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Silk for silver: Dutch-Vietnamese relations, 1637-1700

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EXPORT TRADE (II): OTHER PRODUCTS

1. *Tonkinese products for the Netherlands*

> En dewyle men 't comptoir daar hadde, en mede voor 't vaderlant inkoop liet doen van syde stoffen, voort muscus en anders, wiert de voorsch. syde, sooals die voor Japan wiert ingekoft, over Batavia derwaerts gevoert, en dat soo lang als daarop eenigh voordeel wiert behaalt. Maar deselve vervolgens meer en meer verduyrende, is dat eyndelijck mede nagebleven, en het comptoir alleen gehouden, met seer weynigh bedienden, tot inkoop van syde waeren, soo voor 't vaderlandt also voor Persiën, mitsgaders muscus en andere kleynigheden.
>
> Pieter van Dam[1]

Silk piece-goods

In the overall Company policy of exporting Tonkinese raw silk to Japan, the export of Tonkinese silk and silk piece-goods to the Netherlands constituted no more than a sideline. Evidence to support this assertion is the very fact that up to about 1670, as Glamann has pointed out, the Company's export of Asian piece-goods to Europe was generally modest and came a poor second to its sales within Asia.[2] Among the silk items which the Company brought home in the first three decades of the seventeenth century, Chinese items unmistakably constituted the chief group. But when it established a factory in Persia in the early 1620s, the Company was able to procure Persian silk for the Netherlands, and it decided to to reserve Chinese silk for the Japan trade which was in a process of restructuring in the early 1630s.[3]

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[1] "And while we maintained a factory there [in Tonkin] and also bought silk piece-goods, musk and other items for the Netherlands, the silk which we bought for Japan was carried thither via Batavia. This was done as long as it yielded any profit. But [the silk] grew more and more expensive so that we finally abandoned this, and the factory was maintained, manned by just a few servants, only in order to purchase silk piece-goods for the Netherlands and Persia, and also to buy musk and other miscellaneous items." Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, Vol. 2-I, 362.

[2] Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade*, 133.

[3] Idem, 135; Femme Gaastra, "De Textielhandel van de VOC", *Textielhistorische Bijdragen* 34 (1994): 56-57.

Shortly after the establishment of trading relations with northern Vietnam in 1637, the Dutch factors began to send Tonkinese silk cloths to Batavia, where they were reloaded on board the homeward-bound ships. The export volumes of Tonkinese silk piece-goods to the Netherlands in the first years were neither substantial nor regular in comparison to those sent to Japan, since Chinese piece-goods still constituted the staple in the homeward-bound cargoes. From the early 1640s, political turmoil in mainland China obstructed the regular influx of Chinese goods to Formosa and reduced the annual import volumes of Chinese products of the Company.[4] As a consequence the VOC fostered the import of Tonkinese silk piece-goods to the Netherlands.

In 1644, the chief of the Tonkin factory, Antonio van Brouckhorst, suggested to Batavia that in order to facilitate the purchase of Tonkinese silk and piece-goods for both Japan and the Netherlands, it would be advisable to leave one junior merchant and some assistants supplied with substantial amounts of money to reside permanently in the capital Thăng Long to buy silk in the off season.[5] This proposal was approved; the Company's export of Tonkinese silk and piece-goods ran smoothly in the years which followed. In the 1645 trading season, for instance, out of the 135,000 taels (approximately 385,000 guilders) which the Company provided for the Tonkinese silk trade, Batavia instructed that 122,400 taels (90.4%) was to be spent on raw silks and silk piece-goods for Japan, the rest of 12,600 taels (9.6%) was to be used to buy raw silk and silk piece-goods for the Netherlands (see Figure 11).[6]

When the profit margins which Tonkinese silk cargoes fetched in Japan fell rapidly from the early 1650s, Batavia resolved to suspend the Tonkinese silk export to Nagasaki for a while, but ordered the Dutch factors in Thăng Long to purchase Tonkinese silk piece-goods only for the Netherlands.[7] In response to the current shortage of copper coins, hence, the devaluation of silver, the purchase price of Tonkinese raw silk increased on average 20 per cent. Tonkinese weavers, shaken by the high price of the raw silk, only wove piece-goods after foreign merchants had advanced the sum required to pay for them in full. Because of this, the 1655 and 1656 cargoes of piece-goods which the Tonkin factory sent to the Netherlands were valued at only 25,773 and 16,000 guilders respectively.[8]

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[4] In the 1644 trading season, Zeelandia Castle reported to the Deshima factory in Japan that half of the Company's demand for Chinese goods to be procured there could not be fulfilled. In 1648, the Governor of Formosa kept lamenting that the export of Chinese commodities to this island from the mainland had dwindled to almost nothing. This situation remained more or less the same in the 1650s. NA NFJ 57, 10 Sep. 1643; NA NFJ 61, 15 Sep. 1648.

[5] Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 121-124.

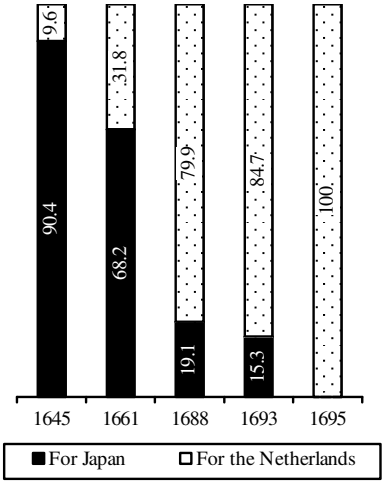
[6] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1644-1645, 108-122; Van der Plas, *Tonkin 1644/45*, 30.

[7] Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 140.

[8] NA VOC 1216: 436-442, G. Hanssen to Batavia, Feb. 1656; *Generale Missiven* II, 777; III, 2, 61.

Figure 11 Division of the Tonkin cargoes, 1645-1695

(per cent)



Sources: *Dagh-register Batavia*, 1644-5, 108-122; 1661, 89-91; 1664, 298; NA VOC 1453; 1536; 1537; 1580; 1596.

