

ASIA



PIRACY AND PLAY: TWO CATHOLIC APPROPRIATIONS  
OF NIEUHOF'S *GEZANTSCHAP*\*

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Johan Nieuhof's report of a VOC embassy to Beijing, printed in Amsterdam in 1665, was one of the most influential works of its time on Western perceptions of China. It drew extensively on previous works by Jesuit authors, but Nieuhof was also convinced that the Jesuits at the imperial court had misrepresented the Dutch to the Emperor, and at the climax of his narrative he broke out into a diatribe against them. The passage was omitted from the piratical Antwerp reprint, which added fourteen new chapters under the heading 'The Progress of the Christian Faith in China due to the Labours of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus'. A slightly less transparent Catholic response was one of the last plays written by Joost van den Vondel. In 1667 he published the closet drama *Zungchin or Downfall of the Chinese Government*. For Vondel, too, this is little more than a hook on which to hang a paean of praise for the Jesuit missionaries that Nieuhof had maligned. Where there was, by the mid-seventeenth century, an extensive communication system within Europe, news from beyond the European area was channeled through specialized networks, mediated by 'gatekeepers' who saw to it that only such news was publicized as served the purpose of the global corporation they represented – whether it was a state, a trading company, or a missionary order. It is only rarely, as in the Catholic appropriations of Nieuhof's work, that we see directly conflicting interpretations of overseas encounters.

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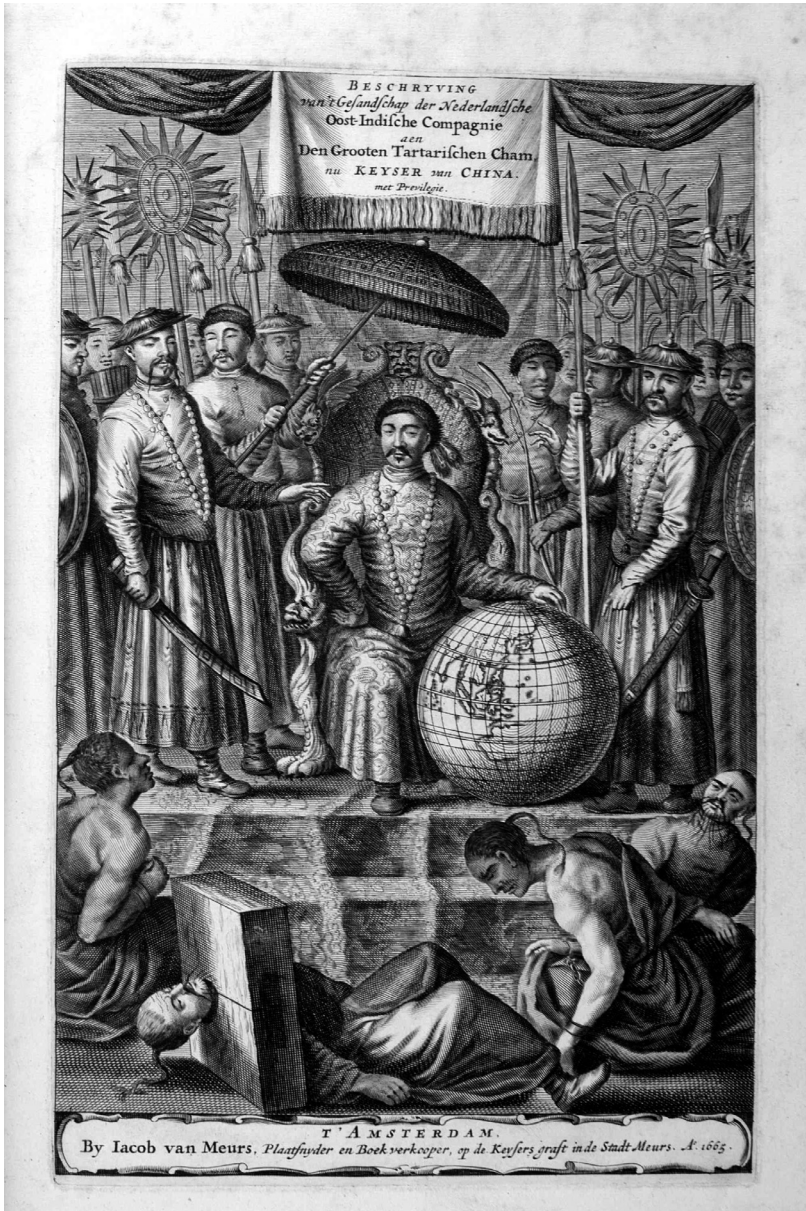


Fig. 1. Anonymous, Frontispiece to Johan Nieuhof's *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandische Oost-Indische Compagnie aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen keizer van China* (Amsterdam, Jacob Meurs: 1665), Amsterdam, University Library. The image represents the most powerful government in the Eastern Hemisphere.

