which read: "…they [the Chinese] say the King is dead and many compete for the throne [and] that the Tartar making use of the situation makes considerable progress in China."[89] Interestingly, the information passed on by merchants from the mainland to Formosa that was subsequently dispatched to Batavia was not very different from the version of the episode that Martini palmed off to the Company a decade later. The sketch of events that was procured through the Company's Formosan channel may, to use a phrase that contemporary chroniclers favoured, have qualified as "a true and exact account" of the takeover of the capital. It possessed all the elements generally associated with the tale of the fall of Peking – Li Zicheng's takeover of the city with the help of treachery, the suicide of the King, the post-regicidal continuation of the Ming struggle, and the ultimate victory of the Tartars. There is little doubt that in relaying information of the conquest of the capital the Company servants at Castle Zeelandia had established that the Formosan channel of information was a reliable one. Whether the character of the information that reached the VOC or the period in which it was received was conducive to proactive policy-making by the Company is debatable. As far as the VOC was concerned, the objective was to negotiate with the central authority in China for trading rights on the mainland. The information of supreme importance for the Company consequently was whether the Tartar invasion of China qualified as a raid or outright conquest, and whether the

[87]Entry dated 24 March 1639. Blussé et al., eds., *De dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, vol. 1: 1629-1641*, 454.For the losses suffered by the Ming in the hands of the Manchus in 1638, see Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 142.

[88] NA, VOC 1148 Taiwan, "Copy of the resolution in Castle Zeelandia to Antonio van Diemen, Governor General of India dated October 25,1644," ff. 265 r-265v; See "Account or summary drawn from successive letters and other papers received from Formosa since December 2, 1644." J. de Hullu, ed., *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia, Anno 1644-1645* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1903), 143.

[89]NA, VOC 1147, A. van Diemen, C. van der Lijn, S. Sweers, Paulus Croocq en Simon van Alphen, Batavia, 23 December 1644, fol. 56. Referred to in Shaogang Cheng, "De VOC en Formosa, 1624-1662: Een vergeten geschiedenis, deel 2: bijlage" (PhD diss., University of Leiden), 224.

Tartar ruler had decided to descend from his saddle and ascend the throne of China or merely retire on horseback to Manchuria with a magnificent booty. While by the end of 1644, the Company recognized the fact that the Ming dynasty had been displaced from Peking, the ultimate consequence of the Tartar incursions into Chinese territory remained a subject of intense speculation. It was only in 1651 with the arrival of Martini in Batavia that the Dutch became certain that a single and stable regime had established control over China and felt reassured enough to initiate diplomatic contact with the imperial court.

The impact of the information that Martini passed on to the VOC was acutely felt at the level of policy, however there is little trace of it on paper. The archives reveal little about Martini's stay in Batavia or the character of his interaction with the VOC officials. They do however showcase the Company's remarkable skills of persuasion in coaxing the Jesuit to part with the information he had gathered about the empire during his residence in China and which was intended for publication in Europe. Testimony to this effort is the presence in the VOC archives of the early drafts of what Martini would publish in 1654 as *De Bello Tartarico*, and in 1655 as the *Atlas Sinensis*.[90] Although the Company came into possession of the manuscripts authored by Martini in Latin during his period of captivity in Batavia, they were translated into Dutch by VOC scribes only as late as 1655, by which time the *Atlas Sinensis* was in press and *De Bello Tartarico* had been available to the European reading public for a year.

As momentous as Martini's forced holiday in Batavia was for the Dutch in evaluating the possibilities of direct commercial contact with China, the Jesuit's encounter with the VOC is equally important in the realm of news transfer. Martini's unexpected presence in Batavia resulted in the confluence of two information networks, the Jesuit channel of information transfer and the Company's circuit of newsgathering. Although the VOC possessed a rather self-sufficient channel of information procurement to keep abreast of the developments in China by means of their Formosan connection, it perceived the news that Martini was in possession of as superior to their own and thereby proceeded to employ it to their advantage. Thus the VOC did not enter Vondel's text via *De Bello Tartarico*, as an information donor but by aiding in the transfer of information quite literally by conveying Martini and his manuscript of *De Bello Tartarico* to the Dutch Republic.

[90]Martinus Martini, *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Amsterdam: J. Blaeu, 1655).The draft versions of the *Atlas Sinensis* and *De Bello Tartarico* in the VOC archives are NA, VOC 1206, "Corte beschrijvinge van het uijtterste Asia…, fols. 271r-325v and NA, VOC 1206, "Korte historisch verhael vande gedenckwaerdighste geschiedenisse voorgevallen in't groote ende seer vermaerde coninckrijk China...." fols. 326r-359r, respectively.

Although the presence of the VOC in Vondel's *Zungchin* via Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* is marginal, the Company appears to have contributed to the making of Vondel's *Zungchin* through yet another circuit. This is revealed in a single but crucial detail in Vondel's drama. The conclusion of the play foresees the persecution of the Jesuits at the hands of the Qing dynasty.[91] Writing the play in 1667, Vondel was here alluding to the persecution of the mission under the Qing regime from 1663 to 1668.[92] Curiously, this episode is recounted by none of the putative sources to Vondel's play, which suggests that the playwright's reading might have been far wider than is presumed to be.[93] One account that does make reference to this period of persecution in China and should be considered as another source to Vondel's play is the Flemish Jesuit Cornelius Hazart's *Kerckelycke Historie*, also published in 1667.[94] Interestingly, this account credits a report to Gentlemen Seventeen dated 30 January 1666 by VOC Governor General Johan Maetsuycker, who was Catholic by faith, as the source for this information.[95] The VOC archives reveals that Maetsuycker had in turn received this information from reports sent by a Dutch trading mission which was sent to Foochow under the stewardship of Constantijn Nobel in 1665.[96] In this confluence of the Jesuit and the Dutch channels of information, the VOC was a source of information for Vondel's play and the principal agent involved in information gathering and its transfer. The Jesuit account was in this instance a grateful beneficiary of this information and a conduit of transfer to Vondel's play.

Discourses, Dispositions, Despotisms: Imagining the Middle Kingdom

Zungchin is intriguing to say the very least. Peer behind the layers of literary detail and there lies a riveting history of information travel through pathways instituted by two enterprises with strong moorings in Asia. Apart from formulating the news circuits through which this

[91] See Verses 1601-1606.
[92]On the Jesuit persecution in China, see Ross, *A Vision Betrayed*, 172-74.
[93]While the detail is understandably omitted in *De Bello Tartarico* which was authored a decade before the persecutions, news of this phenomenon also fails to feature in Kircher's *China Illustrata* which was published in 1667, the very year that *Zungchin* was authored.
[94]Cornelis Hazart, *Kerckelycke historie van de gheheele wereldt, deel. 1* (Antwerp: Michiel Cnobbaert, 1667).
[95]Ibid., 482.The report alluded to in the context is Maetsuyker XXXV, 30 January 1666. See W. Ph Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneur Generaal en Raden aan heren XVII der verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, vol. 3, 1655-1674* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1968), 493. Barten contemplates the possibility of the VOC as having been the source to Vondel's information about the Jesuit persecutions, but fails to identify the channel by which this was made possible. See Barten, "Hollandse kooplieden op bezoek bij concilievaders," 81.
[96] NA, VOC 1252, "Missives sent by Nobel and the Council of Hocksieu (Fuzhou) dated 28 February 1665," pp. 192-195 and NA, VOC 1253, "Missives sent by Nobel and the Council of Hocksieu (Fuzhou) dated 31 October 1666," pp. 1876-1877. For the translation of the first report, see John E. Wills, Jr., "Some Dutch Sources on the Jesuit China Mission, 1662-1687," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu* 54 (1985), 285-86. Wills' article is one of the many studies that explore Dutch-Jesuit interaction and collaboration in the period.

information coursed until it drained into the literary piece, these enterprises also constituted the sources of information to the drama. The VOC makes a justifiable claim as an information donor to the play but it is the Society of Jesus that is its principal informant. Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* as demonstrated in the past sections had provided nearly all the brick and mortar that went into the building of the play. Together with this percolation of detail that sprung from the two sources, these enterprises left a mark on the drama in the form of their perspectival intrusions into the literary piece.

The prolonged intercourse of the Dutch East India Company and the Jesuits with the Middle Kingdom created for these enterprises conceptions about the empire. As regards the VOC, these views mostly replete in their private correspondence were occasionally laid out before the public eye in the reports of its employees which went into print. The Jesuits also generating a significant amount of covert institutional correspondence had all through their tenure in China from the late 1500s until the dismantling of the society in the late 1700s tirelessly churned out literature about the empire for the European print market.[97] When comprehending these perspectives about China that were engendered by the interaction of the Jesuits and the VOC with the empire, the concept of a discourse seems an attractive category whose application in the context is not without justification. Systematization and consistency, which were the defining terms of the concept, were characteristic of the textual representative strategies of both enterprises. Encounters with China generated knowledge for the Company administration which served as a roadmap for their future interaction with the empire and similarly, there was a pressing need for standardization in the Jesuit generated accounts in Europe, as consistency meant credibility which was crucial for selling the pursuits of the Society to the European reading public.[98] Less discernible and therefore open to debate is the question whether we are to here perceive the presence of single European discourse or to acknowledge the existence of two visibly variant institutional discourses. In other words, we ask whether we should be receptive to the fact that the varying objectives and histories of encounter of the two enterprises with China could cause them to imagine the empire differently thereby engendering two distinct discourses. If not, would we be sufficiently justified in collapsing these so called institutional imaginings to perceive these conceptions as

[97]Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, vol. 3: A Century of Advance, Book 4: East Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1564-66.

[98]The standardization drive in Jesuit accounts on China is apparent in Basil Guy's assertion that the Jesuits in the early seventeenth century manufactured "a version of geography, history and civilization in the Orient [which] was reinforced through successive generations of [their] propaganda." Basil Guy, "Ad majorem Societatis gloriam: Jesuit Perspectives on Chinese mores in the 17th and 18th centuries," in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, eds. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 74.

a part of a larger all-encompassing category of a European discourse about the Middle Kingdom? The means of resolving this knotty issue would be to line up the arguments that support both positions for evaluation before settling for an answer. While this question will be addressed intermittently, a second and more important concern also calls for reflection. Paying heed to the theory of Orientalism, we ask whether or not the Jesuit and VOC perceptions about China instituted formulaic conceptions of the empire that came to dictate the manner in which Europe subsequently imagined China.

