

**Meeting the Dutch:
cooperation and conflict between
Jesuits and Dutch merchants in Asia, 1680-1795**

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Introduction

It is commonly acknowledged that merchants and missionaries in early modern times contributed to the growth of global connections and interactions which facilitated the large-scale migration, global trade and global circulation of knowledge since then.¹ Although these two very different types of actors not necessarily depended on each other to be able to accomplish their goals, their activities often were intermingled, as for example appears from the spread of Buddhism facilitated by merchants.² In early modern Asia the European trading companies and religious orders played an exceptional role in the development of global labour markets and global circulation of ideas.³ They moreover shared interests and space. Trading nations tried to strengthen and extend their trading posts by implementing mission work, as was the case in the Catholic communities in the Portuguese port-cities, which the Dutch after conquest subsequently tried to transform into Protestant settlements. Jesuits in trade settlements in turn offered help as interpreter to European merchants establishing commercial relationships with local rulers.⁴

Two organisations representing these two types of organisation that held the most dominant position in Asia until nearly the end of the eighteenth century were the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Society of Jesus. Only after 1770 the amount of ships of the VOC sailing between Asia and Europe was surpassed by the English East India Company (EIC) and the French Compagnie des Indes.⁵ Notwithstanding the considerable growth of missionaries from the regular orders and the Propaganda Fide since the 1680s, the Jesuits kept the highest rate of priests in the Portuguese mission in Asia until the dissolution of the Society of Jesus in 1772.⁶

The well-organized long-distance correspondence of the Jesuits and their travelling between Asia and Europe depended to a large part of the trading companies.⁷ Since the arrival of the Dutch, English and French companies, the spot of the Jesuits shifted from Portuguese

¹ Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York 2005) 114-118.

² Jerrey H. Bentley, *Old world encounters: cross-cultural contacts and exchanges in pre-modern times* (New York 1993), 67-111.

³ Steven J. Harris, 'Long-distance corporations, big sciences, and the geography of knowledge' *Configurations* 6.2 (1998) 269-304; Karel Davids, 'Van VOC-mentaliteit naar jezuïetenmentaliteit: de Societas Jesu als schrikbeeld, partner en ijkpunt voor de Oost-Indische Compagnie', in: Maurits Ebben, Henk den Heijer en Joost Schokkenbroek ed., *Alle streken van het kompas: maritieme geschiedenis van Nederland* (Zutphen 2010) 132-135; Luke Clossey, *Salvation and globalization in the early Jesuit missions* (Cambridge 2008); Matthias van Rossum, Lex Heerma van Voss, Jelle van Lottum and Jan Lucassen, 'National and international labour markets for sailors for European, Atlantic and Asian waters, 1600-1850', in: Maria Fusaro and Amélia Polónia ed., *Maritime history as global history* (St. John's 2010); Jan Lucassen, *Global labour history: a state of the art* (Bern 2006) 33.

⁴ In both Asia and the Americas this strategy was common, see Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-betweens and the colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600* (Austin 2005); C. Pucko, 'The activity of Polish Jesuits in Persia and neighbouring countries in the 17th and 18th centuries', in: Ch. Melville ed., *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies II, Medieval and modern Persian studies* (Wiesbaden 1999) 309-315.

⁵ J. Bruijn en F. Gaastra, 'The Dutch East India Company's shipping, 1602-1795, in a comparative perspective' in: Bruijn, J. en F. Gaastra ed., *Ships, sailors and spices: East India companies and their shipping in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries* (Amsterdam 1993) 181-182; K.N. Chaudhuri, 'The English East India Company's shipping (c. 1660-1760)' in: *Ibidem*, 59; Ph. Haudrère, 'The "Compagnie des Indes" and maritime matters (c. 1725-1770)' in: *Ibidem*, 81; V. Magelhaes Godinho, 'The Portuguese and the "Carreira da Índia", 1497-1810' in: *ibidem*, 19-23.

⁶ The Portuguese mission existed of India, China, Japan among other regions, and fell under jurisdiction of the Portuguese crown in agreement with the Pope (the Padroado). The amount of Jesuits in Asia varied between three hundred and five hundred, see Dauril Alden, *The making of an enterprise. The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its empire, and beyond 1540-1750* (Stanford 1996).

⁷ The route over land of the caravans to Moscow was considered to be a safe alternative.

ships to a wider range of European ships to transport themselves. As one of the most important trading centers in Asia, Batavia served as an indispensable node through which Jesuits passed by and sent their letters and packets to and from Europe. The use of communication channels of the Jesuits was admired by the Propaganda Fide: ‘Gesuiti arriveranno per tal via e piu sani e piu sicuri, e meglio trattati. Questa è la via, chengono gli spediti da Propaganda.’⁸ It has been suggested that VOC-merchants in turn showed more interest in the learned knowledge of Jesuits than French and English merchants since the second half of the seventeenth century. The VOC and the Jesuit Order therefore have been considered to be complementary in benefiting from each other.⁹ The VOC though also struggled with the presence of the Catholics in the colonies. Asian Christians who preferred the colourful ceremonies of the Catholic religion of the former Portuguese to the sober Calvinism of the Dutch, contributed to the Catholic dominance in VOC-territory. In Ceylon more Catholic priests were at work than Protestant clergymen. The Dutch were alternately tolerant and severe towards the practice of Catholic rituals in her colonies. Moreover a bitter suspicion existed towards especially Portuguese Jesuits who were considered to be a fifth colon in Dutch colonies.¹⁰