*The European News System*

The newspapers of the middle decades of the seventeenth century display in their content and datelines the existence and workings of a ramified system for public communication within Europe, an interconnected series of networks with nodes in all the major trading cities and princely residences – ‘ports and courts’ – of Western and Central Europe, from Lisbon to Riga and from Naples to Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup> The proliferation of interconnecting and competing carrying services, whether royal or state posts, civic carriers, or private ventures, meant that this system increasingly had redundancy built in, so that failures of connections in one part of the network (due to war, pestilence, flood, or other disasters) could be compensated in others. It could be assumed with some confidence that major public events in any part of Western or Central Europe would become known throughout the system within a period of weeks. This was a network that cut across confessional and political boundaries, so that newspapers regularly printed reports reflecting different political and religious views.

Only where partisan confessional or dynastic interests were involved would editors make much of an effort to provide verification or interpretation, otherwise generally seeing their job as publishing whatever credible reports were circulating, and leaving the rest to the reader's discretion. Very occasionally this assumption is made explicit, as in the advice of Pierre Hugonet, editor of the *Relations véritables* published twice weekly in Brussels, that he was aware of the discrepancies between reports but that ‘Des uns & des autres vous formerez tel jugement qu'il vous plaira pour y discerner la vérité’.<sup>2</sup>

News from outside Europe was a rather different matter, not being available regularly nor, in most cases, by channels that provided a wealth of conflicting detail or interpretation. Those extra-European reports that did become available were almost entirely fed into the network at a few key points – most importantly Rome, Amsterdam and Seville – and were filtered by various institutional actors, each

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<sup>1</sup> See Arblaster P., “Posts, Newsletters, Newspapers: England in a European System of Communications”, *Media History* 11 (2005) 21–36; reprinted in Raymond J. (ed.), *News Networks in Seventeenth-Century Britain and Europe* (London – New York: 2006) 19–34.

<sup>2</sup> Note concerning conflicting accounts of a naval engagement off Livorno in the first Anglo-Dutch War, printed at the end of *Relations véritables*, 29 March 1653.

with their own interests in publicizing or suppressing particular stories. By the mid-17th century the outline of the known world had almost reached its present extent, but only a tiny part of it was linked up to the European news cycle. It should speak for itself that there were other news networks and other news cycles beyond Europe, but my own research interest is in the interaction between the European communication system and extra-European news.

Two of the institutional providers of extra-European news, and in many ways the main two, were the VOC and the Society of Jesus. At least, it seems a fair inference that newspaper stories datelined Rome detailing the achievements of Jesuits, and stories datelined Amsterdam publicizing news that would be welcome to VOC shareholders, were indeed 'fed in' by these institutions for their own purposes. It was only when two European overseas institutions clashed directly that conflicting reports would circulate in European news publications. A good example of such a clash in the early days of newspaper publishing is coverage of the Amboyna Massacre, an incident in March 1623 whereby Dutch merchants put to death ten English merchants, nine Japanese mercenaries, and one of their own employees, suspecting them of plotting to seize control of the Dutch fort.<sup>3</sup> The precise course of events and the justice of the executions remained controversial to the end of the century.

The importance of institutional actors as conduits for public information was not by any means limited to the newspaper press, as the present volume makes abundantly clear. A number of servants of the VOC, and a number of Jesuit missionaries, brought forth publications in their own name, and the information provided by them was picked up and combined by other writers. The first maritime atlas on the Mercator projection, in the sixth part of Sir Robert Dudley's *Dell'Arcano del Mare* (a work printed in Florence in 1646–47)<sup>4</sup> draws on Dudley's own experience as a navigator and that of his associates, but combines this with information drawn from other sources, including both the latest Dutch voyages and Jesuit communications.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Markley R., *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730* (Cambridge: 2006) 149–153.