Addressing the theme of discourse, a prudent defence of the argument that the VOC and the Society of Jesus generated independent and varying visions of China might begin with the understanding that the merchant and priest were unlikely to conjure up similar images of the empire. Illustrative of their varying sensibilities are the differing observations that two servants of these different enterprises made on the trivial yet telling theme of what the Chinese empire lacked. The Jesuit Alvarez Semedo whose account was published in the mid-seventeenth century, was convinced that the Chinese lacked nothing but religion.[99] When Olfert Dapper's *Atlas Chinensis*, an account of the Company's voyages in China from 1662 to 1665 under the stewardship of Balthasar Bort, was tempted into a similar exercise of appraising China's wants, it summarily announced that if there was anything the Chinese needed, it was "Indian spices."[100] The ideological foundations of the two enterprises which determined the very different standpoints, from which they viewed China, also influenced the thematic content of their accounts. Spurred on by their religious vision, it was commonplace for the Jesuits to litter their works to references to churches and conversions or to engage in descriptions that foretold promisingly of the advent of Christianity into the Middle Kingdom.[101] Accounts written by the servants of the VOC on the other hand consciously abstained from incorporating a religious rhetoric in their accounts or even postulating a religious premise to rationalize the events they narrated. In consequence, even the fall of the Ming dynasty, which the Jesuit Martinus Martini was tempted to ascribe to "divine

[99]Alvaro Semedo, *The History of that Great and Renowned Monarchy of China* [Relação da propagação da fe no reyno da China e outros adjacentes] (London: E. Tyler, 1655), note to the reader.
[100]I employ the English translation of the work, which incorrectly identifies Arnoldus Montanus as author instead of Olfert Dapper. The account reads, "we can justly call China a little world, and compare it to a precious gem in the midst thereof, in which more riches are found than in the whole earth besides: All that is wanting in China are Indian spices, or drugs." Arnoldus Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis: Being a Second Part of a Relation of Remarkable Passages in two Embassies from the Dutch East India Company of the United Provinces to the Viceroy Singlamong and the General Lipovi and to Konchi, Emperor of China and East Tartary*, trans. John Ogilby (London: Tho. Johnson, 1671), 465. Following the loss of Formosa to the Chinese pirate, Zheng Chenggong, the Dutch realized that any attempt to reclaim the island involved collaborating with the Manchus who too saw Zheng as an obstinate foe. The Balthasar Bort expedition was an expression of this policy of Dutch military cooperation with the Manchu dynasty. Wills, *Pepper, Guns and Parleys*, 29-34.
[101]Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 159, 173, 174, 197.

providence" was perceived by Nieuhof as the connivance of "the vicissitudes of fortune" and had no religious connotations.[102] Also registering the institutional differences were the narrative terrains of the Dutch and the Jesuit accounts. Ashley Millar and Jonathan Spence perceptively note that the Company accounts were realistic chronicles of encounter that illustrated the lived experience of Dutch interaction with the empire.[103] The Jesuit narratives, encyclopaedic in content and mostly impersonal in character, instead provided the reader with a panoptic view of China.

As palpable as these differences between the Company and Jesuit discourses on China might be, the argument that both had a fair share of commonalities and constituted a part of the grander European discourse has merit. For one, the accounts of the VOC as discussed earlier reveal a dependency on Jesuit information thereby negotiating the differences that the varying institutional affiliations brought with them. Johan Nieuhof no doubt typifies the trend of the Company's profligate borrowing from Jesuit accounts, but private reports of the VOC too conceded their indebtedness to Jesuit knowledge on China. As many as twenty years after Martini's eventful stay in Batavia, Pieter van Hoorn chose to open his report about his embassy to the Manchu court in the years 1666 to 1668 with a section titled "In praise of Martini," which acknowledged the Jesuit's contribution to opening up China to the Company. Here, he applauded the reliability of the Jesuit's observations about China, which he claimed were corroborated by his own experiences there.[104] In the similarities that these borrowings were bound to bring about, the most striking is what has been referred to by Lach and Van Kley as a feature typical of seventeenth-century accounts on China - their sublimely positive image of the empire.[105] Jesuit chroniclers were wont to opening their accounts with laudatory passages and their admiration for various facets of the Chinese civilization was a pervasive feature in their writings. This convinced contemporary European readers that China was in no way inferior to a prelapsarian Eden where a father-like emperor at the helm of an educated bureaucracy who possessed an immaculate sense of justice ruled over a people accomplished in the arts and sciences. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) noted with satisfaction that "of all the

[102] Cf. John Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company of the United Provinces to the Great Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*, trans. John Ogilby, 2nd ed. (London: John Ogilby, 1673), 252. Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 184-85 (in chapter titled "Algemeene beschrijving van 't ryk Sina"). For Martini's appraisal of the causes that led to the fall of the Ming dynasty, see Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 21-23.

[103] Millar, "Authority and Parenthood," 15. Spence sees in the reports of the Dutch on China, the advent of "realistic reportage" on the empire in Europe. Jonathan Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 42.

[104] NA, VOC 1269 Batavia, "Report on the Embassy to Peking submitted by Pieter van Hoorn to the Governor General and Council of India on 16 November 1669," fol. 273r.

[105] For instance see Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, vol. 3, Book. 4*, 1566.

pagan nations known to Europe, I know of no people who fell into fewer errors… than did the Chinese," and Martini writing in 1644 dubbed China as the "noblest and oldest" of all nations.[106] The representative strategy of portraying China as a land of enviable traits was mimicked by the Company chroniclers. The *Atlas Chinensis* deemed its people "very ceremonious, civil and modest," and in his estimation of the empire Nieuhof quoted Ricci almost verbatim in declaring that "of all the heathen sects which are come to the knowledge of those in Europe, we have not read of any who are fall'n into fewer errors than the Chinese..."[107]

The tendency to wax eloquent about China was arguably a European habit even before the Jesuits and Company servants put quill to paper. Previous bids to envision China for Europe such as Marco Polo's thirteenth-century *Il Milione* and sixteenth-century Portuguese accounts on the Middle Kingdom had already been disposed to glorifying the government, natural bounty, morality, and civilizational achievement of the empire, thereby creating a reservoir of images about China for the Jesuits and subsequent observers to draw from.[108] While these enterprises had evidently worked within the strictures of what may be seen as a formulaic European discourse on China, as Lach and Van Kley note, the Jesuits are to be credited with contributing to this mode of representation a deeper, better defined, and more persuasive image of the virtues of Chinese civilization.[109] This was further supplemented by the VOC, though in modest measure.

Discerning Oriental Dispositions: Tartar Bloodbaths and Chinese Bookishness

Amidst the flattering repertoire of images that constituted China in the VOC and Jesuit mentalité, imaginings of the empire that were less complementary found two avenues for expression. The first is a feature to which Chi-Ming Yang in her recent study on eighteenth-century English perceptions of China ascribes considerable importance to – the emphasis on

[106]Louis J. Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci* (New York: Random House, 1953), 93. Blaeu's section on China which was Martini's *Novus atlas Sinensis* in translation opened its statement to the reader with the words, "None, but the ignorant and inexperienced can deny that Asia is the noblest of all lands…but Asia too has no part older, nobler or better governed than its most extreme [territory]." Blaeu, *J. Blaeus Grooten atlas*, note to the reader.

[107]Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 186; Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, 441.

[108]For an analysis of the perspective contained in the account of Marco Polo, see Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds*, 3. In his reading of accounts such as Juan González de Mendoza's *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China* which was first published in Spanish in 1585, Donald Lach asserts that the basic tenor of the work was one of admiration. Donald F. Lach, *China in the Eyes of Europe*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 763-64.

[109]Lach and Van Kley state that "the image of China projected through both the ethnohistories and the Jesuit letters becomes progressively more adulatory." Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, vol. 3, Book. 4*, 1566.

effeminacy.[110] Yang mostly traces the source of the conflation of this feature in the English rhetoric to seventeenth-century texts on China that were preponderantly Jesuit and VOC in origin. When Yang underlines the centrality of effeminacy in discerning the Chinese disposition in these texts, one goes a step further to argue that the concept was suddenly hoisted in the seventeenth century to a position of unprecedented significance. Jesuit and VOC mediation tremendously bolstered the role of effeminacy as a stereotype that later European writers took as a characteristic feature of the Chinese, thus ensuring that it became a mainstay in the repertoire of European perspectives on China.

The concept of effeminacy seeped into the most predominant Jesuit and VOC accounts on China, and the writings of the Jesuits Matteo Ricci, Ferdinand Verbiest (1622-88), and Martino Martini were symptomatic of this tendency. Company accounts such as Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap*, Dapper's *Atlas Sinensis* and Matthijs Cramer's *Borts voyagie naerde kust van China en Formosa* (1670), a book of verses in praise of the Bort expedition to China, also confessed to having been influenced by this theory of effeminacy. In the eyes of its Jesuit and VOC authors, this trait meant more than the absence of virility. Martini may have appealed to its plainest meaning when he testified that "physical strength" was not a trait that the Chinese were endowed with.[111] Other seventeenth-century observers endowed the term with attendant traits to construct a well-developed theory that helped explain various facets of the Chinese civilization.[112] Effeminacy, considered an unfortunate corollary of the empire's high civilization, was at one level posited as a societal malady where China's bookish and lettered lot denoted a potentially languorous people. It was to this interpretation that Verbiest subscribed when he reasoned that the Chinese were in the throes of "a characteristic effeminacy."[113] Just as it seemed to help comprehend China's societal faults, it also aided interpret her foreign policy. Matteo Ricci expressed incredulity at China's lack of interest in expansionism and her single-minded concern merely to preserve her existing boundaries and this compelled him to compare the empire's apparent listlessness to Europe's expansionist zeal.[114] With effeminacy's aid, China's historical trajectory of being repeatedly

