
*A New Approach to the History of the Dutch Expansion in Asia: the Personnel of the Dutch East India Company in the XVIIIth Century*¹

F. Lequin
University of Leiden

The socio-historical aspects of Dutch expansion in Asia in the eighteenth century, particularly a systematic study of the personnel of the V. O. C. (Dutch East India Company), can undoubtedly be regarded as an underdeveloped field of historical research. "Personnel" will be understood here to include all the servants of the V. O. C., afloat and ashore, in Asia and the Cape of Good Hope.

Boxer, Furber and Wijnaendts van Resandt² have already published interesting and valuable studies in this field, but they do not cover the whole range of personnel in different ranks over a fairly long period. A thorough inquiry into the possibilities and an analysis of the basic archive material concerning

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² C. R. BOXER, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800*, London 1965 (particularly Chapters 3 and 6).

—, *Jan Compagnie in Japan*, the Hague 1950.

—, "The Mandarin at Chinsura". Isaac Titsingh in Bengal 1785-1792, in: *Koninklijke Vereeniging Indisch Instituut*, mededeling nr. LXXXIV, afdeling Volkenkunde nr. 32, Amsterdam 1949.

H. FURBER, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient 1600-1800*, London/Minnesota 1976, pp. 300 ff.

W. WIJNAENDTS VAN RESANDT, *De gezaghebbers der Oost-Indische Compagnie op hare buiten-comptoiren in Azië*, Amsterdam 1944.

this subject has not been undertaken before. The results of a large scale project on V. O. C. shipping in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries undertaken at Leiden University will shortly become available, together with other important work on the economic history of the V. O. C. in the eighteenth century³, it seems worthwhile to start on the socio-historical side of the history of the V. O. C. in the eighteenth century.

The results of this new research will be to extend and deepen the mainly economic-historical studies now extant, by providing as much information as possible on the V. O. C. personnel concerned in the process of Dutch expansion in Asia. A wealth of fundamental sources for almost the whole of the eighteenth century is to be found in the *Koloniaal Archief* of the *Algemeen Rijksarchief* at the Hague. The results and main ideas of a detailed report,⁴ exploring the possibilities of this material, will be presented in this article. The report enunciates a method and provides the necessary apparatus to handle these sources efficiently.

The basis of any systematic research into the personnel of the V. O. C. in the eighteenth century is the *Generale Land-en Zeemonsterrollen* (1700 to 1791), (lit. "General land — and sea — musterrolls").

The 127 volumes of this series give an annual survey, at the end of June each year, of the complete strength of personnel afloat and ashore, Europeans and non-Europeans. It informs us about each servant: his Christian name and surname; place of birth; name of the ship on which he arrived in the East; rank at the time of departure from the Netherlands; rank and official salary at the time of registration in the relevant musterroll; place of posting; V. O. C. — *Kamer* ("Chamber") of engagement. The information has been systematically arranged under the following headings in hierarchical order: settlement; main establishment of that settlement; occupational categories in the main establishment; names of the servants in strict hierarchical order within each particular occupational category; subordinate establishment of the main settlement, if any, with the same classification system as the main establishment.

The sea-musterrolls offer the same information, arranged according to the same system as the land-musterrolls under the main divisions of the name of each registered ship.

To conclude the annual survey, the land-musterrolls have two useful summaries. The first deals with the strength of the personnel of each individual settlement, specifying the occupational categories within that settlement. The second concerns the whole range of the existing occupational categories of all the registered settlements in any given year, without specifying the names of the settlements. The total strength and total amount of money involved

³ H. FURBER, *John Company at Work*, Cambridge Mass., 1948; K. GLAMANN, *Dutch Asiatic trade 1620-1740*, Copenhagen 1958.

⁴ The report, 278 pages, has been presented to the "Werkgroep" in May 1977.

with the monthly salaries, are calculated both for each individual settlement and in an annual grand total for all the registered settlements.

The 2979 volumes of the *Scheepssoldijboeken* (1700 to 1794), i.d., "Ship-paybooks", are the next basic source. The name of the ship on which a servant arrived in the East is a datum we have from the musterrolls and gives access to this material. Each paybook contains information on all occupants of one ship leaving the Netherlands, in so far as they are V. O. C. servants, generally registered in order of hierarchy.

This series covers part of the seventeenth century, but this portion is far less completely preserved than for the eighteenth century, as a comparison between the surviving paybooks and the number of ships, which sailed out in the period 1700 to 1794, shows.

A difficulty arises concerning access to the information of the paybook, when the musterrolls state, instead of the name of the ship on which a servant arrived, *in dienst*, i.d. "in service", i. e. a servant joined the V. O. C. in Asia or at the Cape of Good Hope, either because he was born there, or he accompanied his family on their way to the East. In these instances there are evidently no ship-paybooks to consult.