Although a certain degree of toleration of the great amount of Catholic Asians and Europeans in the Dutch colonies naturally existed, assistance offered by VOC-servants to Jesuits must be considered peculiar.¹¹ The division of the world in a Portuguese and a Spanish part by the Pope after the first voyages of discoveries had been contested the most by the Reformed maritime powers England and the Dutch Republic. In the Dutch Republic the reputation of the Jesuits moreover decreased steadily due to theological conflicts in Europe during the eighteenth century.¹² The image of the untrustworthy Jesuit resounded overseas as well, as appears from the widespread publications of Dutch authors staying in the East like VOC-painter Johan Nieuhof and clergyman François Valentijn. Nieuhof accused a Jesuit at the Chinese court of sabotage -a view which has been repeated in recent histories-, and Valentijn suggested that the ‘treacherous, villain’ governor-general Joannes Maetsuyker was a Jesuit.¹³ The question of the weight of the religious opposition on the degree of cooperation between the two biggest organisations of their type, is furthermore an interesting one in the light of the early modern identity, which could be bounded by religious orientation at least as much as by origin. An Englishman in India in 1609 agreed to marry a ‘rich, high-born and white’ Indian woman after he discovered she was an Armenian Christian instead of a Moore.¹⁴ In China a high degree of cooperation existed between Jesuits hiding for the Chinese authorities and Chinese Christians helping them. Would it be far-fetched to suggest that in the early modern times of religious dominance in daily life Jesuits might have

⁸ ‘Jesuits arrive via many ways, healthier, with more certainty and better treatment. This is the way the missionaries of the Propaganda take’, Pater Cetti, between 1758 and 1760, Archive of the Propaganda Fide (APF), *Scrittura Congressi*, Indie Or.-Cina 29, p.606v.

⁹ Davids, ‘Van VOC-mentaliteit naar jezuïetenmentaliteit’.

¹⁰ G.J. Schutte, ‘Een hutje in den wijngaard: Gerformeerd Ceylon’, in: idem, *Het Indisch Sion: de gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum 2002) 177-188, 182.

¹¹ See for examples of toleration C. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne empire* (2e ed.; London 1966) 139-142; J.J.Th. Wijnhoven, ‘List of Roman Catholic priests in Batavia at the time of the V.O.C.’, *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 30 (1974) 13-38, 127-138.

¹² Conflicts arose between Jesuits and Jansenists about religious practice. Also the Chinese Rite controversy in which especially Dominicans attacked Jesuits intensified.

¹³ Johan Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap der Neerlandtsch Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham...* (Amsterdam 1670) 166, 205; François Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën* IVa (photomechanic ed. 1724-1726; Franeker 2002-2004) 298.

¹⁴ Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to colonialism: Indian travelers and settlers in Britain 1600-1857* (Delhi 2004) 10-11, 23-24.

preferred cooperation with Chinese Christians to one with the heretic Dutch and English merchants? From a narrower European perspective it can at least be presumed that cooperation with the Catholic French, Portuguese, Swedish and Ostend merchants was far more desirable than with the Dutch, the English or the Danish.

Of the few forms of cooperation that existed, in this paper the focus will be on the mobility of the Jesuits, as facilitated by VOC-officials allowing transport to them between Asia and Europe.¹⁵ Moments of cooperation will be examined from an integrated perspective in which analysis of interests of both parties is being combined with examination of global developments. When we have a closer look on the encounters between Jesuits and VOC-merchants on different locations in the period 1680-1795, it will become clear that transport on a VOC-ship could be arranged by exchange of knowledge. Second, decisions of an Asian prince could determine the degree of cooperation. However, in the age of inter-European warfare the origin of Jesuits visiting Dutch trading posts determined the willingness of VOC-rulers to help them, whereby a change occurred from hostility towards the Portuguese to the French. Finally, outside VOC-territory a substantial exchange of services took place in Tonkin. In Canton on the other hand cooperation VOC-merchants offered surprisingly little assistance compared with French and English merchants. These findings implicate an insignificant role of religious opposition in overseas encounters between Jesuits and the Dutch.

Transport by the VOC

In order to interpret the degree of assistance given by ship officers of the VOC, we should first know the nature of the VOC policy towards passengers in general. The amount of passengers traveling on board a VOC-ship was limited, varying from zero to twenty. The wife, children and servants of the higher officers, senior merchants, administrators, judges, clergymen and free burgers traveled in a private cabin. They had dinner with the officers and were exempted from labour. The sick, the condemned and the prisoners of war on the other hand stayed at the hold of the crew at best, and on the chain at worst. Transport of European merchants by VOC-ships was forbidden since 1695. Transport of hajj pilgrims however was increasingly provided by VOC-officers during the eighteenth century.¹⁶ The possibilities of missionaries wishing to travel on a VOC-ship were restricted by the fact that their presence in Dutch colonies was not appreciated. Vigilant on the presence of the Portuguese in their colonies the VOC-rulers prohibited the Portuguese missionaries to go ashore in Batavia and Ceylon since 1664. Dutch citizens who assisted them would be punished. Between Dutch settlements and trading posts in Canton, Siam and Manila however missionaries occasionally sailed on Dutch ships.