If the 1645 composition of silk and silk piece-goods had been 90.6 per cent for Japan and 9.4 per cent for the Netherlands, it was already 68 and 32 per cent respectively in 1661. Out of 264,144 guilders allotted to the Tonkin trade that year, Batavia ordered 84,144 guilders to be spent on local piece-goods for the Netherlands, consisting mainly of *pelings*.[9] This composition was permanently maintained throughout the decade of 1660-1670. In 1664, for instance, out of the 164,703 guilders Batavia sent to Tonkin, 50,000 were to be spent on silk piece-goods for the home market, the rest would be invested in raw silks for Japan, making a rough ratio of 30/70.[10]

In the last three decades of the Company's Tonkin trade, the annual capital reserved for the procurement of Tonkinese piece-goods for the Netherlands showed an overall increase, prompted by the slump in the Company's export of Tonkinese raw silks to Japan reinforced by its cancellation of the Tonkin-Japan direct shipping route in 1671. As the profit margin on Tonkinese silk in Japan fell drastically during the 1670s, the Dutch factors in Thăng Long were instructed to procure Tonkinese silk piece-goods, most popularly among them *pelings*, for the Netherlands. From the early 1680s, the Company's export of Tonkinese silk to Japan virtually ended; besides some local miscellaneous items the Dutch factors in Thăng Long bought Tonkinese silk piece-goods for the European market only.[11] The annual capital for purchasing Tonkinese piece-goods consequently increased to between 100,000 and 150,000 guilders per year. In 1681, for instance, out of 113,318 guilders invested in the Tonkin trade, Batavia

[9] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 89-91.

[10] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1664, 298.

[11] See Chapter Six for detailed information on the Company's export of Tonkinese silk to Japan.

ordered its factors to buy no goods other than *pelings* and musk for the Netherlands, earmarking nothing for the Japan trade.

To make sure that this composition would be adequately fulfilled, in his letter to *Chúa* Trịnh Tạc, the Governor-General requested the latter not to supply the Company with any raw silk that year.[12] Choosing not to heed the Governor-General's request, the *Chúa* forced the Dutch factors to accept a large amount of Tonkinese yarn, but at better prices. The next year, the English and the French also arrived in Tonkin with large amounts of capital to buy silk piece-goods for Europe, escalating the fierce competition between these European rivals and consequently pushing up the purchase prices, particularly those of *pelings* and musk. Given these circumstances and resultant prices, the Tonkinese piece-goods cargo reportedly yielded no profit in the Netherlands.[13]

This discouraging trading situation dragged on notwithstanding exertions by the Company to improve the state of its Tonkin trade. In 1686, the Governor-General again demanded the *Chúa* pay the Company in either cash or such silk piece-goods as *pelings* instead of raw silk because Tonkinese yarn was currently not marketable and therefore not profitable. Batavia's request again fell on deaf ears; *Chúa* Trịnh Căn forced the Dutch factors to accept raw silks for the silver which the factory had advanced him earlier.[14]

In 1688, Batavia instructed the Tonkin factory to order local spinners to spin Tonkinese raw silk using the Chinese and Bengali methods, hoping that the innovation in spinning would make it suitable for the European market. Therefore, in the summer of 1688, samples of Chinese and Bengali raw silk were sent to Tonkin to be spun. Soon afterwards, the well-thought-out plan proved illusory. After one year of bringing in low prices, Tonkinese yarn again grew scarce and expensive as the harvest had been poor. In spite of this, the Dutch factors still managed to have 72 catties of Tonkinese raw silk spun using the Chinese and Bengali techniques.[15] It seems that these samples failed to find favour with Western consumers as nothing came out of this attempt. Consequently the export of Tonkinese silk piece-goods stumbled for around one more decade before it finally ended when the Company abandoned its Tonkin trade in early 1700.

Musk

Musk was another highly sought-after item in the Netherlands. Although exported from Tonkin, repeating the story of gold, the major part of musk available on the Tonkin market was not produced locally but, if we are to believe the Company historian Pieter

[12] *Generale Missiven* IV, 435, 490; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 177-178.
[13] NA VOC 1377: 556-564, Tonkin factory to Batavia, Jan. 1682.
[14] NA VOC 1438: 669-670, Tonkin factory to Batavia, Jan. 1687.
[15] NA VOC 1456: 2018-2020, D. Wilree and the Tonkin factory to Batavia, Jan. 1689.

van Dam, it originated mainly from the Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan and, to a lesser extent from the kingdom of Laos.[16]

Reviewing the history of the Company's musk trade, it seems that its interest in this product was not awakened until 1652, when the Dutch factors in Tonkin were ordered to purchase some Laotian musk for the Netherlands as an experiment. That same year, Batavia was informed that Bastiaan Brouwer, a Spanish Brabander working the triangular trade between Manila, Tonkin, and Cambodia under the auspices of the Governor of Manila, had also bought a large quantity of musk in Tonkin and carried it to Cambodia, where he gained a good price of 80 taels per catty.[17] When it turned out that musk was also a marketable item in Holland, the Tonkin factory was ordered to supply the homeward-bound cargoes with whatever musk it could obtain in Tonkin. But after a few halcyon years, in the late 1650s, musk, as did gold, became scarce on the Tonkin market. The civil war in southern China severely curtailed the flow of the Chinese musk to Tonkin. Chinese and Vietnamese merchants involved in the cross-border trade were often robbed by the Qing soldiers, acutely exacerbating the scarcity of Chinese musk on the Tonkin market. The Laotian musk was therefore preferred.

In 1655, the Dutch factors in Thăng Long utilized their good relations with the *capado* Ongiadee to contract with him to buy all the Laotian musk which would be exported to Tonkin through the region governed by him.[18] This agreement failed to live up to expectations because the annual quantities of Laotian musk exported to Tonkin were neither regular nor substantial. Consequently, the Dutch factors could purchase for Batavia only 25 catties of musk that year.[19]

The low export volumes of musk from the Tonkin factory were in part also attributable to Resimon's stiff competition and speculation. As long as this Japanese free merchant was still facilitated and protected by local mandarins, the Dutch procurement of musk, not to mention gold and piece-goods, would still have to contend with very exacting competition indeed. Between 1650 and 1660, while the Dutch export volume of musk from Tonkin hardly surpassed some 30 catties per year, this entrepreneur experienced no difficulty in sending 112 catties 10 taels of musk to Siam in the year 1659 alone. This portion of musk was then bought by the Dutch factory in Siam at a much higher price. The next year, the Siam factory, again, had to buy 72½ catties of musk which Resimon had sent from Tonkin. To rub salt into the wound, Batavia had to pay interest on its late payment to Resimon.[20]

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[16] Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, Vol. 2-I, 364-365. See also Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, 49; Baron, "Description of Tonqueen", 663; Richard, "History of Tonquin", 711. For a general account of the musk trade in the early modern period: Borschberg, "The European Musk Trade": 1-12.

[17] NA VOC 1194: 165-239, Tonkin factory to Batavia, 8 Dec. 1652; *Generale Missiven* II, 651-652.

[18] NA VOC 1216: 436-442, G. Hanssen to Batavia, 20 Feb. 1656; *Generale Missiven* III, 69.

[19] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1655, 46-47.

[20] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 54-55, 87.