[110]Chi-ming Yang, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1760* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011).
[111] Martini rehearses Aristotle's observation in this context in his *Novus Atlas Sinensis*. Blaeu, *J. Blaeus Grooten atlas*, 7.
[112] A number of the traits referred to here are engaged with in Yang, *Performing China*, 32-51.
[113]Ferdinand Verbiest, et al., *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors of China, including the two journeys into Tartary of Father Ferdinand Verbiest, in the suite of the Emperor Kang-hi*, trans. Earl of Ellesmere (London: Hakluyt Society, 1854), 11.
[114] Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci*, 54-55. A similar perspective is aired in Matelief, "Historische verhael vande treffelijcke reyse gedaen near de Oost-Indien en China," 106.

vulnerable to conquest by the invading nomads from beyond its northern borders also became clearer. The *Atlas Chinensis* perceived China's pacifism and susceptibility to invasions to be the results of her military inaptitude. It noted that the Chinese had been cured of their inadequacies on the battlefield only after they had bowed to the Tartar conquest.[115] Further, the Chinese aversion to warfare could be rationalized as being both a cause for and consequence of effeminacy and high civilization. "The Chinese is of an affable and peaceable disposition, addicted to husbandry, and loving all good arts and sciences..," wrote Nieuhof insinuating that the Chinese were more given to poring over a book than wielding a sword.[116] The most significant spinoff in terms of characterization from the conjecture of Chinese effeminacy was, as Adrienne Ward and Yang have noted, the ability of the trait to distinguish the Chinese from their seminomadic northern invaders.[117] Although Ward argues that the representation of both groups of people were at times contingent, they were mostly perceived as possessing remarkably contradictory traits – the civilized, polished and lettered Chinese in their sedan chairs were compared to the uncivilized, battle-hardened barbarians on horseback who were notorious for their savagery.[118] Nieuhof reckoned "that they [the Tartars are] in effect a nation of plunderers and robbers," and when describing the death and mayhem unleashed by the Manchu conquest, Matthijs Cramer wrote,

> Here, the curtains to all atrocities are drawn,
> No tyranny too great that that has not been enacted here,
> In villages and towns, yes, all the countryside
> Feel the sword and arrow; and bow and distress and death and fire.[119]

The Tartars may have been savage but commentators were quick to argue that these distinctions between the Chinese and the Tartar were not irreconcilable and that the power of the Chinese civilization was such that it could domesticate their barbarian invaders and render

[115] Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, 428.
[116] Cf. Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 250; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 181 (in the chapter titled "Algemeene beschryving van 't ryk Sina").
[117] Adrienne Ward, *Pagodas in Play: China on the Eighteenth-Century Italian Opera Stage* (New Jersey: Associated University Press, 2010), 86-88; Yang, *Performing China*, 35.
[118] Ward infers that the stereotypes that were conceptualized to comprehend both groups of people were not static and fixed. Yet one would argue that the Chinese were more prone to being depicted as effeminate as were the Tartars as savage. Ward, *Pagodas in Play*, 86-88.
[119] Cf. Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 255; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 188-89 (in the chapter titled "Algemeene beschrijving van 't ryk Sina"); "Hier opent de gordijn van alle gruw'lijckheden,/ Geen tyranny te groot, die hier niet wert geleden,/ In dorpen en in ste'en, ja't heele platte landt/ Voeldt klingh, en pijl; en boogh, en noot, en doodt, en brandt." Matthijs Cramer, *Borts voyagie naerde kust van China en Formosa* (Amsterdam: Pieter Dirksz, 1670), 88.

them susceptible to its most seductive yet lethal trait - effeminacy. As a result, both Martini and his textual protégé, Nieuhof, noted how the Chinese subjects infected and overpowered their conquerors with their civilizational decadence almost as a form of retribution for their subordination.[120]

Effeminacy was certainly not deployed for the first time in the formulations of the Jesuits and later the VOC. The concept and its many manifestations such as China's aversion to war had already caught the imagination of commentators who had attempted to comprehend the Chinese civilization before the Jesuits did. Marco Polo had made mention of this contemptible fault of the Chinese in the thirteenth century and the accounts of the sixteenth-century Augustinians Martin de Rada and Juan Gonzales de Mendoza had drawn the attention of Europe to the fact that the brilliance that the Chinese demonstrated in numerous fields was not replicated in the realm of warfare.[121] Yet it was the Jesuits and the VOC who are to be credited with the effort of giving the notion significance. Apart from the novel manner in which the seventeenth-century chroniclers worked the term to function as a threshold to the Chinese civilization, what won the concept renewed attention was the historical conjuncture that manifested itself in the period. The first dimension of the conjuncture is, as Ward and Yang rightly observe, the coincidence of the Jesuit and VOC involvement with China during the empire's revolution of 1644, whereby Europeans became witnesses to this landmark event in Chinese history.[122] In recounting the political turbulence that imperial China underwent, these commentators fell back on their denominational and institutional affiliations to comprehend the causes and the consequences of the war. As discussed previously, Martini ascribed the outcome to the Almighty while Nieuhof threw his weight behind destiny. Yet the manner in which effeminacy as a trait seemed peculiarly appropriate in discerning the event was not lost on these chroniclers. Effeminacy permitted them to argue that the rise and fall of a dynasty was not written in the stars alone but that it could be ascribed to human disposition. Repeating Martini's emphasis on "divine providence," with its Catholic undertones, might have offended Nieuhof's sensibilities, but

[120]Martini, *Historie van den Tartarschen oorloch*, 5-6; Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 251; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 182 (in the chapter titled "Algemeene beschryving van 't ryk Sina").
[121]Lach, *China in the Eyes of Europe*, 786; Marco Polo and Rustichello from Pisa, *Travels of Marco Polo*, (1903).
[122]Although Ward recognizes the impact of the war in China on European representations of the Chinese and the Manchus, she argues that it helped demolish the straight-jacketing that was otherwise prevalent in European textual representations. Ward, *Pagodas in Play*, 88; Yang argues that the "invasion[..] came to symbolize China's resiliency." Yang, *Performing China*, 33.

employing the theme of effeminacy may have seemed the better alternative.[123] More important, both writers realized that no spectacle could better legitimize their subscription to the theory of effeminacy. The Manchu conquest had after all, it seemed, brought alive all the traits associated with the concept - the vulnerability of the Chinese to the Tartar invasion, their impotency in warding off the attacks of their northern invaders and the Manchu successes in battle. If effeminacy provided a plausible explanation for the dramatic turn of events, the second dimension of the historical conjuncture which was the forcefulness with which the Jesuits planted the idea of Chinese effeminacy in the European imagination. Jesuit works on the empire (and to a far lesser extent VOC accounts) irrevocably strengthened European assumptions of Chinese frailty, their aversion to warfare, and Tartar brutality.

Their strategies of representation reaped spectacular results. The image of the Chinese as civilized and effete and of the Tartars as warrior barbarians vulnerable to the charms of their effeminate subjects was reproduced in the subsequent centuries with startling fidelity. The introduction to Engelbert Kaempfer's *The History of Japan* published in 1728 projected effeminacy as a principle marker of difference between the Chinese and Japanese and another eighteenth-century account, the *Driejaarige reize naar China* reaffirmed the effeminate ways of the last Ming ruler, the Chongzhen emperor.[124] The work alleged that the emperor's self-imposed seclusion within the four walls of his harem with only his concubines as company was a practice that was least conducive to good governance. Effeminacy as a label also proved to be a surprisingly versatile concept. In the hands of some later chroniclers, its value as an explanatory device capable of describing varying historical circumstances made it a tantalizing tool. On other occasions, shifts in perspective that came with time ensured her repeated evocation. As the first cracks appeared in the imperial edifice of Manchu China in the nineteenth century signalled that the decline of yet another dynasty in China approached, many observers took as its cause the Manchus' vulnerability to effeminization. Sir John Francis Davis's popular work titled *The Chinese* (1836) noted that two Manchu rulers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had "in their comparative indolence" eschewed the

[123]Millar states that the theory of the Manchu susceptibility to sinicization allowed the Jesuits to still abide by their theory of "China's historical stagnation" which the conquest would have otherwise crushed owing to the radical change it signified. Millar, "The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers," 39.

[124]The publication of the English version of Kaempfer's text preceded the publication of the Dutch translation of the work by a year. Interestingly, the Dutch version does not reproduce this perception of the Chinese. *The History of Japan: Giving an Account of the Ancient and Present State of that Empire, vol. I,* trans. J.G. Scheuchzer (London: Printed for the translator, 1728), xxiii; Everts Ysbrants Ides and Nicolaes Witsen, *Driejaarige reize naar China, te lande gedaan door den Moskovischen afgezant, E. Ysbrants Ides, van Moskou af, over Groot Ustiga, Siriania, Permia, Sibiriën, Daour, Groot Tartaryen tot in China* (Amsterdam: Pieter de Coup, 1710), 234-35(note).

vigour exhibited by their predecessors and scouting for an explanation for this condition, *The Westminster Review* of 1840 reasoned that the Tartars were rendered more vulnerable to Chinese charms because of the racial affinities they shared with the latter group.[125] Interestingly, when the drama of imperial decline was rehearsed this time, the nineteenth-century observers borrowed from their predecessors the explanatory tool of effeminacy alone. Propositions of religion and destiny, which seventeenth-century chroniclers had used to explain Ming decline found no takers. To post-enlightenment writers who "placed human volition rather than divine providence at the centre of the historical process," faults in human disposition explained circumstances better than divine agency or chance did.[126]

The most notable deployment of the term effeminacy came with the eighteenth-century description of China by Lord George Macartney, who headed a 1793 trade embassy to China, a British venture whose failure has been perceived as a cause for the historic Sino-British confrontations of the nineteenth century - the Opium Wars.[127] When Macartney caught sight of the Manchu attire, he was supposedly astonished by how "effeminate" it was and the embassy's draughtsman, William Alexander, was forced to a similar conclusion when he observed that the "effeminate" Chinese trooper was no match for his European counterpart.[128] The usage of the term "effeminate" in the context of the Macartney embassy is significant because the Earl had in the course of the diplomatic undertaking toyed with the possibility of an outright war against the Manchu empire, and the term had moreover been deployed in the context of estimating the relative martial prowess of the parties involved.[129] Effeminacy had therein been roped into the vocabulary of British imperial expansionism and was employed to describe what the British subjects saw as a beleaguered and floundering foe.[130] Apart from fostering a vision of a frail dynasty that compared poorly with its prospective European adversary, the English trade in opium in China whipped up new associations between effeminacy and the Chinese. Nineteenth-century English tracts such as *Opium and Opium*

[125]"China: Its Early History, Literature, and Language; Mis-translation of Chinese Official Documents; Causes of the Present War," *The Westminster Review* 34, 2 (1840), 273; John Francis Davis, *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and its Inhabitants, vol. 1* (London: Charles Knight and Co, 1836), 172-73.
[126]Cf. Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.
[127]Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 67.
[128]Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 28; James J. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), 201-02.
[129]Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*, 201-02.
[130]According to Benjamin Fischer "he (Macartney)…viewed the country with an imperialist eye." Benjamin Louis Fischer, "Opium Pushing and Bible Smuggling: Religion and the Cultural Politics of British Imperialistic Ambition in China" (M.Phil diss., University of Notre Dame, 2008), 175.

