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The Netherlands

The Dutch East India Company's tea trade with China, 1757-1781

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Citation

Liu, Y. (2006, December 6). *The Dutch East India Company's tea trade with China, 1757-1781*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/5421>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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INTRODUCTION

In the years 1792-1793, the British King George III sent George Macartney as his envoy to the Manchu court in Peking. The main purpose of this appointment was to establish trade and diplomatic intercourse on the basis of equality with the Empire of Qing China. Some historians argue the Macartney mission failed because of the clash between the Chinese and the English attitudes toward the Chinese court etiquette, which required all visitors to kowtow before the Qianlong Emperor. This argument may be acceptable from the cultural point of view, but the deeper reason behind the Emperor's refusal to accede to the English requests was his persistently dismissive attitude about foreign trade, which was undoubtedly representative of the basic policy of the Empire. This was clearly expressed in his reply to the British King: "The productions of Our Empire are manifold, and in great abundance; nor do We stand in the least need of the produce of other countries" and "China in particular affords tea, and fine earthen ware, silk and other materials. All these are in great request, both in your own and the other Kingdoms of Europe."¹

The tone may have sounded arrogant and the "We need nothing" formula is a standard phrase in imperial rhetoric, but the facts the Emperor stated were simply true at one level. The two sentences more or less summarize the commercial situation between Europe and China in the eighteenth century. There was an imbalance in the European trade with China. The Manchu government considered the permitting of European trade in Canton a beneficent indulgence towards European countries. It did not particularly value the European trade, although its contribution to the imperial treasury was not to be sneezed at.² China was not to purchase enough foreign commodities to balance the trade until the import of opium mushroomed in the early nineteenth century.³ For their part, the European countries needed the China trade dearly. After their infatuation with spices and Indian calicoes in the seventeenth century, the Europeans turned their gaze to China in the eighteenth century.⁴ The "China craze" showed itself in a passion for Chinese silk, porcelain, and tea, but it was tea which took pride of place. In Europe, the widespread vogue for *chinoiserie* and the concomitant development of the porcelain industry, and later in the nineteenth century the design of the fast tea-and opium-clippers were all linked to the craze for tea. It takes no great stretch of the imagination to realize that tea indeed gave shape to the course of the European-China trade.⁵

The influence of this rise in consciousness was especially significant to the China trade of the Dutch United East India Company (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, hereafter the VOC) from 1729, when the VOC initiated its direct trade with China, until 1794 when the directorate of the Company was dissolved. Notwithstanding the fact that the VOC traded with China for tea, porcelain, raw silk and silk textiles, China root and galingale, rhubarb, star anis, spelter and so on, the tea trade exclusively occupied by far the most important proportion of the VOC China trade. The growing perception of the importance of its tea trade by the VOC administration stimulated the Gentlemen Seventeen (*Heren Zeventien*), the central administrative board of the VOC, to carry out no less than three times a drastic change of policy towards the trade route to China.

Before the present study, little attention has been paid to the importance and the relative value of tea as a commodity within the VOC trade or to the management of the tea trade itself. The more meticulous the research into the records of the China trade of the VOC, the more indelibly the idea takes root that tea was indeed the cornerstone of the China trade. This affirmation makes a case study of the VOC management of its tea trade with China a worthwhile proposition.

Outline of the VOC tea trade with China

On 20 March 1602, in order to reorganize the burgeoning Dutch overseas trade with Asia, the States-General (*Staten-Generaal*) of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces of the Netherlands (*Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Provinciën*, hereafter the Dutch Republic or the Republic) issued an exclusive charter for the foundation of the VOC, in which all the existing East India Companies of six different cities in the coastal provinces of Holland and Zeeland were merged into one company.⁶ Not many years passed before the China trade emerged as an important component of the Dutch trade with Asia.⁷

The Dutch were the first to take tea from Japan and China to Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century,⁸ but during most of the seventeenth century the China trade of the VOC was focusing on the trade in silk, gold, and porcelain. From the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards, as European consumers familiarized themselves with tea-drinking and tea entrenched itself as an indispensable article in European daily life, the significance of tea as an important article of trade began to dawn on the Company directors. In the meantime, the VOC tea trade with Japan dwindled, and China became the only source of supply. Initially tea was a luxury article reserved for the wealthy, but it was not long before it became a popular drink among the general public. Well