Dissatisfied with the mediocre performance of the Tonkin factors in procuring musk, in 1661 Batavia unrelentingly increased its demands for this product as well as for Tonkinese *pelings*. Out of the 264,144 guilders Batavia destined for the Tonkin factory during the 1661-1662 trading season, 180,000 was earmarked to buy Tonkinese raw silk for Japan, and the rest was to be spent on *pelings* and 1,800 ounces of musk for the Netherlands.[21] No matter what Batavia did to encourage some improvement in the purchase of musk in Tonkin, its efforts fell on stony ground. The Tonkin trade was so ailing at that moment, the Dutch factors were hard put to buy any musk at all for the domestic market.

Table 6 The VOC's export of musk from Tonkin

Year	Amount	Year	Amount
1653	some	1673	192 catties
1656	25 catties	1674	304½ catties
1663	14 taels 2 maas	1675	$32^{6}/_{8}$ catties
1664	$17^{17}/_{32}$ catties plus 8 taels 3 maas	1677	118¾ catties
1665	131 catties 15 taels 1 maas	1678	156½ catties
1669	102 catties	1679	156 catties
1670	208 catties	1680	176 catties
1671	200 catties	1681	170 catties
1672	some		

Sources: *Dagh-register Batavia* 1653-1682; NA VOC 1197, 1290, 1294, 1386.

In his report to the Governor-General, Hendrick Baron, the chief factor of the Tonkin factory, explained that the current depression in the musk trade in Tonkin was primarily caused by the Manchu military campaigns against the Nan Ming and its staunch supporters, the Zheng clan in south-eastern China. The other fly in the ointment was Resimon and his manipulations. With the full support and connivance of the mandarin Ongiahaen, this merchant did his best to procure all Chinese musk as soon as this product crossed the border.[22]

In 1663, the directors in the Netherlands demanded 3,000 ounces of musk for the next homeward-bound voyage. Besides urging its Tonkin factors to supply the bulk of this demand, Batavia also ordered the factory in Agra (India) to provide the Company with supplies of this product. The High Government stressed that in order to timely dispatch musk and Tonkinese piece-goods to the Netherlands, the Tonkin factors should

[21] Ibid., 89-90.

[22] NA VOC 1240: 1355-1374, H. Baron to Batavia, 12 Nov. 1662; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 89-91; 1663, 71 and passim.

send whatever items they could purchase to Batavia before 1 November. To the disappointment of Batavia, Tonkin sent in 1663 and 1664 only 14 taels 2 maas (around 0.9 catty) and 17 17/32 catties of musk respectively. The reasons for these paltry cargoes were a reprise of those of previous years, namely the Manchu violence on and around the border and Resimon's speculations.[23]

Despite these meagre supplies, Batavia raised its order for musk at the Tonkin factory in the 1664 trading season, demanding for the Netherlands 50,000 guilders' worth of silk piece-goods and 4,000 ounces of musk.[24] The Dutch factors in Thăng Long now resolved to contract with Resimon to buy all the gold and musk from him. Despite their efforts, they could procure for Batavia only 8 taels 3 maas of musk in the winter of 1664 and 20 catties more in the summer of 1665, barely fulfilling one sixth of the total demand.[25]

These tiny cargoes raised the ire of Batavia, especially when it was well informed that other foreign merchants trading in Tonkin had been able to purchase more musk than its factors. The Castilian merchant Gonsalvo Discouar, for instance, had percipiently co-operated with Resimon and spent a considerable capital on both Tonkinese silk piece-goods and Chinese musk. Believing that the export volume of musk could be increased if its factors in Tonkin were to do their best, Batavia sternly renewed the order for the previous year and stressed that the Tonkin factory should provide the homeward-bound ships with 4,000 ounces of musk. Just as the pressure Batavia exerted on its factors for musk seemed about to hit the ceiling, the Company's Tonkin musk trade started to improve, responding favourably to the revival of the Tonkin-China border trade. A cargo valued at 56,492 guilders that the Tonkin factory sent to Batavia in the winter of 1665 reportedly contained 111 catties 15 taels 1 maas of musk.[26] After this, the annual export volume of musk by the Tonkin factory increased considerably and remained stable until 1700, when the Company finally severed its trading relations with Tonkin.

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[23] NA VOC 1241: 356-366, Tonkin factory to Batavia; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 689-692; 1664, 65-67.

[24] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1664, 298.

[25] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1664, 298, 548-550; 1665, 83, 193, 222, 370-372.

[26] NA VOC 1253: 1712-1734, C. Ranst to Batavia, 30 Oct. 1665; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1665, 370.

2. *Gold for the Coromandel Coast*

> The same Countries [*Boutan* and Yunnan] yield gold also, and supply this Country [Tonkin] with it: for whatever Gold Mines the *Tonquinese* are said to have in their own Mountains, yet they do not work upon them.
>
> William Dampier (1688)[27]

In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the supply of gold and silver played an indispensable part in the entire commercial activities of the Dutch East India Company in the East. As a fixed rule, right from its foundation in 1602, every chamber of the Company was instructed to send silver pieces of eight to Asia as investment capital, and if this specie was not provided in full, then gold was consigned as an alternative.[28] As early as 1602, gold was included in the Company's cargoes dispatched to Asia when 247,500 guilders in *rosenobels* was exported under the auspices of the Company.[29] Silver in the form of both minted coins and bullion was the sort of money which was indispensable to the Company in running its intra-Asian trade throughout the two centuries of its existence. Nevertheless, in some places was gold preferred, especially on the eastern coast of the Indian Sub-Continent. The Indian trade of the Company required both silver and gold as investment capital: silver was generally in high demand in Bengal and copper was very acceptable in Surat, but gold was desirable in Coromandel. During the seventeenth century, the Coromandel Coast was the most important destination for the gold exported from Europe and by Asian gold exporters. To maximize the profit on the Coromandel trade, or at least to direct this trade into the most profitable channels, the Company was forced to provide its Coast factories with gold. The gold supply from the Netherlands to Asia was not always sufficient to cover the demands. During the 1640s, for instance, Batavia's requests for adequate amounts of capital were not always satisfied; its demand for African gold for its Asiatic trade was ignored altogether by the Gentlemen XVII.[30]

The Company was not entirely dependent on the Netherlands for its supply of precious metals, although during the first thirty years of the Company's existence, its trading capital relied heavily on the money sent from the Republic. After this, however, the trend changed significantly. In the case of the gold supply for Coromandel, for instance, by the early 1630s, a larger proportion of the annual capital was being

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[27] Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, 49.

[28] For a general account on the Company's bullion trade, see, for example, Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade*, 50-72; Gaastra, "The Exports of Precious Metals", 447-476.

[29] Gaastra, "The Export of Precious Metals", 453. According to Glamann, "…not until 1618 gold was sent – intended for the Coromandel Coast – in all 72,000 rials out of the total cargo of the money of 612,000 rials, Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade*, 51.