What could have been the considerations of missionaries? From a comparison of capacities of the different companies it follows that there was more space for passengers on the ships of the smaller trading nations than on the ones of the big trading companies that needed also personnel for the maintenance of the colonies. The Danish and Swedish ships therefore had better living conditions on board, an argument that might have been of importance to missionaries. French officers of a ship of the *Compagnie des Indes*, usually very crowded by crew and soldiers, for example received the request of missionaries to ‘be

¹⁵ The other forms of cooperation were transport of letters and packets by the VOC, and translations, diplomatic advice and exchange of information by Jesuits.

¹⁶ *Dutch Asiatic shipping I, Introductory volume*. J. Bruijn e.a. ed. Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën nr. 165 ('s-Gravenhage 1987) 146-149; Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne empire*, 143.

lodged decently' meaning to travel separate from women and 'passengers of all qualities'.¹⁷ More important though was velocity and safety during the passage, which was determined by warfare in the first place. During the Seven Years War for example Jesuits in Canton preferred the ships of the neutral nations Denmark, Sweden and the Dutch Republic to transport themselves and their letters.¹⁸

Transport and knowledge

Antoine Thomas in Cochin

In the Dutch colony of Cochin on the Malabar coast Jesuits lived together with Carmelites, Dutch settlers and indigenous Thomaschristians. The Catholic priests who tried to convert the Malabar-christians were considered to be dangerous, and were tolerated at most, as long as they caused no harm to the colony.¹⁹ Also on Ceylon Catholics were tolerated, although the regular arrival of priests from Goa had always been subject of discussion among VOC-officials. When the Flemish Jesuit Antoine Thomas arrived in Cochin in 1681 on his way to Japan, he was advised by the Dutch 'commandeur' to go to Tuticorin in order to arrange transport on a VOC-ship to Batavia.²⁰ In his own words Thomas was received in a friendly way by the Dutch official who made an effort to help him on condition that the Jesuit gave him an explanation of a comet. Thomas dedicated a treatise on the comet to the governor-general Rijcklof van Goens, which was –'very friendly' again- being translated in Dutch by a descendant of Rijcklof van Goens in order to send it to 'uncle Ricloff'.²¹ When the commandeur asked the governor of the Dutch colony of Ceylon to allow Thomas to take the first ship leaving for Batavia, the latter after consulting the Ceylon Council 'to his regret' refused to transport him as 'on the island it would be dangerous'.²² Asking himself what the reasons for this refusal might have been, Thomas returned to Cochin where his request for a transport also was refused. In the end he found a Portuguese ship in Goa that sailed him to Malacca. He though did not give up asking the Dutch for assistance as he sent the treatise about the comet to the governor-general in Batavia with the general request to be allowed to sail on VOC-ships 'in order to make longitudinal observations'. To the regret of Thomas the governor-general Rijcklof van Goens was just been replaced. The treatise about the comet, possibly as a consequence, so far has never been found.

What catches the eye, is that although the VOC-officials did maintain a severe policy of not allowing the Jesuit to go ashore on Ceylon and not providing transport from Ceylon and Cochin, they friendly tried to help the Catholic priest to move on. Thomas surprisingly seemed not aware of the impossibilities of cooperation in the Dutch hostile environment. The Jesuit even tried to negotiate with the highest official of the VOC! It stays unclear whether the requested description of the comet was a true means to negotiate transport or whether Thomas was intentionally fleeced by the knowledge-loving VOC-officials who already knew transport from their trading posts was no option. Nevertheless Thomas seemed to have been convinced

¹⁷ Haudrière, 'The "Compagnie des Indes" and maritime matters', 81.

¹⁸ See the correspondence of the sinophile minister Henri-Léonard Bertin, Bibliothèque de l'Institut (BI), Paris.

¹⁹ Schutte, 'Een hutje in den wijngaard', 182.

²⁰ This must have been Marten Hysman who was commandour of Malabar between 1678 and 1684. Cochin was the capital of the VOC settlements on the Malabar coast.

²¹ The governor-general of that time was indeed Rijcklof van Goens. His son Rijcklof van Goens jr, who most probable was meant in this letter, had been governor of Ceylon until 1679 and 'commisaris-generaal' of the Dutch Indies until 1680.

²² Laurens Pijl was governor of Ceylon from 1679 to 1692. His predecessor was Rijcklof van Goens jr.

by the functioning of the mechanism of dedication and exchange of knowledge in order to arrange logistics.