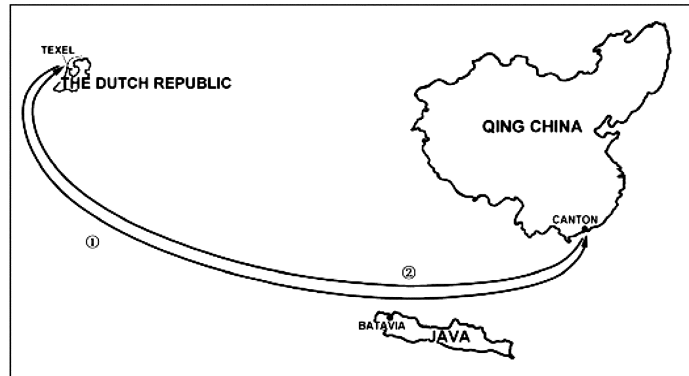
aware of the European infatuation with tea, the VOC saw itself obliged to reorganize its trade relations with China.

Until the second decade of the eighteenth century, the VOC used to purchase tea in Batavia to where it had been brought by Chinese junks from such Chinese ports as Canton 广州, Amoy 厦门, and Limpo 宁波.⁹ In the face of the mounting demand for tea, which went hand-in-hand with a growing perception of the quality of the product, the shortcomings of this tea trade based on Chinese shipping to Batavia was thrust under the nose of the Company directors. They were acutely conscious of their rivals, having to contend with fierce competition from the Ostend merchants in the Austrian Netherlands, whose ships first appeared in Canton in 1715,¹⁰ and from the English East India Company (hereafter the EIC), which managed to establish a regular tea trade between Canton and Europe in the 1710s.¹¹

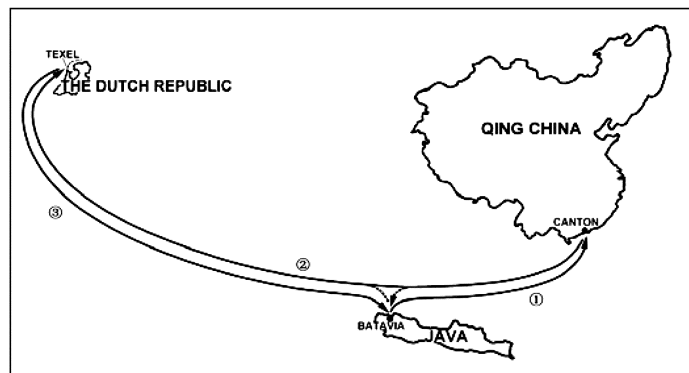
The circuitous Chinese tea trade via Batavia suffered from various shortcomings. The worst impediment was that it took a considerable amount of time to deliver tea to the European market because the Dutch merchants had to await the arrival of Chinese junks in Batavia. The tea they brought from China had to be discharged, purchased, and finally transferred to the homeward-bound Company ships. The second drawback was that the supply of tea to Batavia was neither consistent nor dependable, causing the purchase price of tea to fluctuate. Cogently, the purchase price of tea in Batavia was often much higher than it would have been in China. Another impediment was the impossibility to guarantee a constantly high quality of tea because the Dutch could not select this article themselves in China in the same way as their competitors did. The combination of all the above factors forced the VOC management to reconsider its commercial policy towards the tea trade with China. Therefore, after giving the matter due consideration, the Gentlemen Seventeen decided to reorganize their purchasing policy and in 1729 they established a direct trade link with China.¹²

The ensuing period of the tea trade with China which lasted sixty-five years can be divided into three quite distinct phases (see Map 1): the direct trade between the Dutch Republic and Canton managed by the Gentlemen Seventeen themselves in a short trial period between 1729 and 1734; the trade directed by the Governor-General and Council of the Indies in Batavia (*Gouverneur-Generaal en Raad van Indië*, or the *Hoge Regering te Batavia*, hereafter the High Government) for the following twenty or so years (1735-1756); and finally the direct trade conducted by the so-called China Committee (*Chinasche Commissie*, or *Commissie voor de vaart naar China*) from 1757 to 1794.¹³ During this sixty-five-year period, tea became the lifeblood of the China trade, since it made up on average 70 per cent of the total purchases on the Canton market.¹⁴