Appetite popularized the notion that effeminacy was an inextricable trait of the vegetating Chinese opium eater and Suvendrini Perera in her reading of Thomas de Quincey's 1821 autobiography titled *Confessions of the Opium Eater* underlines the manner in which the work considered the consumption of opium conspicuously Chinese because of its connotations of effeminacy.[131] Thus it was thanks to the Jesuits and the VOC that effeminacy became a watchword in the vocabulary of subsequent China commentators. As such, the concept invariably conferred an Orientalist perspective as Edward Said understood the term.

Begetting Sinister Children: Benevolent and Oriental Despotisms

Effeminacy, the apparent fault in the Chinese character, was the first Orientalist intrusion into the VOC's and Jesuit representations of China; the second was their understanding of the empire's political organization and nature of governance. The political make-up of no extra-European society, it might be argued, received as much attention as did the Chinese notions of rule and kingship in the early modern period. Chroniclers who were generally unperturbed in arbitrarily clumping together most Oriental societies under the heading of Oriental Despotism single-mindedly popularized the notion of China as different by projecting her system of government as a "benevolent manifestation of despotism."[132] The reasons for such a characterization, many scholars point out, is to be found in the leverage it provided in legitimizing the modus operandi of the China observers, the Jesuits, in winning Christian converts.[133] By envisaging the Chinese government as a well-ordered, pyramidal structure, the Jesuits were able to justify their policy of proselytizing the ruling elite at the apex through a policy of acculturation so that the faith would subsequently trickle down to the general population at the base.[134] In the Jesuit representation of China's political apparatus, two elements were repeatedly emphasized as being characteristic of the empire's governance: the absolute rule of the monarch, a feature continuously recalled in Jesuit accounts from Francis Xavier's reference to the emperor as "a single sovereign whose will is absolute" to Martini's

[131]Calkins Alonzo, *Opium and the Opium-Appetite* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 113; Suvendrini Perera, *Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 112.
[132]Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism: Botero to Montesquieu," *Journal of Early Modern History* 9, 1-2 (2005), 126-27.
[133]Millar, "The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers," 13-14; Gunther Lotte, "China in European Political Thought, 1750-1850," in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Thomas H.C. Lee (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), 67-68.
[134]Lotte, "China in European Political Thought, 1750-1850," 67-68.Thinking aloud on the proselytization plan that he sought to institute, Francis Xavier wrote, "We shall inform the sovereign first, and then his subjects, in the name of the King of Heaven, that henceforth they must not worship the devil, but God." Henry James Coleridge, ed., *The Life and Letters of St. Francis Xavier, vol. 2* (London: Burns and Oates, 1872), 497.

and Verbiest's reiteration of a similar evaluation in their appraisal of the emperor as the supreme authority of the state; and the compassionate rule of the emperor.[135] The projection of the nature of the Chinese state along these lines allowed the Jesuits to rationalize the fall of the Ming dynasty as being the outcome of the gross violation of this ideal form of government. The Chongzhen Emperor's avarice could be seen as having flouted the rules of paternal and altruistic rule. Similarly, a later European chronicler would recall that the emperor's "blind attachment to unfaithful magistrates and soldiers" exceeded all permissible limits and could indicate that his absolute authority and his ability to reign in his bureaucracy had been compromised, thus giving way to weakness and a debilitating dependence of the emperor on the imperial edifice.[136] The Jesuits envisioned the sort of Benevolent Despotism found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China as a highly desirable model of governance which Europe could do well to emulate. Ironically, when their information about the empire came to fuel eighteenth-century Enlightenment speculations on good and deplorable forms of government, as Ashley Miller has pointed out, they were employed not only to support the arguments of China sympathizers, who like the Jesuits, subscribed to the idea of the virtuous Chinese state, but also to fortify the counterclaims of critics who thought China should be included among the already well-populated category of Oriental Despotisms.[137]

Benevolent Despotism caught the fancy of the Jesuits but how did their fellow European observers in the VOC envision Chinese governance? Laura Hostetler's analysis of Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap*, which narrated the events of the embassy to Peking in 1656, is instructive.[138] The record of Nieuhof's experiences, she observes, indicated a deeply vexed relationship between the centre and the provinces in the Middle Kingdom, where the imposition of central authority on the provinces was marginal and incomplete.[139] The suggestion of the imperial state's loose grasp over its provincial limbs is echoed in Dapper's *Atlas Chinensis*. In their portrayal of provincial governors, the chapters in *Het Gezantschap* and the *Atlas Chinensis* devoted to recounting the experiences of the embassies and expeditions of the VOC delegations in China subtly point to the glaring defects in the empire's central authority. These state officials who mediated the interaction of the Company

[135]Coleridge, *The Life and Letters*, 373; Verbiest, et al., *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors*, 125-26; Blaeu, *J. Blaeus Grooten atlas*, 14; Kircher, *Toonneel van China*, 202.
[136]The work attributes these words to Adam Schall who is said to have made this reference in the context of a conversation with the Manchu emperor, Shunzhi. Verbiest et al., *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors*, 41-42.
[137]Millar, "The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers," 1-5.
[138]Laura Hostetler, "Mapping Dutch Travels to and Translations of China: Jan Nieuhof's Account of the First East India Company Embassy, 1655-57," *Horizons: Seoul Journal of Humanities* 1, 2 (2010).
[139]Ibid., 158-59.

representatives with the imperial court were caricatured as enterprising entrepreneurs guilty of engaging in rampant corruption and private trade. *Het Gezantschap* alleged that the Governor of Canton claimed that the VOC's request for free trade could only be bought through bribery. This advice, the Dutch reckoned was not motivated by the Governor's desire to ensure the success of the embassy but to fatten his own purse.[140] The embassy of Pieter van Hoorn encountered similar instances of provincial authorities enriching themselves. Agents of the viceroy of Fuzhou exhibited an eagerness to engage in clandestine trade when they, as the *Atlas Chinensis* notes, offered to sell the Dutch, "white raw silk," a commodity whose "transportation was strictly forbidden by the emperor."[141] In his private correspondence to the Amsterdam Chamber, Pieter van Hoorn described Singlamong, the Governor of Fuzhou, as "being regarded the greatest merchant in China who like Coxinga had opened outlets across the entire empire and whose representatives were to be found in all the principal trading centres."[142] In stark contrast to the somewhat sterile Jesuit views of an immensely supreme and rather secure monarchy, it was a corruption-ridden and potentially subversive government that the Dutch encountered in their engagement with imperial China.

That the Dutch perception of Chinese imperial governance was contrary to the Jesuit understanding of the system is to be attributed in part, as Walsh and Millar discern, to the very different character of the Company's interactions with China.[143] According to Walsh, the bickering, brawls, and negotiations of the VOC servants with their Chinese counterparts and lower-level bureaucrats occasioned a more "realistic" perspective of China.[144] This, Walsh notes, allowed the Company to tear away the heavy veil of idealism with which the Jesuits draped their China. A second reason why the Dutch were prompted to characterize their relationship with China differently must also have had to do with the fact that both Nieuhof's and Van Hoorn's embassies were failures. In reporting to the Council of Batavia and the Gentleman Seventeen in Amsterdam, they could therefore attribute their lack of success to the fact that the provincial governors exceeded their authority and liberally engaged in corruption. Although there is no questioning the fact that the Dutch were able to create an alternative

[140]Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 112; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 167 (in chapter titled "Nauwkeurige beschrijving van 't gezantschap").
[141]Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, 218.
[142]"Voorts wert desen coning Singlamongh gehouden voor den grootsten coopman van China en gelijck Coxin sijn winkels door het gantsche rijck had verspreiden so bevonden over al in de principaelste handelplaetsen de factoors van ditto coninck." NA, VOC 1269 Batavia, "Report about the Peking embassy by Pieter van Hoorn submitted to the Governor-General and Council of India on November 16, 1669," fol. 281v.
[143]Ryan Walsh, "Johan Nieuhof's Cathay: Aspects of Inventing a Travelogue in Early Modern Europe," *Outstanding Honors Theses* 35 (2011), 7-8; Millar, "Authority and Parenthood," 15.
[144]Walsh, "Johan Nieuhof's Cathay."

image of Chinese governance, the extent to which this characterization constituted a supple counter-position to the Jesuit formulations is suspect. The VOC perception of a trouble-ridden Chinese bureaucracy undoubtedly flits across their narratives about their experiences in China. However, the more visible, plain-for-all-to-see appraisals of the monarchy contained in their general evaluations of Chinese society replicate the Jesuit stance on Chinese governance. Nieuhof self-assuredly subscribed to the idea of the Chinese monarch's absolute rule when he declared that "the emperor of China commands over the lives and estates of all his subjects, he alone being the supreme head and governor; so that the Chinese government is absolutely monarchical."[145] Dapper's vision of the Chinese polity was moulded on similar lines.[146]The similarity of the Company's observations to the Jesuit position may be attributed to the unassailable position that the Jesuit conceptualizations of China enjoyed in the European public sphere, and as Walsh notes, the quest for credibility in the VOC narratives demanded their alignment with the Jesuit view.[147] Overhauling the Jesuit perspective for the Company accounts therefore seems not to have been an option, and even if the VOC's alternative imaginings of the Chinese state were articulated in Company accounts, they only featured in its obscure narrative alleyways. At this juncture, it might be worth pondering whether the Dutch would have been able to detach themselves from their dependency on the Jesuit discourse and forcefully sell their idea of China to readers in Europe had they enjoyed a more dominant relationship with or a more intrusive presence in China. Under the circumstances that then existed, the Dutch discourse dwelt in the shadow of the Jesuit one.