Tachard at the Cape of Good Hope

The journal of the voyage to Siam in which Jesuit Guy Tachard described his stay of one week with five other ‘mathématiciens du roi’ in the VOC-garden at the Cape of Good Hope, has been analysed mostly by looking at the scientific results of the cooperative meeting.²³ The source however also tells something about the respectful attitudes of the Jesuits and the VOC-officials Hendrik Van Rheedee tot Drakenstein and Simon van der Stel. When the Jesuits arrived in the bay of the Dutch colony, they initially doubted whether to go ashore disguised or not, as ‘Jesuits, Mathematicians, and several instruments carried ashore might offend the Nicety of a Dutch Commander, in a pretty new Colony, and make him suspect something else than what we pretended’.²⁴ To their own surprise they were given a warm reception, which seduced the Jesuits to propose to make longitudinal observations of the Cape which they would share with the VOC-officials. They agreed and even assisted in making astronomical observations. The Jesuits were lucky to meet these two officials, who, as they were involved in botanical research, showed a curiosity uncommon to VOC-servants.

Furthermore I would like to add a note on the sustained nature of this personal encounter. This appears from a ‘secret memoire’ of a French Jesuit about Tachard’s journey to Siam and back to Europe conserved in the Jesuit Archive in Rome, which moreover illustrates the role that origin did play, or better, did not. When three years later Tachard landed at the Cape again on a French returning ship, the Dutch captured the French as war had been proclaimed again. Simon van der Stel recognized the Jesuit and although he put him in prison, he also took good care of him during the two months of his stay. The discrepancy in behaviour towards the French enemy had been expressed by Tachard in the following words: ‘je riois en moi mesme de la sanité du monde et des comedies qui s’y jouient. on nous regaloit derriere la scene, et sur le théâtre on venoit de nous depoüiller’. The Dutch commander allowed Tachard to leave for Europe, and offered him ‘secular’ clothing to be able to go ashore in the Dutch Republic. Tachard described this friendly assistance in a conversation which was extraordinary in terms of content and in terms of what has come down to us from the past. Tachard wrote about his departure:

‘as I entered the room of Van der Stel he received me while laughing at my new dress. In Portuguese he said: “Look at this, the father has become a horseman of Cape of Good Hope”. I answered him in the same language: “Horseman I am not, but I do have good hope”.

When the Jesuit went on board the Dutch ship to Europe, he had a less friendly conversation with the VOC-officers. They did not let him through before he emptied his pockets, as the officers suspected the Jesuit to be in the possession of goods of value.²⁵

²³ Florence C. Hsia, *Sojourners in a strange land: Jesuits and their scientific missions in late imperial China* (Chicago 2009); Davids, ‘Van VOC-mentaliteit naar jezuïetenmentaliteit’, 140.

²⁴ Guy Tachard, *A relation of the voyage to Siam* (London 1688) 47-48.

²⁵ Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Jap.-Sin. 78, ‘De ce qui s’est passé à Siam dans les années 1687 et 1688. Provincia Francia.’, part of a volume entitled ‘memoires secrets de siam 1687 et 1688’ in ARSI, f.173-203, 192-196.

De Bèze at Malacca

When Claude de Bèze who had accompanied Tachard during the second embassy of the French to Siam, wanted to travel further to China he was captured by the Dutch in Malacca 'on the pretext of war'. Underway to Siam he had made astronomical observations and a map of the Cape of Good Hope. During his imprisonment 'in the tower of the fort' of Malacca he moreover continued his activities as he possessed instruments to make astronomical observations with. He also wrote the brief 'Descriptions of a few trees and plants of Malacca' and his observations were published in volumes of the Parisian Academy.²⁶ In 1690 the Dutch decided to ship De Bèze to Batavia in order to take him to the Dutch Republic together with the French Jesuit Patricius Comilh and fourteen French prisoners of war. Unlike his confreres Thomas and Tachard De Bèze surprisingly did not offer his knowledge in exchange of service. Instead he and Comilh begged to stay in Batavia, suggesting that they could be of more use to the Dutch alive in the Indies than in a suffering state on a VOC-ship to the Republic. 'Perhaps the governor-general could send a letter to the Gentlemen Seventeen to communicate the professed treatment of the Jesuits, and we could add our letters to our friends in France in order to receive help, if you agree'.

This request went way too far for the VOC-officials in whose eyes the Jesuits ought to be thankful to travel to Europe 'in such an easy way' as they had offered them transport money out of charity. The governor-general ordered the ship officers to watch the Jesuits closely during the trip.²⁷ The seafarers might have taken this task without mercy, as the voyage to Europe had been described as very tough: the Jesuits were 'thrown in with the pigs' without being allowed to take air on the deck. After his release from the prison in Rotterdam, Comilh was said to have become too weak to return to China.²⁸ Possibly the poor priests were transported as prisoners of war in the hold of the ship instead of being allowed in the cabin. This casus shows that knowledge exchange did not necessarily occur, and was being obstructed in times of European warfare.

Transport and international relations

Batavia

During the existence of the VOC around hundred-ninety priests stayed in Batavia for a few months or years to take care of the souls of the considerable amount of Catholics here.²⁹ In order to preserve stability in Batavia visiting missionaries were usually forbidden to go ashore. When they were allowed to land they were being lodged between the Castle walls to prevent them from practicing their religion. Frequently though they were forced to leave Batavia on the first ship to appear.