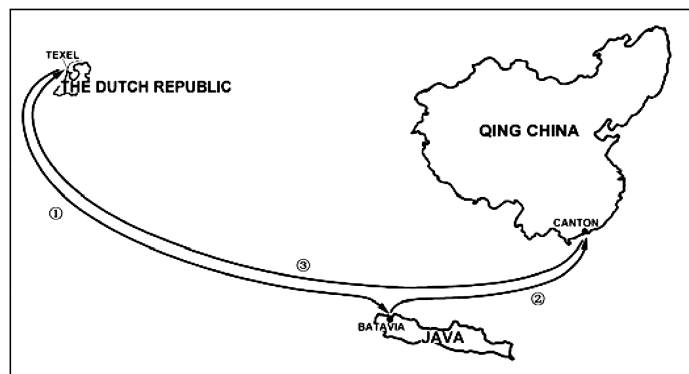
Map 1 Sailing routes of the China ships between the Dutch Republic and China, 1729-1794



Phase One: 1729-1734



Phase Two: 1735-1756



Phase Three: 1757-1794

The High Government stubbornly refused to fit out ships for the purchase of fresh, high quality tea for the European market in Canton. It preferred to acquire all Chinese goods via the Chinese junks in Batavia, whose shipping profited the economy of this town enormously. In answer to this defiant attitude the Gentlemen Seventeen decided in 1727 to organize the China trade themselves and dispatched ships directly to Canton from the Dutch Republic, bypassing the Asian headquarters. In this early phase, it transpired that the China trade was unsuccessful because, with the exception of precious metals (mainly silver), sheet lead, and textiles from the Republic, the VOC ships carried none of the tropical products from the East Indies region which were in demand in China. Furthermore, the trade suffered on account of smuggling by the crews, who should have been supervised more strictly. In order to restore the imbalance in the trade, it was decided that from 1734 two ships would be sent annually from Batavia to Canton where the Company delegates were to purchase fresh tea and other such Chinese goods as porcelain and raw silk. When the transactions had been satisfactorily completed, one ship would sail directly back to the Republic without calling at Batavia again but the other would return to the Asian headquarters, where her cargo should be regulated.¹⁵ In order to sustain the advantageous Chinese junk trade with Batavia, permission was granted to continue the purchase of lower quality tea from the Chinese junkmen, which was then shipped to the Republic. The management of the China trade by the High Government protracted the swift transport of tea to Europe; consequently these teas were less fresh upon arrival than those varieties imported directly from Canton. The last change was made in 1757 when the China Committee, an independently functioning department directly under the supervision of the Gentlemen Seventeen, dispatched ships to Canton from the Republic, putting in at Batavia outward-bound to load the sought-after goods from the East Indies. On their return voyage, these ships had to sail back to the Republic from Canton without putting in at Batavia again to ensure the swift transport of the tea. In comparison with the first two phases, the tea trade in the last phase was indisputably more stable and successful, owing to the more flexible and satisfactory management of this trade at home.

Previous research

Although there are several excellent, detailed studies on the VOC trade with China in the eighteenth century, these studies do not really reveal the significant proportion assumed by the tea trade in the overall commercial activities of the Company in Asia. In the past decades more atten-

tion was paid to the problematic Dutch-Chinese tea trade as it was run until the 1750s, rather than to the flourishing trade during the last four decades of the existence of the VOC.

As the pioneer in research on the history of the Dutch-China trade Johannes de Hullu demonstrated in a 1917 article, the existing source materials from the VOC factory in Canton can be applied not only to the study of the transport of Chinese tea to Europe, but they are also highly informative about the circumstances under which tea was purchased in China. De Hullu was initially interested in the debates which were pursued on the board of the Company directors concerning the profit maximization of the China trade during the first thirty years of the eighteenth century.¹⁶ In 1923, in another article he focused on the debates which were waged about the reorganization of the direct China trade and the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the China Committee in the second half of the 1750s.¹⁷ He understood how important the China Committee's intervention was to the more successful direction taken by the China trade from the 1750s and therefore devoted his full attention to the study of the preparations leading up to the reorganization of this trade. The purpose of the present study is to follow up the discussion started by De Hullu almost a hundred years ago and to show how the direct China trade of the VOC, after having been subjected to several reorganizations, was successfully managed in the second half of the eighteenth century.

