

A historiographical analysis of the decline of the Dutch East India Company

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Summary

The Dutch East India Company was the first multinational corporation in the history of humankind. Throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century, the company thrived. Both its trading posts and the number of its employees increased throughout the years. However, this success story came to a halt at some point during the eighteenth century, perhaps even before. All the way back to the nineteenth century, historians have discussed various causes of the decline of the Dutch East India Company. However, no one has written a historiographical analysis of the topic. Thus, the main aim of this master thesis is to produce a historiographical analysis of the decline of the Dutch East India Company. This historiographical analysis revolves around the viewpoints of five authors who have sought to explain the decline of the Dutch East India Company.¹ Together, these authors represent the most widespread explanations to the decline of the VOC. The emphasis in this paper will not only be on the literature of these authors, but also on their personal background, as well as elements of historical theory and methods. In each chapter, the respective scholar will be compared to his/her preceding scholar, in chronological order. In addition, there is an introduction, a background chapter and a conclusion.

¹ In Dutch: *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC).

Preface

Writing a master thesis is like walking an endlessly long road, completely by yourself, never reaching a destination and continuously taking wrong turns on the way. At least, that is what it felt like, much of the time. Nevertheless, I finally got to my destination. This is because I was not completely by myself. I want to thank my supervisor for giving me excellent feedback, which guided me in the right direction. Furthermore, you were also good at listening to my opinion, so that we could come to a compromise. Ivy: I couldn't have done this without you. I'm extremely lucky that I have you in my life. Thank you for always being there for me. You always encouraged me to study, and you helped evolve my English further.

I want to thank my family for supporting me through this year. I'm thanking you dad for buying me books on the topic and always showing interest and encouraging me. Frida: thank you for making the most delicious dinners. Wibeke, aka auntie dog, you and your dogs always cheer me up. Suzanne: you are sweet and Ronja is adorable, and the light of our family.

Last, but most important, I am addressing you mum: even though you were so sick the last year, you always supported me through it. I cannot find the words to describe how much it saddens me that you could not see it finished. A month before you passed away, you made me promise you that I would finish it before you died. I failed to do so, as you passed away, much too early. Still, I comforted you and made sure that I had everything under control, and I know that you had no doubt that I would have it finished.

Tolkamer, The Netherlands, July, 2018.

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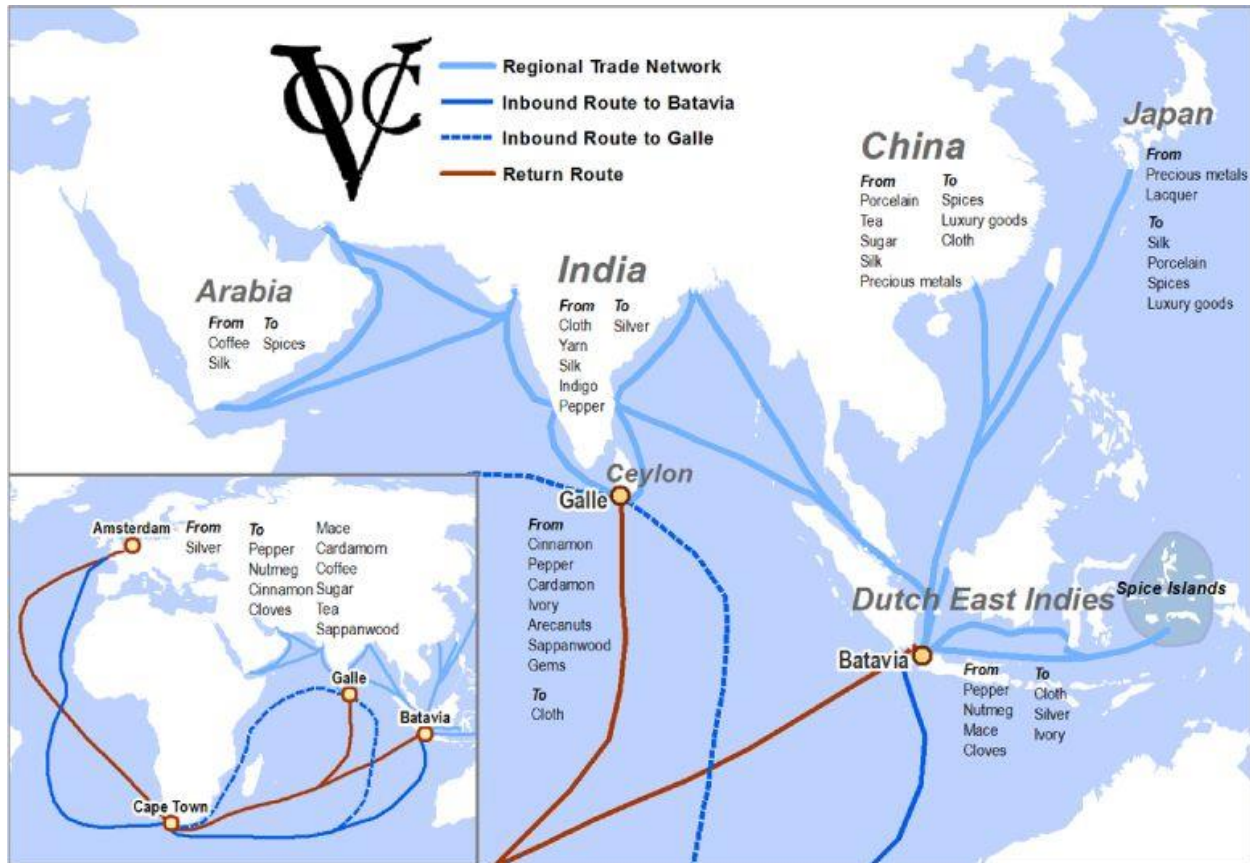
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Why the Dutch East India Company?