<sup>4</sup> Lord Wardington, "Sir Robert Dudley and the *Arcano del Mare*, 1646–8 and 1661", *Book Collector* 52, 2 (2003) 199–211.

<sup>5</sup> Crone G.R., "The Discovery of Tasmania and New Zealand", *Geographical Journal* 111, 4/6 (1948) 257–263; Schütte J.F., "Japanese Cartography at the Court of Florence: Robert Dudley's Maps of Japan, 1606–1636", *Imago Mundi* 23 (1969) 29–58.

The sometimes conflicting imperatives of publication and secrecy, a recurring paradox in early modern thought on Reason of State, were as real to international institutions as to any prince or councilor.<sup>6</sup> In 1628, when Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange, asked his personal secretary Constantijn Huygens to brief him on Dutch activities overseas, Huygens turned to an old friend, Willem Boreel, a lawyer retained by both the VOC and the City of Amsterdam.<sup>7</sup> Boreel provided Huygens with a reading list of published works about the East and West Indies, but he went further than this, sending a manuscript history of Hindustan, with the caution that while he might use the manuscript to brief the prince, he should see that nobody else had access to it, since it contained commercially sensitive information. Given the emphasis on commercial and military secrecy, it can surely be no coincidence that the first comprehensive collection of maritime charts on the Mercator projection to be made available in print was published not in Spain, Portugal, England, or even the Netherlands, but in Florence, where any official interest in long-distance exploration had died with Grand Duke Ferdinando I in 1609.

The Jesuits were just as selective in their communications. The constitutions of the Society of Jesus provided that corporate morale be built up by the circulation throughout the society of annual letters of edifying news from each province – a novel stipulation in religious life and one of the things that made Jesuits particularly conscious of belonging to a peculiarly modern and global organization.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis, however, was very much on edification, rather than full disclosure: anything unedifying was restricted to confidential correspondence, often written in code, between the General and the various provincials. The edifying letters were soon being printed, partly to aid fund-raising and recruitment drives, partly to raise the profile of the often-beleaguered Society's activities. The practice reached its apogee in the eighteenth century, with the thirty-four volumes of *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* from the Jesuit mission in China, printed between 1703 and 1776.

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Arblaster P., "Dat de boecken vrij sullen wesen: Private Profit, Public Utility and Secrets of State in the Seventeenth-Century Habsburg Netherlands", in Koopmans J.W. (ed.), *News and Politics in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)*, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 14 (Leuven: 2005) 79–95.

<sup>7</sup> Worp J.A. (ed.), *De briefwisseling van Constantijn Huygens (1608–1687)* (The Hague: 1911–1917), vol. I, 237–240.

<sup>8</sup> *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, tr. George Ganss (St Louis: 1996) §673, §675.

Although the roots and *raison d'être* of the Society of Jesus and of the Dutch trading companies were not only different but in a certain measure antagonistic, in the middle decades of the seventeenth century a small degree of synergy developed between them. Just one of the various sources of friction between the Jesuits and the secular priests of the clandestine Catholic Church in the Dutch Republic was that the austere leader of the seculars, the Vicar Apostolic Sasbout Vosmeer, had laid down that holding shares in the VOC should be accounted a sin – a view not taken by Jesuit confessors, who were to become notorious for their alleged laxity.<sup>9</sup> Mostly, Catholic missionaries and Protestant merchants moved in separate spheres, but in Japan the Dutch helped destroy the last vestiges of the openly Christian culture established there by Jesuit missionaries, while elsewhere in East and South-East Asia Jesuits might travel, or send their letters, by VOC ships, and servants of the VOC might buy Jesuit publications to gain insight into the lands and peoples with whom contact was shared.

### *Nieuhof's* Gezantschap

Among the major contributions to Western knowledge facilitated by the Dutch trading companies, Johan Nieuhof's report of a VOC embassy to China holds a secure place.<sup>10</sup> Had the embassy succeeded in its aim of obtaining permission for the Dutch to trade freely on the Chinese coast and send a trade mission to Beijing once every five years, Nieuhof's report might well have been treated with the same careful confidentiality as the manuscript history of Hindustan that Boreel had lent to Huygens. As it was, the Dutch not only failed to get a foot in the door at Canton, but a few years later lost their toehold in Formosa. Under these circumstances, company interests would not be harmed and might well be served by making Nieuhof's eyewitness observations available to the public at large. It was duly published in Dutch, and within a very few years in a number of other languages.