Two cases of transport of missionaries arriving in Batavia throw light on the role that global interests played in decisions of VOC-officials. Two Spanish Dominicans who were violently expelled from Tonkin by the prince arrived on a VOC-ship at Batavia in 1681. The Tonkin ruler had ordered the VOC-officers to make the Dominicans leave Tonkin for good. The missionaries sent a polite request to the authorities in Batavia in which they asked for

²⁶ Florence C. Hsia, 'Some observations on the Observations. The decline of the French Jesuit scientific mission in China', *Revue de synthèse*, 4e S. nos. 2-3 (1999) 305-333. 317.

²⁷ *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie V, 1686-1697*. Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, Grote Serie 150 (Den Haag 1975), letter Gouverneur-Generaal and Raden to Heren XVII, 14 March 1690, 375; Nationaal Archief (NA), VOC, inv.nr. 1458, f220-220v.

²⁸ APF, *Scrittura riferite nei Congressi*, Indie Or.-Cina, miscellanea 2, f.411-414, 412.

²⁹ A quarter to a third of the total population in Batavia consisted of Catholics, see Wijnhoven, 'List'.

permission to land. Their only goal was to travel to Bantam, where they knew some friends who could provide them with clothes and money. From there they hoped to sail to the Spanish territory of Manila. The VOC-rulers however decided to ship the Spanish priests to the Dutch Republic! This decision is surprising in the light of the official peace with Spain, but less surprising in the light of the relationship between the VOC and the Tonkin ruler: governor-general Rijcklof van Goens risked a worsening trade relation with the prince if the Dominicans would return to Tonkin from Bantam or Manila. When the missionaries heard about the harsh decision of the Dutch, they wrote again, now a veritable dirge, in which they pictured their future suffering. Sailing on board a VOC-ship would be even worse than being a captive in Tonkin, as they would be prisoners until Spain without being able to meet Europeans in the Indies and to put their feet on soil. They moreover had to suffer while they had not landed and had not won souls in Batavia, in a time of peace and good treatment of prisoners. As the VOC-rulers did not change their policy, the Dominicans in the end requested a decent voyage to the Republic by sending a list of wishes, consisting of goods and service: they demanded among other things six pair of shoes, thirty underpants, two Dutch black dresses 'to go ashore in Holland', two servants, paper and ink. They moreover demanded a private cabin for each, and the deliverance of breakfast, wine and tobacco. On 'days of meat' moreover they demanded to provide them with the food eaten by the skipper.³⁰ When we recall the restricted VOC-policy towards transport of passengers, the missionaries in fact asked to be treated as passengers who were allowed to have dinner with the VOC-officers.³¹

In 1685 a Dutch ship touched the port of Batavia carrying a Portuguese and an Italian Jesuit from Tonkin with seven Tonkin Christians. They had been called back to Europe by the Pope and the Tonkin ruler had ordered VOC-merchants to arrange their shipment to Siam. The 'hardship' they had suffered during the typhoons that blew them to Batavia urged governor-general Johannes Camphuijs to allow the Jesuits to land as long as no ships were leaving for Siam or India.³² According to the Jesuits their suffering moreover consisted of a tough journey on the VOC-ship during which they had to work hard for the Dutch 'heretics' who 'did not like them as they hated the Papists'. On their arrival in Batavia they lacked money and strength to travel further immediately, and decided to wait for a ship from the Portuguese Macao to lend money from. They emphatically expressed the wish to sail from India to Europe on a Catholic ship.³³ Meanwhile they received good care by the governor-general, who accommodated them in a garden and offered them food and drinks. In the two complementary types of sources of the VOC and the Propaganda Fide a salient difference can again be observed between VOC-officers and a VOC-ruler in the degree of assistance given to the Jesuits. In this case the Jesuits seemed to have travelled on a VOC-ship as employee, and certainly not as an official passenger.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century three French Jesuits who had gone into hiding in Batavia were being discovered and captured by the Dutch. Due to logistics two of them had been shipped to the Dutch Republic as spies of the Dutch state, while the third Jesuit Gilbert Bordes was put in jail. This Jesuit was an apothecary who with his boxes of medicaments and instruments had been on his way to Beijing to serve as a physician of the Emperor. In a letter to the VOC-officials he in vain had offered to share his medicinal expertise in exchange of the permission to stay in Batavia 'until peace would have come'. A

³⁰ NA, VOC, inv.nr. 1354, Dayregister 1681, f841-846.

³¹ Whether their request had been agreed to, is yet unknown.

³² NA, VOC, inv.nr. 1394, f282-282v, the gouverneur-general and Raden to the Heren XVII, 12 February 1685; *Generale Missiven van de Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie IV, 1675-1685*. Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, Grote Serie 134 (Den Haag 1971) 759.