After De Hullu, the China trade of the VOC has been touched upon by a number of other scholars who each have contributed to a better understanding of how the China trade was organized.

In his pioneering study of the Dutch trade with Asia, Kristof Glamann analysed the commerce in a number of representative commodities. In dealing with the Chinese tea trade, he compared the composition of Dutch and English cargoes of tea, the Dutch and English purchase prices of Bohea tea in Canton, and the sales of tea in the Dutch Republic and Britain at the auctions organized by the respective East India Companies.¹⁸ Comparing the tea trade of the EIC with that of the VOC, he demonstrated how important the Chinese tea trade became to the VOC. Nevertheless, his focus is restricted to the period 1720-1740 which, as I mentioned above, is not illustrative at all of conditions prevailing in the heyday of the VOC tea trade with China. Quite apart from his limited time frame, the statistical material Glamann adduces for this period is far from complete and is merely illustrative of his argument.

Christiaan J.A. Jörg is the first to have compiled a clear chronicle of the China trade of the VOC. Since his dissertation focused on the export of porcelain, he did not spill much ink on a discussion of the Company's tea trade with Canton, although he recognized the fact that the tea trade was

the most important component of the Company's trade with China.¹⁹ He acknowledges this by pointing out that the tea trade not only had a big influence on the Company's porcelain trade but it was actually directly connected with it. The main value of his work to the present study is that he has clearly shown that tea actually dominated the Dutch Company's trade with China, since it comprised on average 70 per cent of the total purchase in value from China, as shown in Appendix 8 of his book. In this respect, it may be said that Jörg's dissertation constitutes an open invitation to engage in a detailed case study on tea, the principal commodity the VOC exported from China.

Very recently Els M. Jacobs drew her conclusions on the rise and decline of the VOC Chinese tea trade in a brief description of the tea trade within the larger context of her masterly survey of the Dutch intra-Asian trade during the eighteenth century. As she mentions, the traditional viewpoint is that, owing to its late entry in the Canton trade, the VOC could not catch up and compete with the other European companies, and consequently the English had stolen a march on the Dutch after 1750. Jacobs, however, concluded that the results of the Chinese tea trade of the Dutch Company in no little measure depended on the performance of its rivals. She points out that although the VOC kept a large share of the tea market, its main trade was in the cheaper sorts of tea on which it could realize relatively little profit.²⁰ Jacobs maintains that the Dutch had to take a step backwards in the second half of the eighteenth century because their standard trade practices were by then successfully being duplicated by their competitors. Nevertheless, she does not show in detail how she reaches this conclusion. Incontrovertibly, the VOC was outpaced by the EIC in the Chinese tea trade in the second half of the eighteenth century, but in comparison to the volume of trade in the earlier period the Dutch trade in Chinese tea did, in fact, increase considerably.

It is also impossible to overlook three other works touching on the VOC tea trade with China. In his pioneering work on the English China trade, Hosea Balou Morse also devoted attention to the Chinese tea trade of the VOC on the basis of the English source materials derived from the EIC archives.²¹ Louis Dermigny has made use of the data in his *magnum opus* about the European Canton trade, but the VOC trade occupies only a small part of this scholarly narrative about the export of and contraband trafficking in tea from Canton.²² The third contribution is an interesting article by Frank Broeze on the end of the Dutch trade in Chinese tea, focusing on what happened after trade relations were restored in 1813.²³ Curiously enough, in order to present a retrospective to his study, he relied heavily on the data which Morse derived from the EIC archives but does not refer to the copious archival records of the VOC.