[30] Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade*, 57. Gaastra ("The Export of Precious Metals", 453) examining such Company documents as the orders from Batavia, resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII, and receipts in Asia, has stated that 1632 to the end of the 1650s was the "period without gold". The demand for gold from Batavia began once again in 1658, and in 1662 gold was sent from the Netherlands to Asia.

provided by Asian factories which relieved the Coast of its dependence on the Netherlands for the supply of capital.[31]

This change can be largely attributed to the developments in the intra-Asian trade which not only enabled the VOC to make profits on its intra-Asian trading network, but also helped furnish its factories with desirable and marketable commodities.[32] One of the key factors which enabled the Company to establish its pre-eminent position in this commerce was the Japan trade. Generally speaking, after this trade had been restructured and strengthened in the early 1630s, the Hirado factory, and, later on, the Deshima factory were able to export a substantial amount of silver every year from Japan. The major part of this silver was shipped to Formosa, where it was exchanged for Chinese commodities which were sought after on both the Asian and European markets. During the 1640-1660 period, the Company regularly exported silver valued at around one million guilders per year from Japan. Part of this silver was exchanged for Chinese gold in Formosa which was then exported mainly to Coromandel, supplementing the gold which was purchased from Java, Malacca, Laos, and Indragiri.[33] The gold supply from the island of Formosa to Coromandel proceeded smoothly during the 1630s, before falling into a phase of decline from the early 1640s, induced by the decline in the Formosa trade.

Facing the decline in the gold supply from Formosa, the Company was forced to look for alternative possibilities. In fact, in 1640, the Japan factory, conscious of the importance of providing the Coromandel trade with gold, had already exported some Japanese *koban* (small gold coins) and *oban* (large gold coins), valued at 144,050 taels for the first time. The Dutch export of Japanese gold was short-lived because the Japanese Government issued a ban on the export of gold in the following year, fearing a drain of bullion. Because this ban on the Japanese gold export was strictly enforced until 1665, the Company had to look for a gold supply from other places. When the gold supply from East Asia stagnated, the Company factory in Gamron in Persia started to purchase the gold which arrived there from Europe via the land route. In the 1640s and in the following decade, this Persian factory could provide the Indian factories annually with a substantial sum consisting mainly of silver and gold.[34] In South-East Asia, the Company itself endeavoured to mine gold on the West coast of Sumatra, and lost no time in procuring this precious metal from various other places such as Manila, Makassar, and Malacca, eager to supply the Indian Coast with whatever gold it could afford.[35] In spite of its assiduous efforts, the total amount was inconsiderable.

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[31] Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 187.

[32] Niels Steengaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973), 140.

[33] Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 189.

[34] Gaastra, "The Export of Precious Metals", 464-465, 474 (Appendix 4).

[35] Idem, 466; Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade*, 58.

In the context of this gold shortage, Tonkin emerged as an alternative gold supplier in the late 1650s, born of necessity when the gold supply from the East Asian quarters rapidly declined. In order to comprehend the sudden emergence of Tonkin in this role, some facts should be clarified. In 1651, it was reported to Batavia that the flow of Chinese gold to Formosa had come to a complete standstill. The capital which the Zeelandia Castle could afford to send to the Coromandel Coast struggled to reach around 6 tons, 4 tons (400,000 guilders) less than it had been planned.[36] In the middle of the 1650s, the High Government was again informed that the VOC servants in Formosa, suffering from the poor trade caused by the civil war in mainland China and Zheng's embargo on Dutch Formosa, were struggling to gather a mere 3 tons of gold, 8 tons less than 1653. Pertinently, it was noted that the flow of Chinese gold now streamed in the direction of Tonkin instead of Formosa.[37]

The Dutch loss of Formosa to Coxinga in 1662 disrupted the regular gold flow from Formosa to eastern India and exacerbated the Company's gold shortage even more severely. In the meantime, the profit margins on gold on the Coromandel Coast revived in the 1660s because the Mughal Emperor demanded his tribute be paid in gold *pagodas*.[38] Batavia therefore turned to Tonkin on its hopes of solving the gold issue, and urged its factors in Thăng Long to import Chinese gold for Coromandel, where the latest profit was said to be 25½ per cent.[39]

Most of the gold the Company purchased for India in Tonkin was not mined locally. Although in the seventeenth century gold was mined in the present-day northern province of Thái Nguyên, the annual gold output was negligible.[40] The major part of the gold available on the Tonkin market was actually imported from China.[41] Vietnamese and Chinese merchants trading across the border often travelled to Yunnan and Guizhou to buy Chinese gold. The price of Chinese gold sold in northern Vietnam was said to be reasonable. In 1661, for instance, the purchase price of Chinese gold in Tonkin, according to a Vietnamese merchant trading to Nanking, was lower than that in Guangzhou.[42] Ever alert, Batavia, therefore, ordered the Tonkin factors to purchase as much Chinese gold as they could and, to devise a long-term strategy, penetrating the Chinese gold market from the Tonkin springboard. As the Company's petitions to the Lê/Trịnh rulers for a licence to trade on the border were repeatedly delayed, Batavia repromoted its Tonkin factory to a permanent trading headquarters in the hope that a

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[36] *Generale Missiven* II, 451-452.

[37] Ibid., 781.

[38] Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 190-191.

[39] *Generale Missiven* III, 386-389.

[40] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 49-55; See also Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, 49; Baron, "Description of Tonqueen", 663; Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, Vol. 2-I, 361-365; *Lịch triều*, Vol. 3, 76-79; Whitmore, "Vietnam and the Money Flow", 370-373.

[41] Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, 49; Baron, "Description of Tonqueen", 663.

[42] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 49-55.

boost in status would easen the procurement of the Chinese gold pouring to northern Vietnam.[43]

Despite all these strategies, the Tonkin factory often failed to supply the Coast factories with adequate gold cargoes. Rising military tensions in southern China meant Vietnamese and Chinese merchants could not trade across the border. In 1661, under pressure from the increasing demand for gold for the Coast, the High Government, while still nurturing the hope of obtaining a licence from the Japanese Government to export Japanese gold to India, urged the Tonkin factors to purchase whatever gold they could find to supply the Coromandel trade.[44] The next year, Batavia again demanded the Tonkin factors spend at least 100,000 guilders on gold. Under such a constraint, the Tonkin factors planned to spend 102,107 guilders on gold, and the idea was to keep another large amount of money ready in stock, awaiting the arrival of another consignment of gold which was expected to arrive from Yunnan.