Not surprisingly, when Nieuhof's evaluations of China were deployed to substantiate the political debates of subsequent centuries, it was his conspicuous appraisal of China's political character that theorists took note of. In *China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe*, Walter Demel states that when the seventeenth-century German philosopher Samuel von Pufendorf sat down to develop his notion of the monarch, it was Nieuhof's characterization of the Chinese emperor as an "absolute" sovereign that he appealed to.[148] More intriguingly, according to Demel, Nieuhof's depiction of the "Son of Heaven" might also have aided Montesquieu when he drew up his theory of Oriental Despotism.[149] If this inference is true, this means that the apparent contradictions in Nieuhof's account, which held

[145]Nieuhoff, *An Embassy of the East India Company*, 141; Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 1 (in chapter titled "Algemeene beschryving van 't ryk Sina").
[146]Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, 392.
[147]Walsh, "Johan Nieuhof's Cathay," 7.
[148]Walter Demel, "China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe, 1570-1750," in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Thomas H. C. Lee (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), 55.
[149]Ibid., 56.

out the possibility of helping conceptualize what might have been a far more subtle theory of government, where the authority of the sovereign could in practice be defied by governors like Singlamong, who established for themselves parallel commercial empires, had been overlooked. And the outcome instead was the more prosaic theory of Oriental Despotism.[150]

To recapitulate the principle arguments posed above, the Dutch East India Company and the Society of Jesus were predisposed to describing China in superlatives, but their evaluations of the Middle Kingdom nevertheless provided room for certain derogatory perceptions of the empire. These wafted into their theses about the empire in their postulations of effeminacy and Benevolent Despotism. Although effeminacy was not a novel stereotype in the seventeenth century, it was innovatively deployed by the enterprises as a concept that encapsulated many aspects of Chinese life. The historical conjuncture of the Chinese civil war with the Jesuit and VOC presence in the empire, and the influential Jesuit reporting in Europe further ensured that the label of effeminacy remained a staple in the European endeavour to envision China in later centuries. Unlike the first perspective, which had been deliberately evoked by the Jesuits and the VOC to understand the workings of the empire, the second was a project gone awry. The enterprises had understood Benevolent Despotism to be the framework that explained Chinese governance, but they had in the eighteenth century unwittingly sired the influential theory of Oriental Despotism that rudely contradicted their own. Reflecting on the theme of discourse, one could argue that the commonalities between the Jesuit and VOC perspectives were far too many to allow for any delineation that recognizes these enterprises as manufacturers of two independent discourses. Institutional and denominational differences sometimes lent an air of difference to these accounts, but the variations that ensued were largely superfluous and the perspectival kernel of the Jesuit and VOC accounts remained the same. Both were self-professed admirers of the empire, both endorsed the notion of effeminacy, and both seemingly agreed that the Chinese state was best described as a Benevolent Despotism. The VOC did offer an alternative opinion about how the imperial machinery functioned because their experiences with the empire were commercial rather than evangelical. The Company also portrayed the empire differently because explanations had to be found that accounted for the failure of the Dutch embassies that brought these characterizations back home. When they ventured to put forth a varied visualization of the empire, it was an attempt that was too reticently and half-heartedly formulated to either displace the Jesuit viewpoint or to be taken into consideration when

[150]See Chapter titled "East Asia in the Early Modern European Imagination" in David Martin Jones, *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

counter-theories were being formulated in the eighteenth century. The Jesuit and VOC imaginings of China therefore neatly fell in line with the larger European discourse, but they nevertheless constituted an important milestone in the way in which certain images of China were reworked to fire the imagination of later China observers.

Arms or Amiability: To Talk or Terrorize the Chinese into Trade

Before we return to Vondel's *Zungchin* to evaluate the nature of characterization in the play in the light of the perspectives exhibited in its sources, we must take a small detour to evaluate the nature of the VOC's relationship with China. The Company's interaction with the empire must be seen within the larger context of Europe's interaction with Asia in the early modern period. Here, China features as an anomaly in many respects. As we have already noted, the empire in this period hardly elicited the disdain of the European observer in the seventeenth century. It was instead regarded as the embodiment of progress and was an object of European awe. Even when the VOC groaned and grumbled about the levels of corruption that infested China's administrative structure, few of their complaints were heard back in Europe. Most were confined to the pages of the Company archives. The nature of European penetration into China in the period was another cause for exceptionalism. Save for the Jesuits and the Portuguese in Macau, China was mostly isolated from European presence and like the VOC, the English East India Company another corporation and forerunner of imperialism, was yet to establish direct trade with the empire. To academics who write mostly with reference to the English East India Company, these unique circumstances of interaction have been reflected in the sphere of representation. Where these Europeans envisaged their relationship with China in writing, Yuhan Hai and Matthew Hale claim that their views were "not at first militarily and economically invasive" and contained "no trace of western essentialization of the Orient."[151] In a similar vein, Robert Markley's *The Far East and the English Imagination*, which takes into account the oddities of the Chinese case, states that the laudatory European accounts of East Asia were devoid of a hegemonic imaginary that "traditional postcolonialism" associates with the period.[152] To him, "the Far East …serve[d] as the fantasy space for mercantile capitalism."[153] When deliberating on where the Dutch East India Company's encounter with China features in the equation, Laura Hostetler's analysis of

[151]Yuhai Han and Matthew Hale, "Speech without Words," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 15, 2 (2007), 389.
[152]Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination: 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8.
[153]Ibid., 4.

Nieuhof's *Het Gezantschap* is once again useful for our study. Reflecting on the trials and tribulations that the De Keyser embassy in China experienced without complaint, she remarks "the ambassadors and their party must have felt quite at the mercy of forces over which they had no control."[154] The difficulties that she sees Nieuhof and the other embassy delegates as having endured in China, where they could hardly comprehend their environment, also pervades the *Atlas Chinensis*. The Bort expedition (1663-1664), a heavily armed fleet dispatched by Batavia to assist the Manchus in combatting their imperial dissidents on Formosa were left idling in Chinese waters, as the Manchus continued to send heavily garbled replies regarding their commitment to fulfilling the Dutch demands of trade. The sense of Dutch vulnerability that brims over in these accounts has lent itself to arguments of scholars such as Robert Markley and Ryan Walsh who have appealed to such works to argue that "travelogues, if anything, underscore the fragility and uncertainty of early modern European networks."[155] Evidently, such an evaluation contests the recent academic trend of tracing the roots of later imperial imaginings to this period, as is implicit in Anthony Pagden's remark that European engagement with China was fired by "thinly veiled colonizing ambitions."[156]

Walsh is no doubt correct in stating that these texts, most of which are published travelogues, reveal the insecurity of Dutch enterprise in China. An evaluation of the Sino-Dutch encounter solely on the basis of these travelogues is nevertheless misleading because the Company archives, which are equally instructive about the Dutch disposition towards China tell a markedly different story. The instructions issued by the Council of Batavia to the early seventeenth-century Company expeditions to China and the *Beschrijving van de Oost Indische Compagnie*, a comprehensive sketch of the history of the VOC in Asia compiled by Pieter van Dam in the early eighteenth century show the Company's perennial efforts to consider the approach they should adopt in their disposition towards China.[157] Whether the empire was to be coaxed or coerced into consenting to the Dutch setting up shop in the Middle Kingdom was the burning question that Company policy makers grappled with in the course of the seventeenth century. In other words, Dutch strategy in engaging China in the period oscillated between three policy points. The first was diplomacy and the second termed as "the middle path" (de middelweg) was conceptualized as a method of feigning adherence

[154]Hostetler, "Mapping Dutch Travels," 171.
[155]Cf. Walsh, "Johan Nieuhof's Cathay," 25; Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination: 1600-1730*, 1-21.
[156]Anthony Pagden, ed. *Facing Each Other: The World's Perception of Europe and Europe's perception of the World, vol. 1* (Sydney: Ashgate, 2000), xvii.
[157]Pieter van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oostindische Compagnie, boek 2, deel 1*, ed. F.W. Stapel ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1931), 671-767.

to Chinese dictates while pursuing their own interests.[158] The third, which is the one that should arouse our greatest interest, was the option of deploying violence against the imperial entity.

Aggression first entered the vocabulary of Dutch policy considerations when in his instruction to the Reijersoon expedition in 1622, Governor General Jan Pieterszoon Coen grimly observed that "friendship" had failed to shake the Ming dynasty from their refusal to allow Dutch trade in the empire and "that nothing short of the violence of war will obtain [for us] either an audience or trade."[159] The alternative he proposed were *plunderstochten* or raids aimed at impairing Chinese coastal commerce. As a result of these orders, the coast of Fukien was tormented from 1622 to 1624 by VOC raids.[160] Although the policy of violence was discarded in in favour of diplomacy after the Dutch were granted the right to trade in Formosa, it remained a latent option in rhetoric. It was often evoked in the deliberations of the VOC, which contemplated using violence when diplomacy proved inadequate in helping the Dutch attain their objectives. Still clamouring for trading rights in 1630, the VOC was tempted to see the wisdom in the "argument of …Coen…that amiability would never bring the Company trade, only commanding respect and authority would."[161] The persistence with which the VOC considered violence as a feasible option has implications for the manner in which we conceptualize Sino-Dutch encounter in the early modern period. It dispels the image of the VOC as a reticent enterprise daunted by the might of the Chinese empire and instead creates the notion of the Company as self-assured enough to challenge the empire to a contest on the battlefield.