Apart from the above-mentioned research on the Dutch trade in

Chinese tea, Hoh-cheung Mui and H. Lorna Mui's study of the conduct of the EIC tea trade with China in the years 1784-1833 must be mentioned for it has been the main source of inspiration for the present study. This very well-researched work highlights the ins-and-outs of the management of the EIC monopoly on the Chinese tea trade, by counterbalancing the English and Chinese sides of the tea trade through an analysis of such aspects as the total quantities, average bid-up prices, and the assortment of tea sold by the EIC, the put-up prices of tea at the EIC auctions, the deliveries of tea from the EIC warehouses, the EIC accounts of profit and loss with estimates of interest on investment and insurance on cargoes, prime cost and freight charges of tea sold by the EIC, the standard purchase prices of several kinds of teas in Canton and so on.²⁴ Their highly refined research placed alongside Morse's overall survey of the English Company's tea trade in many respects holds up a perfect mirror revealing various possibilities of how the VOC tea trade with China should be studied.

Since the present study focuses not only on the way the VOC conducted the tea trade with China but also deals with the production, transport, and delivery in China, and the distribution in the Dutch Republic, some other publications on the tea-cultivating areas in the uplands and the transport of tea from there to Canton, the business life in the port of Canton, and the distribution of the tea, plus the taxes imposed on this commodity, and the consumption of tea in the Dutch Republic have been consulted.

In 1976 Robert Paul Gardella defended his thesis on the tea industry of Fujian Province 福建 and trade in both Qing China and the Republic of China. In his thesis, some chapters deal with the tea production in Fujian Province and some other areas of China. He locates the Fujian tea industry and trade in the context of the Canton System (1760-1842) and the relations between the European tea trade and the Canton System.²⁵ His research probably is the first specific case study on the Fujian tea-growing areas and their relationship with the Canton trade,²⁶ and sets the present study a good example for examining the other tea-growing areas from where the VOC procured teas: the south-eastern part of Anhui Province 安徽.

In 1989, Ch'en Kuo-tung presented a paper at a conference on the transaction practices in the export tea trade of China in 1760-1833. In this article, which is restricted to the transaction of the teas for the EIC, he discusses the structure of the transaction system. He investigates the practicability of that system – namely the routes and means of transportation used to bring the “EIC teas” from the areas of cultivation to Canton as well as the mode of transacting business pertaining to teas among the various business parties involved in this trade. This leads him to an assess-

ment of the profitability and the possible stimuli for making changes in the existing system.²⁷ Since there was no big difference between the VOC and EIC in the routes and means of transportation of teas from the areas of cultivation to Canton, and the mode of transaction among the parties for the “EIC teas” offers a good comparison with the “VOC teas”, Ch’en’s work is a fine point of reference for the present study on the “VOC teas”, the “VOC tea”-supplying agents, and the procurement of tea by the VOC trade representatives in Canton.

Concentrating on the local organization of the port city of Canton and the Pearl River Delta,²⁸ Paul A. Van Dyke has recently published a monograph on the Canton trade, specifically the day-to-day operations in the port, during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. His book provides a fresh look at the successes and failures of the trade by focusing on the practices and procedures rather than on the official policies and protocols. In his book, the daily lives of all the players in the trade, covering such diverse groups as sampan operators, pilots, compradors, and interpreters, to country traders, supercargoes, Hong merchants, and customs officials, are meticulously unravelled. This research shows that, contrary to popular opinion, the Canton trade was stable, predictable, and secure, and the huge expansion of trade was actually one of the factors which contributed to its collapse as the increase in revenues blinded the Chinese authorities to the long-term deterioration in competence of the lower administrative officials. In the end, the Canton System was indeed overthrown but the principal reason for this was that it had already defeated itself.²⁹ Basing his research on an extraordinarily wide variety of European and Chinese sources, Van Dyke has enriched our knowledge of the daily business affairs in China’s gateway to the outside world, Canton. The detailed narratives in his descriptions of supercargoes, Hong merchants, and customs officials have facilitated the research for the present study in its discussion of the negotiations between the VOC trade representatives and their tea-supplying agents.³⁰ Importantly, the main argument of Van Dyke’s book – that the Canton trade was stable, predictable, and secure in the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century – was an inspiration to the author of the present study to check how the Dutch Company’s China trade, which of course was but one part of the Canton trade, was conducted in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Up to the present time, publications on tea in the Dutch Republic are still scarce. The only one which can be mentioned is J.R. ter Molen’s 1978 museum catalogue for a special exhibition on the history of tea-drinking in the Netherlands.³¹ This catalogue touches on almost every aspect concerning tea in the Republic. For example, it covers the import of tea into the Netherlands, the use of tea as a medicine and a stimulant, tea in the