Hopes were dashed as the rainy weather impeded the journeys of traders. To make matters worse, Qing soldiers raided the Vietnamese merchants trading on the border in order to punish the Lê/Trịnh court for the delay in sending its tribute to the new dynasty in Peking.[45] As a consequence of these commercial setbacks, the Tonkin factory could purchase only 3,861 taels of gold, valued at approximately 22,716 guilders. Shipped to the Coast factories in 1663, this small sum of gold brought a profit of 23½ per cent at Paliacatta.[46]

The weakness of the Tonkin factory in supplying gold for Coromandel was one of the reasons which prompted Batavia to urge the Gentlemen XVII in the Netherlands to supply gold for the Asian trade of the Company. In 1664, the general missive from Batavia to the directors requested that its demand for minted gold and ducats valued at 500,000 guilders per year was to be continued.[47] As has been ably demonstrated by Tapan Raychaudhuri, the demand for gold from the Netherlands in the late 1650s and early 1660s by Batavia, , was essentially a temporary phase because the Deshima factory was officially permitted to export Japanese gold again in 1665.[48]

In April 1663, the High Government resolved to repromote the Tonkin factory to the status of a permanent office, in order to stimulate the gold and musk trade across the Chinese border.[49] Batavia had high hopes its factors in Thăng Long would be able to furnish the return ships with gold.[50] In December, the *Zeeridder* returned to Batavia

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[43] NA VOC 678, Batavia Resolution, 24 Apr. 1663. A detailed discussion of this issue can be found in Chapter Four.

[44] *Generale Missiven* III, 386, 440.

[45] NA VOC 1240: 1355-1374, H. Baron to Batavia, 12 Nov. 1662; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 71 and passim.

[46] *Generale Missiven* III, 450-451, 457.

[47] Ibid., 457-466.

[48] Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 189.

[49] NA VOC 678, Batavia Resolution, 24 Apr. 1663; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 158; 1664, 202-204.

[50] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 209.

with a cargo valued at 148,295 guilders, consisting of approximately 1,900 taels of gold. In the spring, the *Bunschoten* also sailed to Batavia, carrying a small cargo of 31,211 guilders, consisting of 674 taels of gold for Coromandel.[51]

Despite these disappointing gold cargoes, in the 1664 trading season Batavia continued to insist that the Tonkin factory endeavour to supply the Coast factories with whatever gold it could procure in Tonkin. In order to fulfil this order, the Dutch factors contracted with the Japanese entrepreneur Resimon that he would sell all the gold he had at the end of the trading season at the fixed price of 12.5 taels of silver for 1 tael of 24-carat gold.[52] This contract could not be honoured because of the current severe shortage of gold on the Tonkin market.

Unable to fulfil the demand, the Dutch factors resolved to use most of their capital to buy silk and piece-goods. Consequently, upon the departure of the *Zeeridder* for Batavia in November 1664, the Tonkin factors were able to send only 713 taels of gold, promising their masters to try their best in the coming months to spend around 60,000 to 70,000 guilders on gold.[53] This promise the Tonkin factory also failed to keep: the *Bunschoten*'s cargo for Batavia consisted of only 1,387 taels of gold. In their missive to the Governor-General in 1665, the Dutch factors confessed that the gold trade in Tonkin had virtually stagnated and, worse still, the prospect of improving the procurement of gold in the future seemed hopeless.[54] In November of the same year, no gold was found in the Tonkin cargo shipped to Batavia. The Tonkin factory lamented that this year's failure had been caused by the complete stagnation of the gold flow from China. Daunted by various difficulties, Chinese gold merchants no longer visited northern Vietnam.[55]

In order to maintain the gold supply to the Coast after the consecutive failures of the Tonkin factory to procure Chinese gold, in 1663 the Deshima factory ignored the Japanese Government's ban on gold exports and deliberately exported Japanese gold coins.[56] After the Japanese authorized their 1664 application for the export of gold, the Dutch began to export Japanese gold in considerable amounts from 1665. From 1668, when the Japanese Government banned the export of silver and lowered the purchase price of Japanese gold, the Dutch export of Japanese gold rose sharply. The problem of the gold supply to Coromandel was now basically solved because the Japanese *koban* could easily be reminted into Indian *pagodas* as their metallic content was nearly the same.[57] Consequently, from the mid-1660s, Tonkin was no longer considered an

[51] NA VOC 1241: 356-366, Tonkin factory to Batavia, Nov. 1663; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1664, 65-67.
[52] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1664, 548-550.
[53] NA VOC 1252: 209-248, Tonkin factory to Batavia, Feb. 1665.
[54] NA VOC 1253: 1712-1734, Constantijn Ranst and the Tonkin factory to Batavia, 30 Oct. 1665.
[55] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1665, 83, 370-372; *Generale Missiven* III, 491.
[56] Nachod, *Die Beziehungen*, 357.
[57] Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 191.

important gold supplier for the Coast, although Chinese gold was still occasionally procured in Tonkin and exported to Coromandel.

3. *Tonkinese ceramics for the South Seas*

> The Earthen Ware of this Country [Tonkin] is coarse and of grey Colour, yet they make great quantities of small Earthen Dishes, that will hold half a Pint or more. They are broader toward the brim than at the bottom, so that they may be stowed within one another. They have been sold by *Europeans* in many of the *Malayan* Countries, and for that reason Capt. *Pool* in his first Voyage bought the best part of 100,000 in hope to sell them in his return homeward at *Batavia*, but not finding a market for them there, he carried them to *Bencouli* on the Island *Sumatra*, where he sold them at a great profit to the Governour *Bloom* […] The *China* Wares which are much finer, have of late spoiled the sale of this Commodity in most places.
>
> William Dampier (1688)[58]

The porcelain trade of the VOC had begun in the very early years of its trade with Asia. Since the profitable auction in the Netherlands in 1604 of Chinese porcelain captured from the Portuguese ship *Santa Catarina*, the demand for Chinese ceramics in the Dutch Republic had swelled. The Company's export of Asian wares, mainly Chinese ceramics, to Europe was irregular as it was dependent on a myriad of factors. The VOC's export of Chinese wares to Europe briefly flourished in the early 1630s, but soon stagnated as political chaos in mainland China severely disrupted production. Under the increasing pressure exerted by the Manchus, the Chinese Ming dynasty eventually collapsed in 1644. The dynastic change led to a protracted conflict between the die-hart supporters of the Ming and the newly established Qing which largely destroyed the porcelain manufacturing centre of Jingdezhen and consequently caused a severe shortage of fine Chinese porcelain.

After 1647 fine Chinese porcelain was virtually unprocurable on the international market. The VOC, in search of a substitute, switched over to the export of Japanese Hizen porcelain. In 1650 and 1651, the Deshima factory sent 145 dishes and 176 pieces of Hizen fine ware to Tonkin. In 1652, a Japanese porcelain cargo consisting of large and small medical pots was shipped from Deshima to Formosa. After that, the VOC often exported Japanese Hizen porcelain to Batavia, marking the beginning of regular trade in fine Japanese ware. In 1657, a load of Japanese porcelain was shipped to the Netherlands to test its salability. As this cargo found a favourable market, the VOC regularly exported Japanese porcelain to Europe.[59] After around a decade of high

[58] Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, 48.