The formulation of force as a matter of Company policy is also instructive about how the VOC perceived its imperial adversary. It plainly meant that the Company did not consider China as an unassailable fortress, and it shows that far from being intimidated by the empire, the Company was keenly attuned to its troubles and woes. In fact, Coen's proposal for the use of arms against China came at a time when the empire was most vulnerable; the Ming Empire in the 1620s was evidently in a pitiable state, riven by a self-destructive disunity from within and assaulted by calamitous invasions from without.[162] Apart from exhibiting the presence of mind to prey upon the empire when its strength was ebbing, the Dutch were well aware that

[158]For the Company's contemplations on adopting the "middle path", see Ibid., 692.
[159]" ..maer de Chinesen met gewelt aentasten, zoo haest sulcx noodich is ende bij den raedt goodt gevonden wordt, also voorzeecker verstaen dat niet dan met gewelt van oorloge handel noch gehoor becommen zullen." NA, VOC 1077 Batavia 2, "Instructions issued to Commander Cornelis Reijersen and the Council of the fleet sailing to China," fol. 219v. Also see fol. 214r.
[160]Wills Jr, *Embassies and Illusions*, 40.
[161]Van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oostindische Compagnie, boek 2, deel 1*, 697.
[162]Ibid., 682.

the strength to which they would attribute their roaring successes in Asia was the empire's Achilles heel – their naval might. They marvelled at the disdain that China, like other landed Asian polities, possessed for seafaring and the sea and they briefly contemplated replicating the deeds of the infamous Chinese pirate, Iquan (Zheng Zhilong) because of the handsome returns that piracy on China's seas promised.[163] And the scorn that was naturally evinced when a naval power appraised an empire that suffered a curious case of thalassaphobia is captured in Matthijs Cramer's book of verses, which contemptuously noted that "the Tartars are in the sea timid, fearful, and faint hearted…Who have been trained to neither man the junks nor sail the sea."[164]

If at this juncture we reckon that the Company regarded China's unassailability as no more than a myth, the question then is whether the Company took up arms for the attainment of modest mercantile aims or whether we are to read in this exhibition of belligerence a prehistory to a later colonialism? We might be beguiled into believing that the Company tinkered with the prospect of outright colonization if we take into account the frequency with which Company records reflect on the Chinese wariness in getting into too cosy a relationship with the "red-haired barbarians."[165] They feared, so we are told, that it might bring upon them, the fate of subjugation that other territories which allowed a Dutch presence in their kingdoms came to suffer. Also buttressing this argument is the evident discomfort that the Jacob de Keyser embassy of 1656 revealed when it discussed with the Chinese, the VOC's expansionist urges. Anticipating questions by the imperial enquiry panel on the touchy subject of Dutch territorial acquisitions in Asia, the Company delegates resolved to present the Dutch as liberators who were fortuitously granted territorial gifts when they rescued beleaguered Asian potentates from Portuguese tyranny.[166] Although this perspective might suggest a colonizing intent on the part of the Company, one can more easily make a counter argument. Despite his aggressive rhetoric, even the most outspoken exponent of the policy of aggression, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, defined the objectives of the Company's 1622 "raids" in rather narrow terms. His instructions to the Reijersen expedition read,

[163]Ibid., 697.
[164]"De Taters zijn in see verleege bange bloede…Die noch op joncken, noch op zee slaen zijn geleert." Cramer, *Borts voyagie*, 74-75.
[165]NA, VOC 1081 Canton, Entry dated January 24, 1623 in Cornelis Reijersen's diary of his voyage to China, fol. 59r; Also see Van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oostindische Compagnie, boek 2, deel 1*, 698.
[166]NA, VOC 1220 Canton, "Report of Jacob de Keijser to the Governor General Joan Maetsuijcker," fols. 284v-286v.

> [it] appears that this is the best time to force the Chinese with violence to [either] confer unto us a suitable place on her coast or come trade with us and cease her dealings with our enemies and feigning friends.[167]

Coen's objective thus was limited to wresting a trading post from the Chinese emperor, whose authority we may note was still uncontested. We would here reckon that the VOC still articulated their objectives in mercantile terms. These were rather modest aims, particularly if we compare the Dutch agenda with the rhetoric overheard in the official circles of Spanish Manila in 1583 when, "a Spanish invasion of China in order to conquer and convert the Middle Kingdom," seemed to be the next logical step for the Spaniards to take in their relations with the empire.[168] We might then debunk the theory that there was an underlying colonial intent in the Dutch aggression against China. Nonetheless, we must appreciate the fact that the VOC was willing to put to action their policy of aggressive mercantile expansionism, which had reaped high dividends for the enterprise in other parts of Asia in the context of China.[169] Although as Blussé notes, "violence in relation to a stronger Asian opponent [like China] did not fall within the grand strategy of the Company," European mercantile enterprises were sometimes known to commit such acts of daring.[170] For instance, one can draw a parallel between the aggression indulged in by the Dutch East India Company in their raids on the Chinese coast with that of the Child's War of 1686-1690, when the English East India Company entered into a confrontation with the Mughal Empire.[171] The English, like the Dutch could only commit to a policy of aggression due to their superior powers at sea and like the Dutch, whose piratical advances on the Chinese coast yielded no spectacular results, the British severely underestimated the strength of the Mughal reprisal and received a drubbing from Emperor Aurangzeb. Although both naval ventures concluded as sordid debacles, they were bold attempts of two seventeenth-century European mercantile enterprises to test the waters, so to say, and gauge the returns that a policy of aggression

[167]"..schijnt het voor ons als nu den bester tijt te wesen om de Chinesen met gewelt te dwingen ons een bequame plaetse omtrent haer custe te verleenen dan met ons te commen handelen ende haer handel bij ons vijanden ende geveijnsde vrienden near te doen laten…" NA, VOC 1077 Batavia 2, "Instructions issued to Commander Cornelis Reijersen and the Council of the fleet sailing to China," fol. 220r; Also see Van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oostindische Compagnie, boek 2, deel 1*, 682.

[168]This was the brainchild of the Jesuit Alonzo Sanchez. John W. O' Malley et al., eds., *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2000), 345.

[169]Leonard Blussé, "De Chinese Nachtmerrie: Een terugtocht en twee nederlagen," in *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, eds. Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler (Leiden: KITLV, 2002), 210; Barend Noordam, "Military Intelligence Gathering and Early Modern Warfare: The Dutch East India Company and China in the early 17th Century," (forthcoming), 2.

[170]Blussé, "De Chinese Nachtmerrie," 210.

[171]G. Z. Refai, "Sir George Oxinden and Bombay, 1662–1669," *The English Historical Review* 92, 364 (1977).

unleashed against an imperial polity could fetch them. That said, the view of European insecurity in early modern Asia advanced by Markley and Walsh loses its clarity and makes way for the understanding that the Dutch East India Company was the embodiment of a measure of self-assurance and daring that fell short of colonial ambition. The Company's bark was arguably worse than its bite as aggression featured far more boldly in their correspondence than it did in actual Company policy. Force which was seen in the 1620s as the preferred means of convincing the empire to open their doors to Dutch trade, was by the mid-1630s no longer a priority. The Company resorted to diplomacy and even tried a hand at collaboration as the Dutch proposition to grant military aid to the Ming in 1633 and the Bort expedition in 1663-64 make clear. The Company then clearly was open to employing every trick in the book to initiate trade with an empire regarded as essentially unassailable.

The Playwright Sorts and Sieves: Motives behind the Scripting of *Zungchin*

The explanations for why Vondel wrote his play and why he imagined it in the way he did can be ordered in two categories. There are elements in *Zungchin* that were solely ascribable to Vondel and his ideological conception of the world, and there were others that derived from the character of seventeenth-century Dutch culture and society in general. It also goes without saying that the socio-cultural factors in the Republic which exerted an influence on *Zungchin* also had a part to play in the making of Van der Goes's drama *Trazil*. As far as detecting how much of Vondel's worldview features in *Zungchin* goes, the play's connection with its sources harbours the answers. Although *Zungchin* came to reflect the sources with a high degree of exactitude in the manner in which the Chinese revolution was sketched, Vondel felt less obliged to replicate his sources' perspective. His decision to focus on the notion of "divine providence" (which incidentally was also a theme borne by the play's chief source, *De Bello Tartarico*) meant that the common conceptions of China in the sources could not be freighted wholesale into the play. Instead, the compatibility of the ideas with the basic thrust of the drama seems to have been a necessary precondition for their inclusion in the literary piece. The idea of Benevolent Despotism that the Jesuit and VOC writers marketed as the form of government that characterized China was at odds with Vondel's objectives. If "divine providence" was to be emphasized in the drama, it was to be contrasted with a convincing picture of human folly. The portrayal of Zungchin as the miserly king whose lust for wealth lost him his kingdom thus seemed like the sort of characterization that was more in tune with Vondel's intent rather than Benevolent Despotism and the valorised form of governance it

implied.[172] When Vondel rejected Benevolent Despotism as a constituent in his drama, he also saw no appeal in its contradictory image of Oriental Despotism. Thus despite his avarice, Zungchin did not devolve into the stereotypical Oriental despot but was instead represented as a hapless victim in the jaws of malicious misfortune.

Vondel's evocation of the Almighty mediated the passage of perspectives from the sources he employed into his drama but making "divine providence" as the principal thrust of the play came at a price. It diminished the visibility of the Chinese tale. As past scholars have convincingly argued, the Chinese-ness in *Zungchin* was submerged in a sea of biblical allusions, classical references, and Christian imagery, and in their vulnerability to the designs of the Almighty, the Chinese were consequently like their European brethren in the drama, the Jesuits.[173] Vondel's emphasis on the divine might strongly tell of a Jesuitical influence but his plays fell within the ambit of religious drama and as W. A. P. Smit suggests, "the significance of divine rule" was a favoured and recurring theme in his plays.[174] It may then be argued that the prioritization of a Christian imaginary was already a familiar one in his literary corpus. When the play then propagandizes Vondel's religious beliefs at the cost of marginalizing the Chinese elements in the drama, *Zungchin* is stripped of its novelty as being Europe's first "literary Chinoiserie."[175] It instead presents itself as having been a space for the rehearsal of the playwright's theological conceptions as articulated in his previous literary endeavours.