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<sup>9</sup> Rogier L.J., *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam – Brussels: 1964) vol. III, 530.

<sup>10</sup> On the embassy see Wills J.E. jr, *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666–1687* (Cambridge MA: 1984) 38–82; for Nieuhof's account, Blussé L. – Falkenburg R. (eds.), *Johan Nieuhofs beelden van een Chinareis, 1655–1657* (Middelburg: 1987).



The title of the English translation gives some idea of the contents: *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China: deliver'd by their excellencies, Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer, at his imperial city of Peking: wherein the cities, towns, villages, ports, rivers, &c. in their passages from Canton to Peking are ingeniously describ'd.* This is not the full title, but the rest of the subtitle will be left for a little later. The subtitle of the original Dutch edition is even fuller, ending with the phrase: 'As well as an accurate description of Chinese cities, villages, government, sciences, crafts, manners, religions, buildings, clothing, ships, mountains, crops, animals etcetera, and wars with the Tartars'.

The work was first published in Amsterdam by Jacob van Meurs in 1665, under the title *Het gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen keizer van China* [...]. A French translation, *L'Ambassade de la Compagnie Oriental des Provinces Unies vers L'empereur de la Chine*, was printed at Leiden the same year. In 1666 Van Meurs brought out a German translation (*Die Gesantschaft der Ost-Indischen Gesellschaft* etc.), while the French translation was reprinted in Paris, and the Dutch version was reprinted in Antwerp with some significant cuts and additions, which will be discussed further in a moment. A Latin translation followed in 1668, *Legatio Batavica ad magnum Tartarae Chamun*, and the first edition of the English translation came out in 1669.<sup>11</sup>

The greatest selling-point of the work was the 150 finely engraved illustrations, engravings that were to be one of the strongest influences on Western visualizations of China for the next 150 years.<sup>12</sup> Nieuhof justifiably boasted that of all the Europeans who had written on China before him, only three (coincidentally all of them Jesuits) had provided reliable information. The *Gezantschap* was in two parts. The first, describing the embassy's journey from Canton to Beijing, was based on Nieuhof's personal observations of that route, and his description of the time spent at the imperial court, attempting to initiate negotiations for a trade treaty.

<sup>11</sup> There is some discussion of the work and of its impact in England in Markley, *The Far East* 104–129.

<sup>12</sup> On these illustrations, see Ulrichs F., *Johan Nieuhoofs Blick auf China (1655–1657): die Kupferstiche in seinem Chinabuch und ihre Wirkung auf den Verleger Jacob van Meurs*, *Sinologica Coloniensia* 21 (Wiesbaden: 2003).

The second part, providing a more general overview of Chinese customs, produce, houses, religion, and so forth, and a brief history of the Manchu conquest, was explicitly indebted to the publications of Jesuits from the China Mission: the Fleming Nicholas Trigault, author of *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (Augsburg: 1615); the Portuguese Alvarez Semedo, author of *Imperio de la China* (Rome, 1642); and the Italian Martino Martini, author of a history of the Manchu conquest, *De Bello Tartarico* (Antwerp: 1654) and a general description of the country, *Novus atlas sinesis* (Amsterdam: 1655).<sup>13</sup> Not only were VOC employees using Jesuit publications in their reconnaissance of China, the decision to send an embassy at all was the result of news that China's new Manchu rulers might be more receptive to Dutch trade overtures than their Ming predecessors had shown themselves. This news was passed on in Batavia by a Jesuit *en route* to Europe, indeed none other than Martino Martini himself, whose *De Bello Tartarico* and *Atlas* were written on the voyage.<sup>14</sup>

But if one Jesuit had been important in the preparation of the embassy, another Jesuit was instrumental in its failure. When they arrived in Beijing the Dutch had found themselves obliged to rely to some extent on Jesuit mandarins at the imperial court, and in particular Adam Schall von Bell, to confirm their account of who they were and what they wanted.<sup>15</sup> Nieuhof was convinced that these Jesuits had misrepresented the Dutch to the emperor, and at the climax of his narrative of the embassy he lashed out, accusing them of acting as lobbyists for Portuguese mercantile interests: spreading bribes around the imperial court to garner support against the Dutch, representing the Dutch East India Company as an association of pirates rather than of legitimate businessmen, and putting the case for the Macao trade. The Dutch ambassadors, he said,

came to understand that Fr Adam and two other Jesuits living there had spent about three hundred taels of silver (to impede the progress of this labour), and had promised more; as also that they had falsely told the Tartars that the Dutch, under cover of trade, sought nothing but first to