[59] Cynthia Viallé, "De Bescheiden van de VOC betreffende de handel in Chinees en Japans porselein tussen 1634 en 1661", *Aziatische Kunst* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum) 3 (1992): 26.

profits, the Company's export of Japanese porcelain to the Netherlands declined and temporarily ended in 1663, mainly because of the high purchase prices in Japan.[60]

Fine porcelain was only part of the story. While Western merchants opened the European market for fine Chinese and Japanese porcelain, Chinese merchants maintained their regular export of coarse Chinese ware, produced mainly in Fujian and Guangdong, to the insular South-East Asian market. This too was to suffer from the political upheavals of dynastic change. From the early 1660s, the traditional flow of coarse Chinese porcelain to this vast market stagnated in the wake of the political changes in southern China. Finally having to succumb to the superior power of the Qing, the last-ditch Ming loyalists in southern China were defeated. In 1662, the Zheng abandoned their foothold on the coast of mainland China and withdrew to Formosa. Pursuing a policy of isolating and then pacifying Zheng Formosa, the Qing dynasty closed the door for China's foreign trade, and removed its subjects from the coastal areas. The traditional flow of coarse Chinese porcelain to the South Seas, which had been regularly maintained by the Zheng family, was disrupted, causing a severe shortage of coarse Chinese ware on the regional market.[61] Whereas Chinese fine porcelain had been amply supplemented by fine Japanese products, coarse Chinese ware was then substituted by Tonkinese ceramics. Coarse Tonkinese ceramics were now widely exported to the regional markets until the early 1680s.

This ushered in a big change. Despite the fact that Tonkinese ceramics had been sporadically exported to the regional market prior to the early 1660s, the annual export quantities were presumably inconsiderable. In 1663, Batavia noted that a Chinese junk had arrived from northern Vietnam with 10,000 *groove porceleijn koppen* (coarse ceramic cups).[62] In the next three years, roughly 180,000 pieces of Tonkinese ceramics were shipped to Batavia by the Chinese.

These large cargoes of Tonkinese ceramics impressed the High Government and prompted it to participate in the export of Tonkinese ceramics to the insular South-East Asian markets. In response to the swing, in 1667 the Dutch factory in Thăng Long sent the first load of 30,000 coarse Tonkinese cups to Batavia.[63] From this year until the early 1680s, when Chinese porcelain again flooded the international market, the Dutch were among the main foreign exporters of Tonkinese ceramics to the insular South-East Asian market (see Appendix 8). Taken as a whole, the emergence of Tonkin as a major

[60] Cynthia Viallé, "Japanese Porcelain for the Netherlands. The Records of the Dutch East India Company", in *The Voyage of Old Imari Porcelains* (published by The Kyushu Ceramic Museum, 2000), 176-183.

[61] Chumei Ho, "The Ceramic Trade", 35-70.

[62] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 71-72.

[63] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1666-1667, 241.

ceramic exporter in the early 1660s was simply a transitory substitution, similar to what had happened during the sixteenth century.[64]

In a nutshell, the expansion of Tonkinese export ceramics to the regional markets in the early 1660s was stimulated by three main causes: the disruption of the traditional flow of coarse Chinese ceramics to South-East Asia after 1662; the rapid decline in Japanese export ceramics to Asian markets because of the high purchase prices in Japan from 1663; and the current decline in the Dutch Tonkinese silk export. If the first and the second causes justified the decision of the Company to take part in this trading branch in 1667, the third clarifies the peak of the export volume of the Company in 1669 and 1670. As hinted at in the previous chapter, more can be said about this third factor. By the late 1660s, the VOC's endeavours to revive its Tonkinese silk trade proved to be futile. In April 1669, Batavia therefore instructed its factors in Tonkin to ballast their return ships with local ceramics, which the latter executed with great promptitude.[65] In the following year, the Dutch in Thăng Long optimistically reported to their masters that the quality of Tonkinese ceramics had been constantly improved thanks to the use of finer clay by local potters.[66] The Dutch factors managed to purchase large cargoes of Tonkinese wares for the Batavia-bound ships. The VOC's export of Tonkinese ceramics to the South Seas during this period can be considered as a dual success: the VOC regular trade with northern Vietnam ran smoothly during the time its Tonkin-Japan silk trade was stagnated because of low profits, and it also benefited from the export of Tonkinese ceramics.

Following sound economic principle, the annual export volume of Tonkinese ceramics to the regional market fluctuated according to the demands of the insular markets. While Figure 12 shows the fluctuation in the total export amount of Tonkinese ceramics to Batavia during the 1663-1681 period, Figure 13 demonstrates a relatively stiff rivalry between Tonkin, Chinese, and Japanese wares competing for a dominant position in the regional market.

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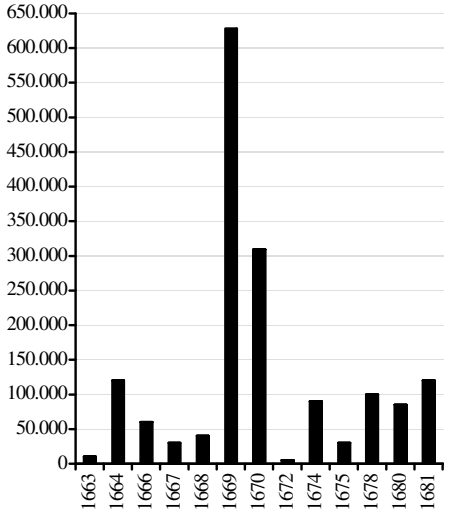
[64] On the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century export of Vietnamese ceramics for the international market: Guy, "Vietnamese Ceramics in International Trade", 47-61; John Guy, "Vietnamese Ceramics from the Hoi An Excavation: The Cu Lao Cham Ship Cargo", *Orientation* (Sept. 2000): 125-128.

[65] NA VOC 1278: 1861-1862, C. Valckenier to Batavia, Jan. 1670.

[66] NA VOC 1278: 1892-1907, C. Valckenier to Batavia, Oct. 1670.

Figure 12 Tonkinese ceramics exported to Batavia, 1663-1681

(pieces)

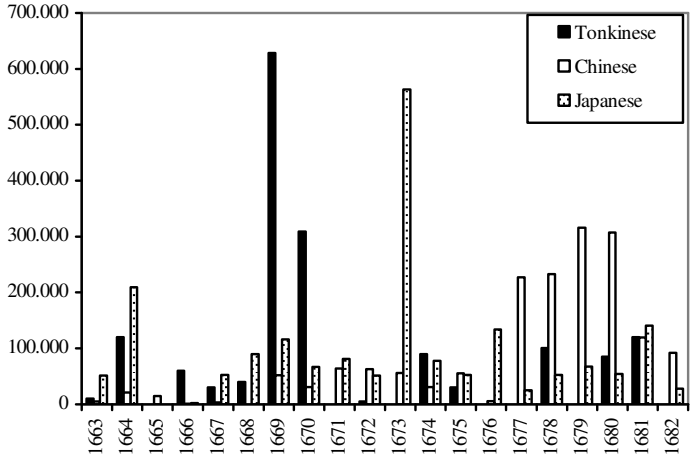


Sources: Adapted from Appendix 8.