Zungchin replicated certain features characteristic of Vondel's other dramas. It was moulded in staunch adherence to the rules of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which as Jan Konst observes made a deep impression on the playwright's literary works in the post-1640 period.[176] For the playwright then, whose dramas were, as James Parente puts it, "theological truths in Aristotelean garb," similarities between *Zungchin* and other plays scripted by Vondel in this period were bound to occur.[177] For instance, the principle of *peripeteia* or the drastic reversal in fortune which constituted the core of dramas such as *Salomon* (1648) and *Noah* (1667) also

[172]Zungchin's miserly nature, as a characterization that Vondel eventually settled on also had its origins in the playwright's sources, see Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 117.
[173]"But the Chinese of *Zungchin*, in spite of his conscientious study of Martini and Kircher, remained soul-less puppets which he had not the showman's skill to manipulate so dexterously as to make them seem real and alive." A.J. Barnouw, *Vondel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 204-05.
[174]Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 608 (appendix).
[175]Pos refers to *Zungchin* as the constituting the first instance of "literary Chinoiserie" in the west. Pos, "Het paviljoen van porselein," 98.
[176]J.W.H. Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei in de Nederlandse tragedie 1600-1720* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2003), 122.
[177]Cf. James A. Parente, Jr., *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 146.

formed the basis of *Zungchin* when it dramatized the Chinese emperor's fall from power.[178] Yet *Zungchin*'s similarities to other plays in the Vondelian canon went far beyond those engendered by the playwright's mere compliance to the strictures of Aristotelean drama.[179] W.A.P. Smit's incisive examination of Vondel's masterpiece *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637) alongside *Zungchin* reveals that the latter drama was a pale imitation of the former – in plot, verse, dramatic technique, and in its emphasis on "divine providence."[180]*Zungchin* was then arguably old fare.

Vondel's ideological leanings and the character of his literary oeuvre determined the form that the drama *Zungchin* took, but as Sterck notes, the personal networks and relationships that the playwright cultivated were also partially responsible for his choice of subject.[181]As an Amsterdammer and the city's most celebrated literary figure, the playwright's association with the Republic's most illustrious corporation, the Dutch East India Company was inevitable. Many of his literary works chronicled the achievements of the VOC and its personnel in Asia and the playwright even arranged for his son to enter Company service when the latter squandered away his family fortune and found himself deep in debt.[182] While his VOC connections made Asia a familiar entity in his literary oeuvre, his knowledge of the Chinese empire did not spring solely from the published sources that he relied on. As past academics have argued, the Jesuits were in part responsible for Vondel's interest in and knowledge about China. Members of the Jesuit mission came to share a close friendship with the playwright and some of them divulged evident China connections. Apart from Adam Schall, who it is believed, suggested to the Nieuhof embassy in Peking that he knew Vondel in person, Philip Couplet, another Jesuit who had spent many years in China, also counted among Vondel's acquaintances.[183] These individual associations that Vondel possessed on a Eurasian if not global scale was arguably typical of the seventeenth century which registered a greater movement of individuals to other parts of the world than ever before. It was perhaps

[178]Karel Portman and Mieke B. Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuwe vaderland voor de muzen: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1560-1700* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008), 534. See also Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 464.
[179]P. Minderaa observes that *Zungchin* was similar to *Koning David herstelt* which was authored by Vondel in 1660. Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 116. Also see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 501.
[180]Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 482, 501-02.
[181]J.F.M. Sterck et al., eds., *De werken van Vondel, vol. 10: 1663-1674* (Amsterdam: De Maatschappij voor goede en goedkoope lectuur, 1937), 13.
[182]Karel Schoeman, *Handelsryk in die ooste: Die wereld van die VOC, 1619-1685* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2009), 137; Jan ten Brink, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1897), 433-34.
[183]Sterck, et al., *De werken van Vondel*, 13; Leonard Blussé and R. Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhof's beelden van een Chinareis* (Middelburg: Stichting VOC publicaties, 1987), 28. Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap*, 162 (in a chapter titled "Nauwkeurige beschrijving van 't gezandschap").

this network that motivated Vondel to centre his play on China because these acquaintances with experiences of East Asia made the otherwise alien plot and setting suddenly seem intimate and familiar.

All of above factors underscore Vondel's own intervention in the drama. The historical and ideological content that the play's sources bore were scraped, chiselled and sculpted by Vondel to suit his ideological and literary needs. We might therefore accord a dominant role to Vondel's artistic licence in determining the content of his drama. However, we still need to acknowledge that the Republic produced not one but two plays that dealt with the pernicious political processes that took root in seventeenth-century China. This suggests that there were other larger social and cultural trends at work in the Republic that laid the groundwork for the Vondel's and Van der Goes's flights of fancy. Both *Zungchin* and *Trazil* were consequences of a cloudburst of information about China that rained on the Dutch print space between the 1640s and the 1660s. As was elaborated in a previous section, the writing of the two plays followed closely on the heels of a landslide of printed accounts that focussed on China's political distress. The plays of Van der Goes and Vondel were thus the result of the happy marriage between Dutch publishing and the Dutch Republic's curious citizenry who hungered for news about the world. While both plays can be seen as the result of a healthy flow of information about China into the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, they also reflected the popular prejudices of contemporary Dutch society. Vondel chose to reject the allocation of conventional traits to the Chinese, and he did not consider effeminacy the peculiarly Chinese trait that his sources had imagined it to be. In Vondel's view, this characteristic was an affliction of all of humanity, who shorn of agency, was irrevocably subordinated to the dictates of the Almighty.[184] In contrast to the liberty that Vondel exercised in rejecting certain imaginings inherent in the sources, an element that he transplanted in its pristine state into his drama was the image of the merciless Tartar. His reference in the play to the tartar king as the "cruel Cham" highlights the visions of atrocity and mayhem that China's northern invaders generated for the playwright.[185] Although scant attention is paid to the Tartars in *Zungchin*, their impact on Vondel's literary imagination was significant. Two of his other plays, *Lucifer* (1654) and *Maria Stuart* (1646), refer to the Tartars even though the

[184]While Zungchin was evidently at the mercy of God's will, the fact that the Jesuits too, were in the same position is mentioned in Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 463-65.

[185] "Die, schier dry eeuwen achter een,/ Den wreeden Cham keerde onverdroten,/ Hoe vreeslijk hy in 't velt verscheen." Verses 138-140.

context of these dramas hardly necessitated a reference to them.[186] In both instances, he used a literary strategy that Antonides van der Goes had also deployed in *Trazil*. He mentioned the Tartars in a context where the Turks too merited reference. When it is widely known that Vondel's treatment of the Turks in his literary frame was anything but sympathetic, it can be reasoned that the Tartars elicited Vondel's aversion for the same reason – heightened feelings of animosity towards the Turks affected the Republic and all Christian Europe in this period.[187]Vondel's and Van der Goes's choice of the Orient as the setting for their dramas also had the impress of another notable seventeenth-century trend. The preface to *Zungchin*, although mostly a contemplation of the rather weighty philosophical problem of the inconstancy of empires, gives us a lead in this regard. Vondel admits to having been positively surprised that a political revolution of the scale of that which gripped China could take place in his lifetime. To his literary sensibilities, if there was any event that could match the demise of the Ming dynasty either in magnitude or in consequence, it was the fall of Troy. The title-page of the 1667 edition of *Zungchin*, as a consequence, carried Virgil's famous words capturing the pathos of the destruction of the ancient city: "*venit summa dies, et ineluctabile tempus*" (the supreme day has come, and the inevitable hour). Vondel specialists such as Minderaa have pointed to the trope of destruction which featured time and again in his plays.[188] Yet, one is inclined to believe that the playwright's Oriental project is indebted to a greater degree to the impression that the political situation in China made on his mind than previous literature acknowledges because Van der Goes, too, took to reflecting on the character of the disaster that befell China. Like Vondel, this young playwright borrowed from Virgil and the title page of his play *Trazil* bore another of the Roman poet's phrases: "*Urbs Antiqua ruit multos dominata per annos*" [The old city has been ruined after many years of subjugation]. Very tellingly, Van der Goes also closed his drama with the lines– "so that no empire in the world remains unchanged."[189] The manner in which both Vondel and Van der Goes dealt with their subjects, hardly hiding their bewilderment at the enormity of the Chinese revolution, perhaps mirrored the common reaction of spectators in the Republic who were acquainted with the episode. Readers in the Dutch Republic like Van der Goes and

[186]"En dit gezalfde hooft den Schotten niet een bede,/ Een nootbe, van geen Turck, noch Tarter, woest van zede." Joost van den Vondel, *Maria Stuart of gemartelde majesteit* (Te Keulen: D'Oude Drukkerye, 1646). Also see dedicatory epistle in Joost van den Vondel, *Lucifer* (Amsterdam: Abraham de Wees, 1654).
[187]For Vondel's disposition to the Turks in his literary works, see Jean Weisgerber, "Orientalisme in de 17de-eeuwse tragedie," *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke academie voor Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde* 120, 1 (2010), 10-11.
[188]See Minderaa, "Het treurspel Zungchin belicht vanuit zijn vermoedelijk groei," 119.
[189] "Zoo blijft geen heerschappy ter weerelt onverandert," verse 2372.

Vondel who were informed about this takeover were as horrified as they were astonished at the magnitude of the affair.

The fixation with the theme of disaster was a cultural preoccupation in the seventeenth-century Republic. Reflecting on the social character of the United Provinces in the early modern era, Simon Schama highlights the manner in which themes of misfortune, disaster and extraordinary occurrences such as the stranding of whales on the beaches of the Republic and curious comet sightings became staple subject matter of the Republic's print and visual spaces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[190] The forcefulness with which news of ominous events and happenings intruded into Dutch culture betrays the strong sense of foreboding that played on the societal mentalité. According to Schama, the paintings of Rembrandt, prints by Jan Saenredam, the writings of Jacob Cats and miscellaneous almanacs all confirmed the sense of gloom that had descended on the Republic. When it can be argued that Vondel and Van der Goes reflect in their dramas on the enormity of the Chinese crisis, there is little doubt that *Zungchin* and *Trazil* also carried a whiff of the same apocalyptic foreboding characteristic of the Dutch in the period. *Zungchin* however, was a better embodiment of this trend than *Trazil*. The melancholic tenor of the play, the playwright's identification of the temporality of human affairs as the backbone of *Zungchin*, and his decision to stud the drama with references to apparitions, premonitions and portents were, as Schama reminds us, all elements of unprecedented weight in the Dutch psyche in the period.