³³ Fragments from Portuguese Jesuit Ferreira to the Jesuit Assistant of Portugal, 3 February 1685 Batavia, APF, *Informationes Liber* 135, f.261.

few months later a Portuguese and a French Jesuit from Beijing who arrived in the roadstead of Batavia on the English ship *Loyal Bless*, wrote a letter to the Dutch authorities in which they asked for the liberation of Bordes and the continuation of his travel to China. They highlighted the advantage for the VOC-rulers in the following words:

‘when we left Beijing the Emperor ordered us to send the physician Bordes to his Court as soon as possible. We therefore, Sir, as ambassadors of His Majesty, pray you to offer this pleasure to the emperor of China, and to send the physician to China on the first occasion (...) the persons who are of such a great dignity like you will take pleasure in keeping up a good correspondence with such a great prince.’³⁴

Despite the useful qualities of Bordes and the suggestion made by his colleagues, clearly China experts, of an improved relationship with the Emperor, no help was provided by the VOC-officials. Also Bordes was shipped to the Republic as an enemy of the nation. A good relationship with the Chinese ruler seemed less important in times of war with France. Even the medicinal expertise of the Jesuit could not seduce the VOC-rulers to let him stay.

Outside VOC-territory: Cochinchina and China

In 1755 the German Jesuit and apothecary Johann Koffler sailed on a VOC-ship from Cochinchina to Malacca and Batavia. He was welcomed ‘very friendly’, received transport and lodging allowance, and even a considerable amount of medicine. As appears from documents of the VOC, VOC-rulers assisted the Jesuit not only out of ‘consideration for his destitute condition’, but also because he had rendered them good turns. Koffler served as a doctor at the court of the monarch of Cochinchina halfway the eighteenth century. Although the VOC had closed their two factories Tonkin and Faifo they stayed involved in the trade in silk and gold in Cochinchina. According to a French apostolic vicar who worked at the court as well, Koffler had ‘lost his soul since a longtime’ and was entirely devoted to assistance of ‘his new society the VOC’.³⁵ In the reports of the VOC Koffler indeed was being mentioned as a ‘benevolent missionary’ who had been willing to negotiate with the prince about ‘unlawful behaviour of the sabandhar’. Moreover the Jesuit had been in possession of a letter of the French king to the king of Cochinchina, of which he shared its content with the VOC-merchants in a memoir.³⁶ The Jesuit in short served as a diplomatic intermediary in relationships between the VOC and the Asian ruler, and as a channel of information. On this location where power of the VOC was limited, each party made the most of the other’s capacities.

Letters of Jesuits at the Chinese court in Beijing and in the provinces were being sent to Canton from where they were being shipped by the European trading companies leaving for Europe between November and February. A well-known example of a highly cooperative relationship between Jesuits and Dutch merchants at the Chinese coast is the story of the Flemish father Philippe Couplet who in the 1670s and 1680s exchanged letters with VOC-

³⁴ NA, VOC, inv.nr 1719, f. 2090-2094, Resolution of 8 February and 15 February 1707, Batavia.

³⁵ The French apostolic vicar of Cochinchina Bennetat to the Sacrae Congregatio of the Propaganda Fide, Pondicherry, 1 September 1754, APF, *Scritture Originali della Congregazione Particolare dell’Indie e Cina* (SOCP) 51, 447r-450v.

³⁶ NA, VOC, inv.nr. 2838, f.11-13, ‘Overgekomen brieven en papieren uit Indië aan de Heren XVII en de kamer Amsterdam’, ‘1755 part IV: Siam, China, Cochinchina, Japan’, 21 December 1753 Faaifooh; NA, VOC, inv.nr. 8714, f.27-44, Ingekomen stukken van gouverneur-generaal en raden bij de Heren XVII en de kamer Zeeland, the royal letter entitled ‘translaat der geannexeerde memorie ... ontvangen 20 juli 1755 per schip Jerusalem uit Malakka’ 41-44.

officers in Macao and assisted them with translations from Portuguese texts. He also exchanged medicinal knowledge with the VOC-doctor Andreas Cleyer in Batavia. This so-called 'via Batavia' along which several intermediaries in China, Batavia, Antwerp and Amsterdam facilitated circulation of letters and books, existed until the beginning of the eighteenth century.³⁷ However, transport of the missionaries themselves has not been reported in VOC-documents. When Couplet who returned to Europe as a procurator wished to sail on a VOC-ship he in the first instance did not succeed. Only after having driven out of course on a Portuguese ship to Batavia, and after a stay of one year in the Castle, he managed to obtain passage on a Dutch ship to Europe.³⁸

In the first decennia of the eighteenth century however the position of the Jesuits in China decreased dramatically due to the visit of a papal legate and the rule of new Emperor. Although the Jesuits at the court were allowed to continue their activities, many missionaries were expelled to Canton (Guangzhou) and Macao or left the country. The Dutch like all Europeans were allowed to trade only in Canton where they established a factory in 1729. As the VOC formed one of the three biggest companies in this Chinese harbour, it could be expected that an increasing amount of expelled Jesuits would try to arrange transport by VOC-ships. There are however only a few signs of contact between the two parties. This contact even seemed superficial or indirect, as appears from an incident observed in the 1760s. In these years VOC-merchants had secretly negotiated with Chinese merchants to stay one month longer in Canton, which was against the rules of the Mandarins. Three years later these same Chinese merchants helped a French Jesuit to hide himself instead of leaving Canton during the 'off-season' of trade. In the dayregister of the VOC it had been reported that Mandarins were researching the case of the French Jesuit called Lefevre who had stayed silently in Canton on account of a Chinese merchant. Letters of French Jesuits however reported differently on the same incident. Louis-Joseph Lefevre who in Canton took care of the correspondence between China and France wrote that he temporarily stayed on Mauritius as 'no Europeans were allowed in Canton'. One of his colleagues moreover wrote that the French Jesuit Louis Bazin who was being called to Beijing as apothecary stayed secretly in Canton instead of going to Mauritius. The study of reports on both the side of the VOC and the Jesuits show name transposition despite contact with the same Chinese middlemen and shared interests concerning staying secretly in Canton.