decorative arts, tea services, tea shops, taxes on tea and other aspects, but there is still plenty of room for further research. Some topics which can certainly yield interesting information are tea shops, taxation on tea, and the auctions of tea by the VOC Chambers. Information gathered from the source materials pinpoints the lacunae in Ter Molen's publication.

Subject and framework

If one looks carefully into the extant archival records of the VOC concerning the Company's tea trade with China, there can be no possible doubt that, after the direct China trade had been completely reorganized at the end of the 1750s, the second half of the eighteenth century emerged as the heyday of the VOC tea trade with China. An even closer look tells us that during the period from the end of the 1750s to the beginning of the 1780s the tea trade reached its zenith because the quantities of tea the VOC exported from Canton each year were comparatively large and stable, yielding much higher annual profits for the Company than they had done in former days.

This conspicuous change raises the question of what was the reason behind this. Or, in other words, how did the Company which had tried for so many years to develop its trade with China, finally manage to make its Chinese tea trade flourish, ushering in a "Golden Age" after nearly a century of striving? How did the VOC conduct this trading link in the phase 1757-1781 – the longest and most profitable phase in the VOC trade with China – and how did this successful trade quite suddenly come to an end in the 1780s? In my study, I hope to provide satisfactory answers to these questions. My aim is not to focus solely on the development of the VOC Chinese tea trade itself, but also to examine the VOC response to the external factors which had a decisive influence on the development of the European-China trade in the second half of the eighteenth century. This leads neatly to an explanation of the period chosen: 1757-1781, that is between the official commencement of the management of the China trade by the China Committee and the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784).

This study commences with the preparations of the Gentlemen Seventeen to reorganize the direct China trade and the establishment of the China Committee. This will be followed by a discussion of the instructions issued by the China Committee to the Company servants on the China ships and in China and those sent to the High Government; the selection of trade goods and the gathering of funds to be sent from the Dutch Republic; and finally the China Committee's demands specifying the "VOC teas".

The next subject is Batavia, as it is essential to investigate the little understood role of the High Government in the direct China trade. This examination will bifurcate, looking first at the contributions of the High Government to the direct trade under the management of the China Committee and then underlining the benefits the former derived from this trade.

With this organizational background in mind, the focus changes to the transaction of the tea trade between the VOC trade representatives and the tea-supplying agents in Canton. Attention will be paid to the variety of the "VOC teas", the component of the "VOC tea"-supplying agents, and the process of tea procurements by the VOC trade representatives.

The often confusing relationship between the European merchants, the bureaucratic apparatus of the Qing regime, and the Macao Government is the following subject. It will deal with the vagaries of daily business life in the Pearl River Delta by highlighting three representative events which occurred in the period under study, namely the protest against the establishment of the Co-hong in 1760; the purchase of the *Herstelder* in 1772; and the recapture of the *Goede Hoop* in 1781.

Having looked at the dynamic interaction in Canton, the attention shifts to the sales of the "VOC teas" in Europe: beginning with the setting of auction dates; the selling prices; the quantities as well as the value of the "VOC teas" which were auctioned off by the chambers. Subsequently, the distribution of the "VOC teas", after the Company auctions, from the tea-dealers to the shopkeepers and eventually to the consumers will be studied; finally, the re-export of the "VOC teas" by Dutch traders to other European countries will be discussed.

Finally an attempt will be made to draw up the balance sheet of the "Golden Age" of the VOC tea trade, by comparing the internal and external factors which initially turned the China trade into a great success and finally led to its abrupt end.

Source materials

Since the present study is principally based on a research into primary source materials, it is necessary to give a brief explanation of the main source materials which were consulted.

There are several sets of archival data available in the VOC archives as preserved at the National Archives in The Hague.³² These sources are remarkably well organized and hence lend themselves well to the present study. I have classified them as follows.