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<sup>13</sup> Nieuhof J., *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen keizer van China* (Amsterdam, Jacob Meurs: 1665) part 1, 208, "Onder d'aanzienlijkste en deftigste Sineesche Schrijvers verdienen d'eerste plaats zekre Jesuiten, als Niklaas Trigautius, Alvaros Semedo, en Martinus Martini".

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, introduction.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, part 1, 162–163.

get a foot on shore, and then to steal whatever they could carry. It also came to their ears that these three Jesuits had made great complaint that such trade would utterly impoverish Macao.<sup>16</sup>

This conflict of interests, or at the very least of intentions and interpretations, between representatives of the Dutch East India Company and members of the Society of Jesus brought two of the greatest institutional conduits for European knowledge of overseas societies into direct and very public confrontation.

This was so much evident that the English translation of the *Gezantschap* advertised itself on the title page (in the continuation of the title, omitted above) as including: *Also an epistle of Father John Adams their antagonist, concerning the whole negotiation. With an appendix of several remarks taken out of Father Athanasius Kircher. English'd, and set forth with their several sculptures.* In much the same manner as the newspaper editors of the time, the English translator of the *Gezantschap*, John Ogilby, was happy to provide his readers with different perspectives on a single event.

#### *Pro-Jesuit Responses to Nieuhof*

The Jesuit interpretation of the affair was, though, not so very different from Nieuhof's. There was no question of being tools of the commercial interests of the Portuguese, but the Jesuits were already convinced for reasons of their own that frustrating the Dutch desire to trade with China would be a good thing. The Jesuits on the China Mission were perhaps a little out of touch with the newly found amity in European affairs that had seen the Dutch come to terms with the Portuguese in 1640 and the Spaniards in 1648. In an understanding of recent history and political legitimacy perhaps more coloured by philosophical absolutes and by the experience of colonial rivalry in Asia, the Dutch were seen as rebels and interlopers who had no right to be there under their own flag, and who consequently were indeed only a step away from being pirates. A series of violent clashes in the 1620s, not only between the Dutch and the Portuguese (including a Dutch attempt on Macao on 1622), but also between the Dutch and the Chinese authorities on the Fujian coast, gave substance to the notion that the Dutch East India Company would happily take by force or fraud what they could

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., part 1, 166.

not acquire by fair exchange.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the Jesuit position seems to have been that they had not so much sabotaged the VOC's mission as simply informed the Emperor, to the best of their knowledge, who these strangers wanting access to China really were.

The immediate reaction of Catholics in the Low Countries was far less confrontational. Nieuhof's publication elicited two works that sought to appropriate, rather than confront, his images and descriptions, but to do so in a way that would compliment, rather than criticize, Jesuit activities in the Far East. The first of these is the Antwerp reprint, the 'piracy' of my title. For the most part this was an accurate reprint of the original, with fine copies of the original engravings. There were, however, a couple of significant changes. One was fairly obvious: Nieuhof's lengthy account of the Manchu conquest, cribbed from Martini's *De Bello Tartarico*, was replaced by a new set of 14 chapters (33–47) providing a potted history of the Jesuit missions in China, and a final chapter describing the so-called 'Nestorian stele', discovered around 1624, which showed that there had been a Christian presence in China as early as the seventh century, due to the activity of missionaries from the Assyrian Church of the East. These additional fifteen chapters were announced on the title page by an extension of the subtitle: 'Benevens een naukeurigh verhaal, van al 't geen de Jesuiten in China, tot voortplanting des Roomschen godsdiensts, sedert hun eerste intree in China, verrecht, en wat al yzelijke en wrede vervolgingen zy aldaar om 't geloof uit gestaan en geleden' (An accurate narration of all that the Jesuits have achieved in China for the propagation of the Romish religion, since their first entrance into China, and all the terrible and cruel persecutions they have there withstood and suffered for the faith). The use of 'Jesuits' (instead of 'Fathers of the Society of Jesus') and 'Romish religion' (rather than 'Catholic Faith'), both contrary to the usual forms of public presentation, seem designed to suggest that the laudatory account is the work of an outsider. On the inside pages, it becomes 'The Progress of the Christian Faith in China due to the Labours of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus'. These added chapters are as dependent on the earlier work of Trigault, Semedo and Martini as the material they replaced, simply

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<sup>17</sup> Wills J.E. jr., "Relations with Maritime Europeans, 1514–1662", in Twitchett D.–Mote F.W. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. VIII: *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 2* (Cambridge: 1998) 351; 366–369.

choosing to include aspects of the literature that Nieuhof had chosen to omit.