This lack of contact moreover surprises in the light of a possible secular orientation of Jesuit Lefevre. An Italian Jesuit touching at Canton reported with disgust about the activities of Lefevre who organized 'rich banquets in his fancy rebuilt home for Chinese, French, English, Swedish and private persons'.³⁹ Although the French Jesuit of the independent French mission might have been victim to the blackening by the Italian Jesuit of the Portuguese mission, the observations were being confirmed by a respected French colleague. Also a discussion by French Jesuits of the careless behavior of Lefevre concerning the sending of packages to Europe might point to his not very devoted attitude. So where were the Dutch during these gatherings of the missionary and the merchants? The VOC-merchant Van Braam Houckgeest who visited Canton three times as assistant of the factory during these years did not speak of contact with the French Jesuit. When Van Braam stayed in Canton as the director of the factory in the 1790s he too established a sustained friendship with the

³⁷ See Noël Golvers, *Ferdinand Verbiest, S.J. (1623-1688) and the Chinese heaven: the composition of the astronomical corpus, its diffusion and reception in the European Republic of Letters* (Leuven 2003).

³⁸ Wills, 'Some Dutch sources on the Jesuit China mission 1662-1687', *Archivum historicum Societatis Jesu* 54 (1985) 267-294, 274.

³⁹ Luigi Cipolla to the Father General, 19 January 1771, ARSI, JS 184, f.249; Louis Poirot to the Father General, 16 September 1771, ARSI, JS 184, f.252v.

French Jesuit Joseph de Grammont. Although the Jesuit corresponded with the VOC-director about the international relationships between China and Russia, and China and England, there are again no signs of transport on Dutch ships provided by VOC-officials in Canton.⁴⁰ Allowing Jesuits transport on a VOC-ship might have been seriously considered as undesirable. This assumption is supported by a remark in the dayregister of 1762, which tells that a request of a French merchant to take to Europe a French bishop was refused ‘in order to avoid reproach in case of future refusals’.⁴¹

Discussion

The mobility of the Jesuits who met Dutch merchants in Asia has been scrutinized in this paper. As has been observed by a Dutch historian, by exchanging learned knowledge Jesuits could stimulate assistance by VOC-servants. We indeed have seen that in order to move between Asia and Europe the Flemish Jesuit Thomas even dedicated knowledge to the Dutch governor-general. Although the exchange of services proved not to be successful in the end, the story moreover highlights the ambivalent attitudes of VOC-servants on different steps of the ladder. We also saw this in the story of the French Jesuit Tachard. Due to the sharing of knowledge with VOC-rulers at the Cape, Tachard received assistance and transport some years later despite the fact that as a French enemy he fell victim to Dutch imprisonment. The treatment by the VOC-commander, who even gave him clothes to be able to move in the Republic, differed considerably from the hostile attitude by the VOC-officers of the ship. The case of De Bèze however shows that exchange of knowledge did not occur in times of war with France.

The transport granted to the Portuguese and Italian Jesuits Ferreira and Fuciti depended on the wish of the Tonkin ruler, whereby again a big difference existed in the degree of assistance offered by ship officers and Batavian rulers. The same holds for the Spanish Dominicans expelled from Tonkin who in Batavia did nothing wrong by intention, but had the bad luck of being part of a commercial relationship between the VOC and the Tonkin prince. On the other hand, the apothecary Jesuit Bordes was expelled to the Dutch Republic as a French spy although allowing him to sail to China might have improved the relationship between the Dutch and the Chinese Emperor. Furthermore, the Dutch did not take advantage of his knowledge and instruments. In Batavia war with France overruled both knowledge exchange and the relationship with China.

At Cochinchina and Canton where Dutch power was limited, Jesuits acted as information agents and even as intermediary between the VOC and the prince of Cochinchina. In Canton which was the nodal point of communication between Europeans in China, assistance and transport by the Dutch had been surprisingly marginal in the light of the converging positions of the VOC and the Jesuits towards Canton during the eighteenth century. The information that was received by the VOC-servants in Cochinchina and China during the eighteenth century moreover was of a strategic nature rather than of a ‘learned’ nature, which contradicts the recent assumption about VOC-servants being the merchants who were most interested in this information.

I aimed to show that Asian rulers played a large role in the decision of VOC-officials to transport missionaries. This point of view is moreover supported by the complaint of the

⁴⁰ For the correspondence between Van Braam and Grammont see NA, VOC, inv.nr. 252, ‘Generaal Rapport 1791’, 19 December 1791.