Due to the fact that after arrival of the V. O. C. servant in the East, paybooks were kept to register the salaries of each servant, it is possible to reconstruct his career, although the paybook does not state the different ranks, but only the places of posting of names or ships. In addition to this and to the data already known from the musterrolls, the following data are available: date of death in Asia, date of return to Europe, date of last payment in the Netherlands and sometimes, the signature of the servant as a receipt; incidental information about the names of relations and other connections. It is also stated if a servant made a will before he left the Netherlands, if he made one in the East, or had any debts at the time of departure.

The third source is the collection of the 21 volumes of the *Rollen der gequalificeerden* (1701 to 1787), i.d. "Rolls of the qualified". It offers an annual survey, at the end of each December, of the "qualified" civil servants, from the rank of "young assistant" upwards, and of the "qualified" military servants, from the rank of sergeant upwards, registered according to almost the same system as the musterrolls. Apart from known data from the above mentioned sources, the rolls of the "qualified" offer a survey of the career of the servant up to the very year of registration in a particular roll, specifying his different ranks, salaries, relevant years of promotion and mentioning the names of his sponsors. The places of posting concerning the different ranks are not stated, except for the most recent rank.

A close examination of the 127 volumes of the musterrolls, the 21 volumes of the rolls of the "qualified", and of 223 volumes of the shippaybooks, revealed that the scheme of registration of these three categories of sources remained almost constant for the eighteenth century, and that, although the year 1707

is completely lacking, the number of registered settlements in the musterrolls, and the number of settlements in the rolls of the "qualified", is equally represented for each year, except the years 1790 and 1791 for the musterrolls.

This examination confirmed that this material is exceptionally suited to quantitative research and computer analysis. It consists of homogeneous and comparable data, both available in equal quantity and comprising a fairly large span of time, recurring with constant frequency and concerning a sufficiently representative pattern of geographical units. As can be appreciated, these three serial and interdependent sources allow us to produce very full statements of the careers of the V. O. C. servants in the eighteenth century.

As we have to deal with 26 main V. O. C. settlements of very different strengths of personnel, and a yearly average of 20,000 servants afloat and ashore, it was decided to collect all the available information from the sources discussed above on all servants employed in Bengal⁵ in the years 1720 and 1760, amounting to 142 and 448 respectively. This examination, however, does not pretend to be precisely representative for the whole establishment, but it is considered to be a systematic start and a pilot study for research with a much broader scope in time, and a larger number of servants. Seventy-six percent of the 142 servants employed in 1720, and 66% of the 448 employed in 1760, were traced in the ship-paybooks.

Table I gives the comprehensive data about the places of birth of the servants. All the topographical names registered in 1720, and 88% of the names registered in 1760 could be traced.

TABLE I

Places of birth	1720		1760	
	nos.	%	nos.	%
Amsterdam	32	22	39	10
The Netherlands, apart from Amsterdam	85	61	104	27
German states	8	6	153	40
Europe, apart from German states	13	8	56	13
Outside Europe	4	3	39	10

Although the numbers are too restricted to draw very important conclusions, the trend of the growing number of German-born and non-European-born servants, and the overall decline of the Dutch servants by 1760, might be a valuable indication for future research. Of the 85 Dutch servants in 1720, 23 were "qualified" but only 17 of the 104 registered in 1760. Of the

⁵ The choice of Bengal, while not of great importance in view of the aims of this examination, is due to the fact that the author is preparing a qualitative and a quantitative study on the V.O.C. personnel in the eighteenth century, particularly in Bengal.

153 German-born servants in 1760, 147 were military. Just 5 "qualified" servants are to be found among the 25 non-Dutch-born servants in 1720; 11 "qualified" servants, out of the 95 European ("German states" excluded), and non-European-born servants in 1760.

An inquiry into the termination of their careers results in the appalling figures shown in Table II.

TABLE II

	1720		1760	
	nos.	%	nos.	%
Died in Bengal	57	} 66	122	} 57
Died in other V.O.C. settlements	5		33	
Died aboard ships	10		12	
Returned and arrived in Europe	24	22	63	21
Deserted	9	8	30	10
Uncertain	4	4	34	12

The average length of service, from the time servants joined the V. O. C., till their death in the East or return to Europe, for the servants registered in 1720, has been calculated at 15¾ years, including possible service in other settlements than Bengal, and for the servants employed in 1760 at 14 years. If one considers these servants as a single "population", one is tempted to conclude that after an average time of service of about 14 years, with a minimum of 1 year and 9 months, and a maximum of 50 years and 3 months, about 25% returned and arrived safely in Europe. These figures, however, seem the more interesting, even though they have been calculated for so small a number of servants, because an analysis of 5000 of the 6549 registered names in Dodwell and Miles' "*Bengal Army List 1760-1834*" showed the same result: "... of every four Cadets, during the period 1760-1834, who left the shores of the United Kingdom in order to seek a military career in India, one, and only one, returned to lay his bones in his Mother country".⁶ Marshall's figures in his "*East Indian Fortunes*" (1976),⁷ concerning the deaths of the *civil* servants of the E. I. C. appointed to Bengal between 1707 and 1775, point also in this direction.