Nieuhof's work was very close to plagiarism, although it would be anachronistic to consider it too much in that light, especially as he did acknowledge his use of Jesuit works, just not the extent of his dependence on them. The Antwerp Jesuit appropriation, or in some respects perhaps reappropriation, of Nieuhof's *Gezantschap* might be considered an act of piracy, although again it would be anachronistic to push this concept too hard in the 17th century. It is, however, the opposite of plagiarism: 'edifying' (that is to say, in effect, promotional) Jesuit writings about the China Mission were being tacked on to the best illustrated book on China available, fathering the whole on Nieuhof – a Protestant who had seen Jesuits in China with his own eyes and recorded how reliant the Dutch embassy had been on the aid of Jesuit go-betweens.

And that was the second significant change, a cut of just a couple of sentences, namely, those in which Nieuhof accused the Jesuits of having slandered the Dutch and of having bribed imperial officials to sabotage the VOC mission. The resulting impression was that the Jesuits had done little more than vouch for the identity of the Dutch as a European sea-going people from a homeland without a king. The only overt indication that the Jesuits might have had anything directly to do with this piratical adaptation of Nieuhof's work is in the identity of the publisher, Michiel Cnobbaert, whose staple was printing textbooks for use in Jesuit colleges, and who was virtually the in-house printer for the Society's Antwerp house. The production as a whole might be regarded as 'jesuitical' in the worst sense (that is, according to the *OED*, 'Having the character ascribed to the Jesuits; deceitful, dissembling; practicing equivocation, prevarication, or mental reservation of truth').

So that was one response to Nieuhof's work: to hijack it as a vehicle for promotional writing about the Jesuit mission. The 'play' option was perhaps not so very different. Joost van den Vondel, the prince of Dutch poets, was a prolific playwright. His best-known plays are *Lucifer*, a tragedy about the downfall of the Angel of Light that was banned after the first performance, and *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*, the first play performed in Holland's first purpose-built playhouse: a historical piece, which in classicizing fashion makes a 13th-century Lord of Amstel into a Dutch Aeneas. One of Vondel's least known plays is *Zungchin or Downfall of the Chinese Government*, a closet drama published

in 1667.<sup>18</sup> *Zungchin* was a treatment in the tragic mode of the betrayal and suicide of the last Ming emperor of China.<sup>19</sup> The work is somewhat lacking in dramatic tension, and as far as I have been able to ascertain no attempt has ever been made to stage it. It is a play for the page, a piece of verse in different voices, rather than a text for dramatic performance.

The dialogues of *Zungchin* are stocked with local colour and historical detail that critics have taken to derive from Nieuhof. It is equally possible that they derive from Nieuhof's sources, for the section of the *Gezantschap* most relevant to the play is the account of the dynasty's downfall that Nieuhof had lifted from Martini, but the play's publication in 1667, two years after Nieuhof's book came out to international acclaim, is at least suggestive that this is a response to Nieuhof's work, and an appropriation of it to Vondel's own ends.<sup>20</sup> For the Dutch reading public, at least, this material was more readily identifiable as Nieuhof's work than as Martini's, for the simple reason that it was Nieuhof's adaptation of *De Bello Tartarico* in the final chapters of the *Gezantschap* that had made Martini's account available in Dutch. For Vondel, as for those producing the Antwerp reprint of the *Gezantschap*, Nieuhof's work functions as a hook on which to hang a paean of praise for the Jesuit missionaries whom Nieuhof had maligned, and none less than Adam Schall, like Vondel himself a native of Cologne.<sup>21</sup> The Adam Schall of *Zungchin* is the only character in any

<sup>18</sup> Available online from the Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren, at the url [http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001dewe10\\_01/vond001dewe10\\_01\\_0068.htm](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001dewe10_01/vond001dewe10_01_0068.htm) (last consulted 30 January 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Van Kley E.J., "An Alternative Muse: The Manchu Conquest of China in the Literature of Seventeenth-Century Northern Europe", *European Studies Review* 6 (1976) 21–43.