After emerging as a major ceramic export commodity in the early 1660s, coarse Tonkinese ceramics dominated the South-East Asian markets in the years of 1669 and 1670. Putting together Tonkinese ceramic cargoes exported to the South Seas by other foreign merchants, roughly one million pieces of Tonkinese ceramics were shipped to the South Seas during these two years. During these two years alone, some 860,600 pieces of Tonkinese ceramics were shipped to Batavia by the VOC, consisting around 70 per cent of the Company's total export of Tonkinese ceramics during the 1663-1681 period.

Figure 13 Ceramics exported to the South Seas, 1663-1682

(pieces)



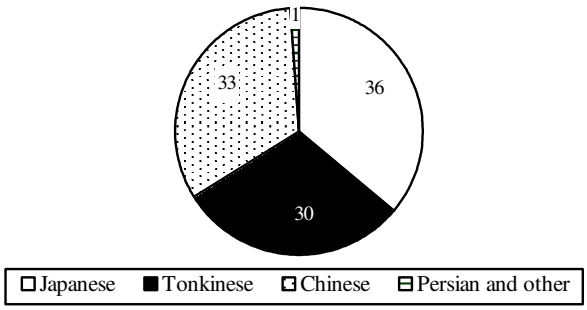
Sources: Adapted from Appendix 8; *Dagh-register Batavia*, 1624-1682; Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company*; Ho Chumei, "The Ceramic Trade, 35-70.

This supremacy was short-lived as the annual quantity of Tonkinese ceramics which reached Batavia in the years thereafter fell drastically. From 1672, the VOC factories in Baros, Cirebon, Toulougbauw, and Banten often sent Tonkinese ceramics back to Batavia as they failed to find buyers (see Appendix 9). In the meantime, only three years after the peak of the ceramic export of Tonkin, Japan reemerged as ceramic exporter when some 563,098 pieces of Japanese porcelain were sent to Batavia in 1673.[67] From 1677, coarse Chinese ware began to reach the insular markets in large quantities again, marking a spectacular return after it had to cede the market to Tonkinese and Japanese products.

According to the VOC records, altogether roughly 1,620,280 pieces of Tonkinese ceramics were shipped to the South Sea between the 1660s and 1680s. The real number must undoubtedly have been much higher, considering the absence of records of shipments carried by other foreigners such as the Chinese and English.[68] Regardless of this matter and taking into account only the numbers recorded in the VOC documents, between 1663 and 1681 Tonkinese ceramics had a share of 30 per cent of the total amount of ceramics exported to the South Seas, while Chinese, Japanese, and Persian wares amounted to 33, 36, and 1 per cent respectively. If we accept Volker's "very conservative estimate" that 12 million pieces were exported by the VOC during its first eighty-years of trading Asian ceramics (1602-1682),[69] Tonkinese ceramics which were exported exclusively for fewer than two decades, shared approximately 12 per cent; Japanese wares which were exported for around three decades counted for 16 per cent; and the remaining 72 per cent were mainly coarse Chinese ceramics.

Figure 14 Ceramics exported to the South Seas, 1663-1682

(per cent)



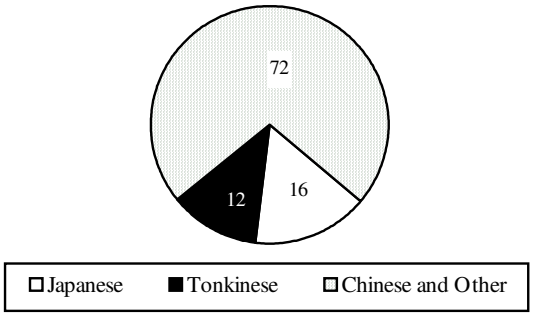
[67] Ho Chumei, "The Ceramic Trade", 35-70.

[68] Dampier (*Voyage and Discoveries*, 48) noted in his account written in 1688 that the English export of Tonkinese ceramics to the Indian market brought considerable profits.

[69] Volker (*Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company*, 218) estimated that out of around 12 million pieces of ceramics which the Company traded between 1602 and 1682, Tonkinese wares made up approximately 1,450,000 pieces, the rest was Japanese (1,900,000 pieces) and Chinese and others (8,650,000 pieces).

Figure 15 Ceramics exported by the VOC, 1602-1682

(per cent)



Sources: Adapted from Appendix 8; Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company*, 218; Ho Chumei, "The Ceramic Trade", 35-70.

Tonkinese ceramics were mainly bought for use on the insular South-East Asian markets. During this period – with the exception of several recorded shipments made by the English from Tonkin to their headquarters in Banten and India – Tonkinese ceramics were exported mainly to Batavia by the Dutch and the Chinese.[70] There they were redistributed to such different consumer markets as Banten, Cirebon, Baros, Palembang, Timor, Banda, Gresik, West Coast of Sumatra, and the like. In the southern Philippines, reflecting the ambiguous political division, Tonkinese ceramics were imported by both the Dutch and English Companies.[71] Besides these insular South-East Asian markets, Tonkinese ceramics were also sporadically exported to Japan and the Indian Sub-Continent.[72] Some English homeward-bound ships reportedly carried loads of Tonkinese ceramics but these cargoes were insignificant.[73]

According to the Dutch records, the assortment of the seventeenth-century Tonkinese export ceramics was rather monotonous. It included mainly cups, rice-bowls, tea cups, and roof tiles. Artistic and sophisticatedly decorated objects such as celadon pedestal, blue and white kendi, hollow-backed glazed stoneware tiles, tall jars, and the like were not mentioned, although these objects have quite often been found at archaeological sites. Various explanations can be adduced for this anomaly. The written documents may not have been detailed enough, or possibly, the Dutch were not interested in trading these sorts of objects. Making a further deduction from the second supposition, foreign merchants other than the Dutch may have been involved in exporting these products. Whatever the reasons behind the absence of written

[70] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1681, 120-121.

[71] Kerry Nguyen Long, "Bat Trang and the Ceramic Trade, 84-90.

[72] Dampier, *Voyage and Discoveries*, 48; Louise Allision Cort, "Vietnamese Ceramics in Japanese Contexts" (62-83) and Guy, "Vietnamese Ceramics in International Trade" (47-61), in Stevenson and Guy, *Vietnamese Ceramics*.