These figures are of course just a few of the possible analyses which can be made from our sources. They were calculated by hand, but the application of

⁶ *Bengal Past and Present*, XIII, Calcutta 1913, pp. 69 ff. The figures of our examination should be and can be much more refined, by relating them to the categories of occupation, considering the risk-factor of a given occupation.

⁷ P. J. MARSHALL, *East Indian Fortunes. The British in Bengal in the eighteenth century*, Oxford 1976, pp. 217-219.

the computer with the help of some packaged computer programmes (SPSS and PSTAT), will enable us to carry out a great variety of analyses once we have made use of all the information at our disposal from the sources.

The collecting of the information is quite exacting and laborious because of the unavoidable use of three different large bodies of material, but once it has been done for an indefinite number of servants, the data will be always available on computer tapes. It might be useful to sum up the most interesting and important possibilities for classifying the variables contained in the sources:

- reconstruction of the course of careers; their speed of promotion and character; mobility from one settlement to another
- geographical origin related to the type of career
- average duration of service in relation to the "dispersal of the observations" (standard and mean deviation)
- mortality related to the occupational-category. The ship-paybooks are the graduated scale "par excellence" for determining the chance of survival of a servant after his departure for the East⁸
- relation between European and non-European-born servants
- the importance and possible influence of family-relations.

The collection of the data for about 3500 servants will take about 2½ years' work for one full time researcher. This number of servants is the computer-calculated estimation⁹ for all the servants employed in Bengal from 1700 to 1791, and based upon the figures from the average time of service for those employed in Bengal in 1720 and 1760, subdivided into categories of length of service, having an average less than 1 year, from 1 to 10 years, from 11 to 20 years etc. The result of this collection will be the reconstruction of about 3500 careers in alphabetical order of surnames of the servants. Doubts existed in the past about whether it would be possible to collect biographical data on hundreds of people,¹⁰ but it is suggested that in this article there is sufficient proof to the contrary. It is remarkable, that almost 140 years ago, the well-known East India Company Agents in London, Messrs. Dodwell and Miles published a similar work, as far as the course of careers is concerned, on the details of service

⁸ J. R. Bruijn in his interesting article "De personeelsbehoefte van de V.O.C. overzee en aan boord, gezien in Aziatisch en Nederlands perspectief", in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Vol. 91, nr. 2, The Hague 1976, p. 218, definitely overstresses on this point the importance of the sources in relation to the shipping movement between The Netherlands and Asia.

⁹ I would like to thank Mr. J. Onderwaater of the Kamerlingh Onnes Laboratory, Leiden for his generous help.

¹⁰ G. J. SCHUTTE, *De Nederlandse patriotten en de koloniën 1770-1800*, published thesis Utrecht University 1974, p. 33.

of the civil and military servants of the E. I. C.'s three Indian Presidencies.¹¹ Although it could be argued that we have limited ourselves to Bengal, the reconstructed careers and the supplementary information cover all the places of posting of the servants, and a body of data as complete as possible for at least one settlement over a long stretch of time has been made available to the public. It also seems to avoid the difficult problems concerning the appropriate formula for "sampling": in the first place we do not yet know the essential criteria for sensible "sampling" relative to our material, and second, a convincing methodological answer to the problems of this "art" in general is not available.

Nowadays the computer can be considered as a "byproduct" of printing, and can be a great help to archives and libraries. The data from our research can be stored on computer-tapes in a data-bank, and will be permanently available for consultation and analysis. A number of copies with all the available data, arranged in alphabetical order of the surnames of the servants, can be printed out by the computer and deposited at strategic institutions, for example the *Algemeen Rijksarchief* at the Hague, and then all the main relevant archives and libraries in the world. This might save the high costs of printing all the information. Once the information for Bengal has been stored, it is easy for the computer to produce an alphabetical list of servants who not only served in Bengal, but also in a settlement which happens to be the next object of similar research. The computer can produce data which have been in fact at our disposal since the end of the eighteenth century, but can only appear to full advantage after systematic classification and mechanical analysis. In conclusion, it is important to state explicitly, that the computer is invaluable for dealing with this kind of material, but it is just *one* of the resources the historian has at his disposal. The results of this project can be of great interest to researchers working on both more abstract structures in the field, and on more detailed biographical information.

At any rate, by combining the three unique sources into one comprehensive file, the research will enable us to fill a serious gap in our knowledge of the history of Dutch expansion in the eighteenth century.

¹¹ E. DODWELL and J. S. MILES, *Alphabetical list of the East India Company's Bengal civil servants 1780 to 1838*, London 1839.

--, *ditto of the Madras civil servants 1780 to 1838*, London 1839.

--, *ditto of the Bombay civil servants 1798 to 1838*, London 1839.

--, *Alphabetical list of the officers of the Indian Army. Bengal, Madras and Bombay 1760-1834*, London 1839.