Record Type A – The records of the China Committee (NA 1.04.02, VOC 4542-4582).

These documents are comparatively independent of the larger corpus of the VOC archives and deal with the VOC China trade in the second half of the eighteenth century. Two sources have been of great importance to the present study: the “Report of the China Committee to the Gentlemen Seventeen, 1756” (NA VOC 4543, *Rapporten van de Chinasche Commissie aan de Heren Zeventien, 1756*) and the “General and Particular Instructions of the China Committee” (NA VOC 4543-4559, *Generale en particuliere instructies van de Chinasche Commissie*).

The records of the China Committee provide information concerning all aspects of the Chinese tea trade outside Canton. Among the data they provide are the instructions which the China Committee issued each season to the authorities on the China-bound ships, to the trade representatives serving in Canton, and to the High Government in Batavia. This is a marvellous way to discover all sorts of commercial data, such as information about the capital sent on the China-bound ships, the detailed orders for the purchase of tea in Canton, the sales of the tea cargoes in the Dutch Republic and other such basic information.

Record Type B – The collected records of the “Resolutions of the Gentlemen Seventeen” (NA VOC 172, *Resoluties van de Heren Zeventien*) on the China trade; the “Reflection by Jacob Mossel” (NA VOC 172, *Bedenking van Jacob Mossel*) on the China trade; the “Answer of the Gentlemen Seventeen to Jacob Mossel’s Reflection” (NA VOC 172, *Rescriptie van de Heren Zeventien op Mossel’s bedenking*); the “Letter from the Gentlemen Seventeen to the High Government” (NA VOC 333, *Brief van de Heren Zeventien aan Gouverneur-Generaal en Raden*).

These records deal with the preparation for an improved management of the China trade and the establishment of the China Committee in the 1750s.

Record Type C – The “Annual Statements of the Goods Sold by all the VOC Chambers, 1731-1790” (NA VOC 4584-4597, *Jaarlijkse staten van de verhandelde goederen bij de VOC ter alle kamers, 1731-1790*).

These records give a survey of the bookkeeping of each chamber relating to sold and unsold goods; outstanding debts; published obligations; advances given to the VOC to buy products; and inventories of the warehouses of the chambers recording the equipage, armament, and provisions. In these records, data can be found on the tea auctions, namely the quantities and value of the teas traded at the Company auctions of all chambers each year.

Record Type D – The “Lists of the Deliveries, with the Names of the Buyers and Prices Paid at the Sale by the Zeeland Chamber, 1724-1776” (NA VOC 13377, *Lijsten van de leveranties, met namen van de kopers en betaalde prijzen op de verkoping van de kamer Zeeland, 1724-1776*).

Over the period 1758-1776, the auction dates, the origins of the teas,

the names of the tea-buyers, the quantities of teas purchased by various tea-buyers, and the auction prices fetched by teas as well as the total amounts paid by the tea-buyers at the auctions organized by the Zeeland Chamber are clearly recorded in the lists.

Record Type E – The “Letters and Documents sent from China concerning the factory in Canton to the Gentlemen Seventeen, the Amsterdam Chamber, and the China Committee 1729-1794” (NA VOC 4381-4447, *Overgekomen brieven en papieren uit China betreffende de factorij in Canton aan de Heeren XVII, de kamer Amsterdam en de Chinase commissie, 1729-1794*).

This record complements the information of *Record Type F* about the trade representatives’ activities in China and the communication between the Dutch factory in Canton and the Company administration in the homeland.

Besides the VOC archives, there are some other sets of important archival data relating to the VOC China trade in tea at the National Archives in The Hague.

Record Type F – The records of the Dutch factory in Canton (NA 1.04.20, *Nederlandse Factorij te Canton* (NFC) 1-388).³³

The documents from the trading factory in Canton contain various kinds of official resolutions and daily records, documents and papers on financial and other special affairs, registers of notarial documents, accounting records of the Dutch factory, and official and private correspondence between the servants of the Canton factory, Batavia, and the Dutch Republic.