<sup>20</sup> Smit W.A.P., *Van Pascha tot Noah: Een verkenning van Vondels dramas naar continuïteit en ontwikkeling in hun grondmotief en structuur*, vol. 3, Zwolse Reeks van Taal- en Letterkundige Studies 5C (Zwolle: 1962) 449–506, esp. 455–457. Available online from the Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren at the url [http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/smit021vanp03\\_01/](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/smit021vanp03_01/) (last consulted 30 January 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Blue G., "Johann Adam Schall and the Jesuit Mission in Vondel's *Zungchin*", in Malek R., S.V.D. (ed.), *Western Learning and Christianity in China: The Contribution and Impact of Johann Adam Schall von Bell, S.J. (1592–1666)*, vol. II, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 35/2 (Nettetal: 1998) 951–981. There is also a mention of the play in Idema W.L., "Dutch Translations of Classical Chinese Literature: Against a Tradition of Retranslations", in Chan L.T. (ed.), *One into Many: Translation and the Dissemination of Classical Chinese Literature*, Approaches to Translation Studies 18 (Amsterdam – New York: 2003) 213–242, esp. 214.

of Vondel's plays who represents a person still living at the time Vondel portrayed him.

Vondel presents Asia as the continent most blessed by the Creator's bounty, and China as the 'diamond in the ring' of Asian lordships, but also draws on descriptions of Chinese religions and religious practices to show the one thing still lacking for China's perfection: illumination in the truth of the Gospel. In acts 3 and 4 he has the character of Adam Schall contradicting hopes and fears based on superstition, and exhorting to patient submission to the dictates of Providence, somewhat tinged with the Baroque fashion for Stoicism. The final character to speak is the Ghost of Francis Xavier, but the shades of Tacitus and Seneca hover mutely in the background.

Vondel has the chorus recount how powerful Chinese converts to Catholicism, both eunuchs and mandarins, overthrow the worship of idols to make room for the worship of the one true God. One of the most powerful and insistent tropes of Dutch anti-Catholicism was that Catholics were idolaters, in part for their veneration of images but primarily for their adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. It is therefore small wonder that Vondel, raised a Baptist but a convert to Catholicism in middle age, lays such emphasis on Catholicism's opposition to idolatry.

Other Catholic missionaries active in China were at the same time accusing Jesuits of being too accommodating towards idolatry for allowing Chinese converts to continue with rituals of obeisance or veneration that looked suspiciously like worship of ancestors, of Confucius and of the emperor.<sup>22</sup> It was to answer such criticisms in Rome that Martino Martini had been sent back from China in 1651, incidentally reigniting Dutch interest in Canton. This being the case, Vondel's presentation of Adam Schall as opposing superstition, and Chinese converts as casting down idols, may also have been an indirect way to answer Catholic critics of Jesuit mission policy, without opening up the whole can of worms of an internal Catholic controversy by explicitly referencing it.

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<sup>22</sup> Mungello D.E. (ed.), *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 33 (Nettetal: 1994) provides an overview of the extensive scholarly literature on this Chinese Rites Controversy.

*Conclusion*

Both these pro-Jesuit responses to Nieuhof's criticism of the Jesuits at the imperial court in Beijing – Michiel Cnobbaert's piracy in Antwerp, and Joost van den Vondel's play in Amsterdam – avoid direct controversy, but both indirectly contest a VOC-sponsored version of a series of events that had taken place a decade and more previously. The manner in which this contestation occurs is a replication of the account itself, in Cnobbaert's case, or of some of its themes and contents, in Vondel's, bringing different aspects of Nieuhof's work to a broader audience even as particular interpretations or representations to be found in it were modified.

The lesson of this for one not so much interested in trading companies themselves as in the networks of public communication within early-modern Europe is that while the VOC might decide what information should and what should not be made public – holding back a history of Hindustan, putting forth a description of China – they could do nothing to control what was done with this information once it was in the public domain of European civil society. This was perhaps especially the case when they were going head-to-head with another of the few institutional sources of extra-European information and global communication.



*Selective Bibliography*

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