[73] *Dagh-register Batavia* 1681, 200.

documents on these sorts of objects, it is clear that the majority of Tonkinese wares exported to the regional markets in the late seventeenth century consisted of utensils for everyday use which were largely manufactured at the Bát Tràng ceramic village. In the seventeenth century, Bát Tràng was the major ceramic manufacturing centre of Tonkin because the Chu Đậu ceramic centre, in modern Hải Dương Province, had declined from the sixteenth century.[74]

Descriptions of the Tonkinese ceramic cargoes were often brief, being nothing more than short notes on the sending of *Toncquinse porceleynen* [Tonkinese porcelain] among other local goods shipped to Batavia. The patchiness of documents prevents us from reconstructing an insightful picture on the VOC's export of Tonkinese ceramics during this period. As for the capital and profits made, it is certain that the total capital the VOC spent on Tonkinese ceramics was not remarkable, considering the low value of this commodity. In 1670, for instance, 214,160 pieces of Tonkinese ceramics cost only 2,650 guilders (see Appendix 8), making an average price of 1.24 cents per piece. Given the rough calculation that 1,620,280 pieces of Tonkinese ceramics were exported by the VOC during this period, approximately 20,050 guilders were spent on these ceramic cargoes, a far cry from what was spent on the Company's Tonkinese silk shipments. The profits that the VOC made on these Tonkinese ceramic cargoes were presumably small.

Besides exporting Tonkinese ceramics, the Dutch and other foreign merchants also imported, mainly Chinese and Japanese, porcelain into Tonkin. Appendix 10 shows the sporadic VOC shipments of foreign porcelain into Tonkin. It also reflects the fairly unconcerned attitude displayed by the Company towards this minor trade. Since the Company's import trade, as analysed earlier, focused mainly on precious metals and, to a lesser extent, on the commodities demanded by local rulers, such miscellaneous items as ceramics failed to spark any interest. Most of the ceramics which the Company imported into Tonkin indeed often pertained to the orders of local rulers. The only considerable load of foreign wares the VOC brought to Tonkin was the 1665 shipment of 17,320 pieces of Japanese porcelain, but even then the Chinese imported considerably more. In 1676 alone, for instance, Chinese merchants brought 9,000 pieces of (most probably Chinese) cups, plates, flasks, brandy-flagons, and brandy-cups, and approximately 100,000 pieces of Japanese assorted wares to Tonkin (see Appendix 10). Two alternative suppositions can be drawn from this data. The VOC did not show any great interest in importing these commodities into Tonkin either because of the meagre profits or the flat market. Alternatively, the Company was not particularly skilled in procuring foreign wares, because of its lack of access to Chinese products or because of the high purchase prices of Japanese wares during the 1660s.

[74] Phan Huy Lê *et al.* (eds), *Bat Trang Ceramic*; Hán Văn Khẩn and Hà Văn Cẩn, "Gốm Chu Đậu Việt Nam".

This still begs the question of whether such large amounts of Chinese and Japanese wares shipped to northern Vietnam were consumed in Tonkin itself or whether they were reshipped to other marketplaces. Since the Dutch Company often complained about the high purchase prices of Japanese porcelain in Japan, it is doubtful if these expensive items were all consumed in Tonkin, where the long tentacles of the Royal Court had already forbidden its subjects to use "exotic merchandise" including foreign ceramics and textiles.[75]

Appendix 11 shows that, unlike the Chinese who deliberately imported Chinese and Japanese porcelain into Tonkin as merchandise, the VOC shipments of foreign porcelain to Tonkin were often contingent upon the Trịnh rulers' demands and orders. While the number of objects per order was inconsiderable, totalling hardly more than some dozens of pieces, the assortment of the objects ordered was monotonous. They were mainly flasks which were apparently used as ornaments by the court and royal family.[76] The court demonstrated the size and decorative motifs by providing wooden models (*houten modellen*) and handed them over to the Dutch factory to be made in Japan since the VOC had no access to mainland China.

[75] The Lê/Trịnh court decreed in 1661 that "Confucian scholars, dignitaries, young bachelors, village headmen, village elders, mandarin's children and grandsons, as well as civilians have to use domestic products". Quoted from Thành Thế Vỹ, *Ngoại thương Việt Nam*, 61. More detailed regulations of the Tonkinese court on this can be found in *Cương mục*, II, 282-290.

[76] Trần Đức Anh Sơn, "Đồ sứ Việt Nam ký kiểu tại Trung Hoa từ 1804 đến 1924 hiện tàng trữ tại Bảo tàng Mỹ thuật Cung đình Huế" (Porcelain Ordered in China for the Vietnamese Court between 1804 and 1824 which is Preserved in the Huế Imperial Museum of Fine Arts) (PhD Dissertation, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, 2002), 27-37.

Concluding remarks

Silk was the centre of gravity which pulled the Dutch Company towards Tonkin in the late 1630s. Thanks primarily to their political and military concessions but with their patient endurance also, Dutch merchants were able to conduct their import and export trade with Tonkin satisfactorily in the first twenty years. Raw silk and silk piece-goods were exported to Japan in substantial quantities in the years leading to 1654, where they yielded handsome annual profits for the Company. As the Tonkin-Japan silk trade grew less profitable from the mid-1650s, the Company altered its focus from raw to woven silk which it exported mainly to the European market. Miscellaneous items such as musk and cinnamon were also carried home while gold purchased in Tonkin was sent to the Coromandel Coast, and ceramics were largely shipped to insular South-East Asia.

As in most Asian trading-ports, the Company needed silver and copper as its main forms of investment capital if it were to conduct its export trade profitably. The proportion of silver to copper varied from period to period according mainly to the demand on the local market and the supply of these items. The ready access of the Company to these metals in Japan was an enormous advantage to its Tonkin trade and maximized its profit margins in the major periods of its entire trade with the Lê/Trịnh domain.

Being a link in the chain of the intra-Asian trade, the Company's Tonkin trade depended heavily on the vicissitudes in the demand and supply sides in this trading network. The case of the Tonkin-Japan silk trade can be considered as an exemplary instance. As Tonkinese silk lost its allure on the Japanese market, the Company switched over to the export of piece-goods and miscellaneous items to be sent to Europe and to ceramics for the South Seas. These alternative export lines did not necessarily imply the prospect of the nice profit margins which they offered but simply reflected the persistence of the Company in its endeavours to avoid losing a trading station which might putatively be important to its commercial strategies in later periods. In the case of Tonkin, it was the prospect of penetrating the vast market of China which stimulated the Company to hang on to its factory in Thăng Long for at least a decade until it was eventually closed. By the turn of the eighteenth century, however, Batavia cancelled its trading relations with Tonkin as, prior to that time, its perspective on the China trade had dimmed considerably.