These records chiefly give information about the tea purchases, showing how the VOC trade representatives contracted for and purchased the “VOC teas”; how they interacted with their Chinese trading partners, the Chinese local authorities, and the other European traders in Canton to solve the business problems in the Pearl River Delta; how they tackled the competition from other companies; and how they corresponded with the High Government. Besides these highly pertinent data, the records also offer information about business dealings such as the selection of trade goods in both the Dutch Republic and Batavia for the Canton market.

Record Type G – The “Prices of Teas, 1670-1695 and 1777-1782” (NA 1.11.01.01, *Collectie Aanwinsten 1820-1992* (Aanwinsten 541), *Prijzen van de Theen, 1670-1695 en 1777-1782*).³⁴

In the section relating to the years 1777-1780, the records yield information about the assortments of imported teas; the variations in selling prices at auction; the names of the China ships which carried these teas; and the auction dates set by various chambers.

Record Type H – The “General Journal” (*Generaal journaal*) in the “Archive of the Bookkeeper-General in Batavia” (NA 1.04.18.02, *Archief*

van de Boekhouder-Generaal te Batavia, 1700-1801 (hereafter BGB) 10767-10800).³⁵

In the “General Journal”, data can be found regarding the transportation of tea between Batavia and the Dutch Republic between 1730 and 1790 and the quantities and value of teas sent to the VOC Chambers in the Republic from Batavia.

Record Type I – The “Hope Collection 1602-1784” (NA 1.10.46, *Collectie Hope 1602-1784*).³⁶

This archive, assisting *Records Types A* and *B*, enriches our understanding of how the VOC administration reorganized the China trade in the middle of the eighteenth century.

In a less obvious place to search for relevant Dutch data, the *Brabants Historisch Informatie Centrum* (Brabant Historical Information Centrum) in 's-Hertogenbosch, the records of the “Plakkaten” (BHIC, *Plakkaten* 1607, 2157, and 2237) were found. These explain in detail the excise that was levied on tea in the Dutch Republic at different moments in the eighteenth century. In the *Gemeentearchief Utrecht* (GAU, Municipal Archives Utrecht), municipal records (Inventory II, N 354 (5 vols) and N 355 (2 vols)) contain such useful material on the sale and consumption of tea in the Republic as the registers of acts of permission concerning the sale of tea as well as the registers of the wholesalers and licensed victuallers of tea in Utrecht and its surrounding areas in 1752-1811. The *Gemeentearchief Amsterdam* (GAA, Municipal Archives Amsterdam) also contains records pertaining to the tea business in this city (Bibliotheek, N 19.23.022, N 40.03.012.24, and N 61.01.016.33), including instructions on how the tea-dealers and the shopkeepers should run their business. The *Collectie Atlas van Stolk* (CAS, Collection Atlas van Stolk 3873) in the *Historisch Museum Rotterdam* (HMR, Historical Museum Rotterdam) possesses printed tax imposts on tea in the Dutch Republic dating from the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century.

In addition to the research in the Dutch archives in the Netherlands, I also consulted the archival records of the English East India Company in the British Library (India Office Records (IOR)) and in the National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office (PRO)) in London.

The diaries and consultations of the EIC trade representatives in Canton (BL IOR-G/12 and R/10) were perused to glean information about conflicts between the English and Dutch Company servants. Many private letters between the EIC and VOC servants were discovered which revealed that there was, as only to be expected, intense rivalry, but also sometimes unexpectedly close co-operation whenever this was necessary. The PRO archives yield information about the British response to the smuggling of the Continental, particularly Dutch, teas to Britain in the late eighteenth century.

Finally, the contribution of the Chinese sources available to the present study is to offer general information about the administration of the foreign trade by the Qing Imperial Government, the local legislation affecting international traders and the activities of the domestic merchants by the Canton authorities, and the various ways in which the Chinese administration kept contact with the Western merchants in that port: see for instance the *Shiliao xunkan* 史料旬刊 and the *Yue haiguan zhi* 粤海关志.³⁷

Unfortunately, detailed Chinese source material pertaining to the Chinese-European daily business activities in Canton is scarce. This is attributable to quite distinct political and cultural factors. During the past century, a series of revolts and considerable political unrest have thrown Canton into turmoil. From a cultural point of view, it has never been the custom of Chinese commercial firms to preserve their archives for posterity at all.