Figure 1: The trading routes of the VOC



The illustration above gives us a good indication of the extent of the VOC during its heydays. The VOC controlled outposts, forts, coastal territories and even vast pieces of land in the areas that are currently referred to as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, South Africa and India. As such, it is fascinating that a trading company, chartered by the tiny Dutch Republic, was able to control territories that were much larger in both area and population than the Republic itself.

The VOC was the largest European trading company in Asia throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The company enforced several monopolies on the Dutch trade in Asia and South Africa, and on some commodities, it enforced a global monopoly. Consequently, the company was an important influence in the making of the modern world economy. Even today,

traces of its significance can be found throughout Europe, Africa and not the least Asia. In the eighteenth century, the company started to decline, eventually leading to its dissolution in 1795. Most historians believe that the VOC underwent a decline throughout the eighteenth century. The historiography of the VOC in the eighteenth century, when the VOC declined, has not been comprehensively researched as compared to the historiography of the VOC in the seventeenth century, during its heydays. Naturally, this is because the consensus of historians in the past were more nationalistic, and mostly concerned with the most glorious aspects of their own history. Interestingly, this still applies to contemporary Dutch historians. Nevertheless, the number of historians analyzing the history of the VOC in the eighteenth century has increased, significantly, throughout the last decades.

1.2: Points in question

The amount of literature on this topic is not huge; yet, it is enough in order to write a historiographical analysis. The project has further been restricted to the literature of five historians; however, these scholars are central to the debate of the decline of the VOC. The main aim of this paper will be to analyze and compare the literature of five authors, central to the debate. Hereunder, we will see how the decline of the VOC has been portrayed in diverse ways. Consequently, the main point in question for this paper will be as follows:

- How did the relevant historians explain the decline of the company?

In order to answer this question better, additional minor questions are listed below:

- How did the historiography on the decline of the VOC develop?
- In what way did personal background, societal and geographical trends influence the viewpoints of the historians in question?
- Was the company able to adjust itself to changing circumstances in the eighteenth century or was it doomed from the beginning?
- Was the decline of the VOC caused by internal or external causes?

The two last points in question are of relevance as these themes are recurrent in the historiography. The question of how the historiography of the VOC has developed is also of interest because of the influence that the relevant historians had in the historiography.

1.3: Sources

As this paper is a historiographical analysis, it will be based, almost extensively, on the literature produced by the scholars mentioned in this paper. Until half a century ago, there was limited literature on the topic and it could only be found in Dutch. Because of the pioneering function that the VOC had as the first multinational corporation, based on shares, non-Dutch as well as Dutch historians have taken interest in the company. An outcome is that a good amount of the literature produced on the VOC is in English. Furthermore, as some Dutch historians have written their literature in English, the ratio between English and Dutch is quite even on the topic today. Furthermore, in recent decades, following the cultural turn, Asian historians, especially Indonesian ones, have increasingly rewritten their history. Admittedly, using these sources would have been a great asset to this paper. However, linguistic limitations, as well as distance, restricts the amount of literature accessible to use in a paper like this. Therefore, the sources in this paper only consist of English and Dutch literature. Overall, as mentioned previously, the literature produced on the topic is not very large, but sufficient to write a historiographical analysis. As the paper is a historiographical analysis, books on historiographical theories and methods have been relevant. Most of these books are listed in the syllabus of HIS4010: “*Historiske grunnlagsproblemer- teori og historiografi.*”

1.4: The historians

As the amount of literature on the decline of the VOC is limited, there was also limited choice when it came to choosing relevant scholars for this paper. Nevertheless, several historians were, potentially, relevant. Eventually, the literature of five authors were chosen for this master thesis. These scholars were chosen due to the relevance of their literature in the historiography. The scholars of relevance here are Holden Furber, Fernand Braudel, Julia Adams, Els Jacobs and Chris Nierstrasz, representing the United States, France and the Netherlands. Braudel’s work has been translated to English. These scholars are not only diverse because of their geographical and linguistic origin, but also in relation to the historiographical schools, theories and methods that they represent. The inspiration for choosing these historians was found in *The Shadow of the*

Company: The Dutch East India Company and its Servants in the Period of its Decline, by Chris Nierstrasz.²

With the exception of Julia Adams, the historians mentioned above have published their work on the topic through books. However, the decline of the VOC is not the main topic for every historian. In the books of Braudel for instance, the topic occupies little space, as the decline of the VOC is merely one out of several topics that he discusses. In contrast, Chris Nierstrasz's only goal with his work *In the Shadow of the Company*, is to uncover why the VOC declined. Similar to Nierstrasz, Julia Adams' main goal in her article *Principals and Agents, Colonialists and Company Men: The Decay of Colonial Control in the Dutch East Indies* is to explain the decline of the VOC.