While we might on one hand conclude that it was Vondel's and Van der Goes's fixation with disaster as a reflection of a wider cultural preoccupation that was the principal motive behind the writing of the play, there is reason to believe that the motives that encouraged these playwrights to court China, like their thematic engagement had a global reach. The Dutch obsession with writings about China in the mid-seventeenth century had after all shown a characteristic commitment of reflecting on the Chinese crisis particularly for the empire's own disaster quotient. The theme of disaster infused the narrative of the *De Bello Tartarico* with its meticulously chronicling of warring armies, the fighting across the breadth of the empire, and the collateral damage seen in smouldering villages and deserted towns. Subsequent publications of the 1650s and the 1660s bore sensational titles such as *Het verwoest Sina, door den wreeden Tartar* which promised to deliver an abundance of

[190] See Chapter titled "Feasting, Fasting and Timely Atonement" in Simon Schama, *The Embarassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: Collins, 1987), 130-50.

devastation.[191] In his article "The Crisis in the Arts of the Seventeenth Century," Peter Burke suggests that the period between the 1640s and 1660s saw an unprecedented series of disasters.[192] Political uprisings were experienced in places as diverse as Mexico and the Mozambique, and contemporary European works of literature according to Burke dwelled on these disasters thereby functioning as registers of the general sense of tumult which engulfed the world. Significantly, Vondel's *Zungchin* which Burke takes as an example of this phenomenon, Van der Goes's *Trazil*, the publication of Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* in 1654 and the continued presence of the story of the Chinese revolution in European texts for the next two decades all occurred in Burke's era of "crisis" of the 1640s to the 1660s.[193] Surely then, it was the element of disaster that Vondel and Van der Goes sought to draw the attention of their readers to, and the disaster motif, it may be argued, was the key to Vondel's and Van der Goes's dramas. It was the Chinese brand of the political turbulence that got these playwrights to experiment with the new.

Vondel's play *Zungchin* and his projection of "providence" as the principle thesis in his drama is deeply illustrative of the character of Dutch culture in the period at another level. The United Provinces in the seventeenth century upheld the Calvinist faith as its state religion and passed stringent anti-Catholic laws, thereby highlighting the marginalization of the Catholics in the post-reformation and post-revolt Dutch society. Yet, as Charles H. Parker notes, the Republic held the peculiar distinction in Europe for "allow[ing] for a more moderate coexistence among people of all religious persuasions."[194] The concurrence of such paradoxes was carried forth into the Dutch print scene. Although Vondel's other dramas such as *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637) met with piercing criticism because of its overtly Catholic content, *Zungchin*, which employed China to project the Catholic notion of *providentia* was curiously immune to censure.[195]

Zungchin, to conclude the section, presents a bleak picture. The freshness of theme was juxtaposed with the familiarity of dramatic technique and theme. "Divine providence," a

[191]The work which was a reprint of *De Bello Tartarico* evidently sought to sell copies of the work by capitalizing on its intriguing title. Martinus Martini, *Het verwoest Sina, door den wreeden Tartar* (Schoonhoven: Leendert van Heck, 1660).
[192]Peter Burke, "The Crisis in the Arts of the Seventeenth Century: A Crisis in Representation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, 2 (2009), 252-53.
[193]Ibid., 253.
[194]Charles H. Parker, "Cooperative Confessionalism: Lay Clerical Collaboration in Dutch Catholic Communities during the Golden Age," in *Catholic Communities in Protestant States. Britain and the Netherlands, c. 1570-1720*, eds. Benjamin Kaplan, et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 21.
[195]For the reaction triggered by Vondel's *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, see Eddy Grootes and Riet Schenkeveld-Van der Dussen, "Vondel's Dramas: A Chronological Survey," in *Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679): Dutch Playwright in the Golden Age*, eds. Jan Bloemendal and Frans Willem Korsten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2.

pet theme of Vondel and the principle object of *Zungchin* determined which perspectives that the sources bore were carried over into the play. The notion of the terrible tartar was retained while the themes of Benevolent Despotism and Chinese effeminacy were ignored. The theme of "divine providence" thus constituted the backbone of the play, and the character of the drama owed more to its playwright that to its sources. Vondel's debt to his sources in terms of detail in the writing of *Zungchin* is too large to ignore, but the ideological standpoint of the playwright and the style of drama that he favoured had immeasurable influence on the play. While one reckons that the fact that Vondel possessed personal contacts in China might have encouraged the playwright to think of the empire as a setting for a play, there were other factors that also help explain why another play on China followed closely on the heels of *Zungchin*. While the Republic's four-decade love affair with China in print ensured that the China story was too current and dramatic a theme to go unnoticed by the state's playwrights, the heightened consciousness in the seventeenth-century Republic about the contemporary world as being one where an incredible amount of turmoil had to be contended with lent itself to determining the tenor of the dramas *Zungchin* and *Trazil*. While contemporary trends in the Dutch Republic influenced Vondel's decision to choose China as a setting for his drama, he was the final arbiter of the play's form.

Conclusion

Zungchin is one of Vondel's lesser known plays. Contrary to its inconsequential existence in the Vondelian canon, *Zungchin* as the dramatization of the fall of the Ming dynasty twenty-two years after the event when the embers of the conflict were still burning is intriguing as it points to a curious connectedness in the period. The sheer immensity of the spectacle of the Chinese revolution made chroniclers of its European observers in Asia. There followed a period of Dutch fascination with the story of dynastic ruin in China and a slew of works on the theme made their way into print in the mid-seventeenth century. This textual efflorescence had the effect of making the playwrights among their compatriots adapt the story to drama and Joost van den Vondel was one of them.

The transport of the tale from the battlefields of China to the bookshelves of Europe and Vondel's own literary piece had two institutional enterprises with strong moorings in Asia to thank for their existence – the Society of Jesus and the Dutch East India Company. Although their objectives were strikingly dissimilar, both organizations understood information to be a crucial commodity for furthering their ambitions in the East and became conduits of information and news about Chinese events to European readers. Of the two

entities, it was the Jesuit network that exercised a disproportionate influence on Vondel's text; the VOC on the other hand influenced the play through rather inconspicuous pathways. Together with the information about the Chinese revolution that the Jesuit and VOC chronicles ferried back to Europe was also perspectival baggage which carried their views about the empire. Considerable space was devoted to emphasizing the excellence of the Middle Kingdom, but these accounts also contained their evaluations of the Tartar and the Chinese dispositions and their understanding of the character of Chinese governance. With the repeated evocation of these perceptions in their annals and the long shadows these evaluations came to cast on later European appraisals of China, these conceptions were what Edward Said might have referred to as being perceptively Orientalist.

In conceptualizing China in the manner they did, the political and ideological differences between the Jesuits and the Dutch East India Company did not make them architects of two divergent discourses. Rather, their perceptions of China coincided. The reason for this lay not so much in their consensus in thought but rather in the varied relations of the enterprises with the empire. The position of the VOC as late comers on the China scene coupled with their peripheral dealings with the empire signalled their arguably inferior capabilities in gathering information. Although the Company presence in Formosa ensured a steady stream of news about China in VOC records from the 1630s to the 1660s, they nevertheless regarded the Jesuits as being in possession of far more credible information about the empire. The outcome was a dependence on Jesuit information and a persistent reiteration of the Society's views in their accounts of China. Although a different history of interaction with the Middle Kingdom afforded the VOC the opportunity of distancing themselves from the Jesuit perceptions of China, the dominance of the Jesuit narrative called for them to fall in line with the prevailing mode of thought. Alternative VOC imaginings of the character of the Chinese government that the VOC was able to conjure up were therefore submerged in their accounts to allow greater attention for those views which converged with the Jesuit conceptions of the Chinese emperor as a Benevolent Despot.

The Company's interaction with China determined their role as agents of information transfer but their political relations with the empire are also instructive in evaluating the character of the VOC's encounter with China. An element of disdain pervaded the Company chronicles in their reflections of their relations with the empire, and Dutch muskets and cannons were occasionally put to use against the Chinese. Yet the self-assuredness of the Dutch rhetoric was devoid of imperialistic designs. Neither is there any evidence that the VOC was an insecure mercantile power intimidated or overwhelmed by the might of the

Chinese empire. The Company instead, presented itself in its relations with China as a trading enterprise that at times was willing to call Asian polities to contest on the battlefield because war, like fortune, could sometimes yield unexpectedly good results.

Zungchin, the literary child of the Sino-centric print frenzy that gripped the Republic, was sure to inherit some of its parental genes. The predominantly Jesuit character of the play's sources won for the order a marked presence in the play. While Vondel reaped material details from his sources, in relation to the perspectival borrowings the playwright exercised greater thrift. As a result, the play only replicated the sources' evaluation of the Tartars while other elements were overlooked. Notwithstanding the fact that notions like Oriental Despotism (which was evidently a Frankenstein monster that the Jesuit and VOC theory of Benevolent Despotism seemed to have sired) and Chinese effeminacy endured longer in European appraisals of China, in relation to *Zungchin*, they reached a dead end. The discourse about China conceived by the Dutch East India Company and the Jesuits about China had therefore failed to penetrate into Vondel's drama. Authorial discretion here was the key factor which determined the passage of perspectives from source to stage, and for Vondel, the theme of "divine providence" played the role of arbiter. While *Zungchin* as a predominantly Catholic play conceived in a land which officially subscribed to the Reformed religion sheds light on the social character of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, Vondel's motivations in writing the drama were many. The play and the playwright typified the convergence of various phenomena in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and world – the presence of individual intercontinental connections created by global institutional networks, a robust print culture, a keenness in the Republic for information about the wider world, and a heightened consciousness about local and global disasters. The notion of "divine providence" in the drama indicates that Vondel's motives were also had a personal dimension. The presence of this concept in the play also makes way for a realization - it was a theme which frequented a number of Vondelian plays and it was deployed in *Zungchin* together with dramatic technique which was also bereft of newness. *Zungchin* then was a play built on borrowed goods – as the last work of an aging playwright; it was forgettable because the novelty of setting was submerged to make the play feel like any other of the Vondelian ones.