⁴¹ NA, Canton, inv.nr. 71, Dayregister 1762, 19 November.

captain of the aforementioned English ship *Loyal Bless* who arrived in Batavia in 1707 with the Portuguese and the French Jesuit from Beijing.⁴² The ‘Tartarian government’ had thrust upon him to transport the missionaries. Also Spanish officers of two ships were ordered by the Chinese authorities of Canton to transport nine missionaries to Europe in 1785. These Chinese decisions throw a different light on the freedom of choice of both Jesuits and VOC-merchants to cooperate with each other. Not only should the power of Asian rulers be taken into account, but also the role played by Asian merchants in the mobility of Jesuits. In 1712 the VOC prohibited the transport to Batavia of ‘papists’ by Chinese junks. This policy moreover was being extended in 1754 by forbidding all Asian captains from Cochinchina, Tonkin, Cambodia and Siam to transport missionaries to Batavia.⁴³ In addition missionaries who crossed the Pacific often travelled on Chinese junks.⁴⁴ As for example the known Jesuit Couplet sailed on a Java boat from Bantam to Batavia, the question rises to what extent missionaries used Asian ships to travel in Asia.

I would also like to discuss the lack of cooperation between the Dutch and the Jesuits at the Chinese coast. Knowledge exchange could influence the willingness of VOC-officials to transport Jesuits. In Canton however hardly any cooperation seemed to have occurred while especially China Jesuits possessed useful knowledge. Improvement or maintenance of relations with Asian rulers could be another motive behind Dutch assistance in transport. Were the Dutch afraid to offend the Chinese when they assisted Jesuits? In the light of the Chinese reluctance to missionaries it is unlikely that transporting Jesuits from China to Europe would have done harm to existing relationships with Chinese authorities. From the perspective of the Jesuits in Canton assistance by European merchants was approached pragmatically: transport of letters had to go fast and safely and in times of warfare preferably by neutral ships. Despite the quantity of VOC-ships, the Dutch possession of a ‘global communication center’ Batavia and their neutrality in the Seven Years War, letters of Jesuits were being sent mainly by French and English ships.

An explanation might lie in the existence of academies in the trading nations. The academies of Paris and London developed a global infrastructure through which the many naturalists, merchants and diplomats extended the power of these nations.⁴⁵ When the French Jesuit Incarville for example arrived in China he was invited by the *Royal Society* to be a correspondent. As a consequence English merchants in Canton shipped the herbals compiled by Incarville to London. The collection of knowledge by the French Jesuits had already been intermingled with political and commercial interests since the 1680s when Louis XIV sent six Jesuits as the famous ‘mathématiciens du roi’ to China on French ships. In the late eighteenth century this relation between state, maritime trade and the Jesuit mission in China became very clear in the person of Henry-Louis Bertin who was minister, head of the finances of the French company and the correspondent of several French Jesuits in China. These empire builders therefore might have facilitated the mobility of missionaries in a much more structural way than the Dutch did.

To conclude, more research has to be done with regard to the role of English merchants. Not only did missionaries often travel on English ships, but they even relied on

⁴² See page 7 about Gilbert Bordes.

⁴³ J.A. van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek IV, 1709-1743* (Batavia 1885-1900), 10 May 1712, 21; Idem, VI, 1750-1754, 13 May 1754, 666.

⁴⁴ Jean-Pierre Duteil, *Le mandat du ciel: le rôle des Jésuites en Chine, de la mort de François-Xavier à la dissolution de la Compagnie de Jésus* (1552-1774) (Paris 1994), 61.

⁴⁵ Also between Swedish merchants and naturalists a strong relationship existed during the eighteenth century. Swedish merchants in Canton transported for example a winnowing-fan to the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. Exchange with Jesuits has been suggested, but not confirmed, Gösta Berg, ‘The introduction of the winnowing-machine in Europe in the 18th century’ *Tools and tillage* 3:1 (1976) 23-46.

English captains. Between 1706 and 1720 the reliability of English captains who sailed between Asia and Europe was being approved by French missionaries. French Franciscans arranged their outward voyage on an English ship to the East from France! These givens shed new light on the limited degree of assistance delivered by the Dutch. As the importance of the EIC grew during the eighteenth century, cooperation between Jesuits and *English* merchants might have increased instead of the Dutch. Further research must reveal to what extent the policy of the EIC made transport of missionaries possible. Such a study furthermore throws more light on the role opposing beliefs played overseas. To return to the issue at stake in the beginning of this paper, religious oppositions seemed to have played a minor role in relationships between Dutch merchants and missionaries in the East. This observation might be extended to relations between missionaries and English merchants. Compared to the Dutch Republic Catholics in England had even less rights as church and state were one and papism was firmly rejected by the Anglicans. If religious tensions did not play a significant role in overseas relationships between Jesuits and Dutch heretics, and not even between Jesuits and the English merchants, then it could also be assumed that the Jesuits may have been willing to arrange transport on the ships of the biggest group of heretic merchants in the Orient: the Moors.