As the decline of the Dutch East India Company coincided with the rise of the (English) East India Company (EIC), specialists on the decline of the VOC have also discussed the rise of the EIC. Hence, there is no point in avoiding the discussion of the rise of the EIC as it has been viewed as part of the reason why the VOC declined. According to the British historian Patrick O'Brien, it is only natural to compare the two trading companies, as a comparative viewpoint is likely to relieve focus on an unavoidable internal decline.³ Later on, we will see whether this is the case for the historians relevant for our paper. A comparative viewpoint is especially clear in the literature of Furber and Nierstrasz. In the following pages, there will be a short introduction on the relevant historians in this paper.

1.4.1: Holden Furber

Holden Furber (1903-1993) lectured at the University of Pennsylvania from 1952-1973, and before that at the University of Texas and Madras. He also served as a social science analyst for the Office of Strategic Services⁴ and as a specialist on the British Commonwealth for the US State Department, during World War 2. Reaching, the age of 90, Furber had a long scholarly career, in which he pioneered Asian history. Throughout his bibliography, Furber was preoccupied with the study of Asia, especially concerning the maritime history of India, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After the publication of *John Company At Work*, Furber

² While going through Nierstrasz's book, footnotes suggested which historians he was inspired by. This was confirmed by personal correspondence with Chris Nierstrasz himself.

³ O'Brien, 2000, 469.

⁴ This was the predecessor of the CIA.

became a pioneer within the history of European expansion in Asia, as he applied both comparative methods and broke with the Eurocentric history writing that was predominant at the time. His book received the Watanabe prize in 1949, as it was the best book on Asia, published in America that year.

As a result of Furber's extensive study on commerce in Asia, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he influenced historians preceding him, on European expansion in Asia, until this day. After the release of *John Company At Work*, he was the first scholar who discussed the role that private trade had for the European trading companies. During his stay at the University of Pennsylvania, Furber initiated an increased focus on the study of India, as he and his colleague W. Norman Brown established a program that sought to promote the study of the Indian subcontinent. As a result of Furber's pioneering work on Asia, he became a member of the Royal Historical Society, and perhaps even more impressive he became the president for the Association for Asian studies in 1968.

Perhaps the only book exceeding *John Company at Work* in fame is his renowned work *Rival Empires of trade in the Orient*, published in 1976, during his retirement. This book built upon *John Company at Work*. Both *John Company at Work* and *Rival Empires of trade in the Orient* are relevant for this paper, as both books revolve around the decline of the VOC. However, *Rival Empires* is referred to more often, because it is a more extensive study of Furber's research on the trading companies in Asia, as it incorporated much of his previous work in *John Company at Work*, in addition to more recent research conducted by prominent VOC historians like Marie Antoinette Petronella Meilink-Roelofs, Kristof Glamann and Niels Steensgaard.

1.4.2: Fernand Braudel

As one of the greatest historians of the twentieth century and a leader within the influential Annales School movement, Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) hardly requires an introduction. Like Annales School historians preceding him, Fernand Braudel sought to portray a history that not only focused on one field, especially not on one event, but on several fields, including anthropology, geography, sociology, economics and psychology. This approach is known as a 'total history'. Through the time that Braudel spent in Algiers, Brazil and involuntary in Germany under Nazi captivity, he formed his ideas on large-scale and long-term factors. His

time abroad and his fruitful study of several languages led to a global approach which greatly influenced, and set him apart from previous Annales School historians. His three major projects *The Mediterranean, Civilization and Capitalism*, and *Identity of France* were groundbreaking works with his emphasis on long-term and large-scale factors. Of relevance to this paper is his renowned project *Civilization and Capitalism (1955-1979)*.

1.4.3: Julia Adams

Julia Adams is a professor of social, area and international studies, with special interest in the fields of state formation, gender and family, social theory, early modern European politics, colonialism and empire. Today, her focus is on large-scale forms of patrimonial politics, the historical sociology of agency relations and modernity, gender, race and the representation of knowledge on academic platforms. Adams started her academic career as an assistant professor at the University of Michigan in 1992. Since 2004, she has been employed as a professor at the University of Yale. Aside from her job as a professor, Adams has other important functions like being the chair of the sociology department and her function as Joseph C. Fox Director of the Fox International Fellowship Program, which is an exchange program between Yale University and 19 other well-known universities. Previously, Adams was the president of the Social Science History Association (2008-2009). More than anything else, Adams is renowned for her work on patrimonial and principal-agent relations. In addition to applying it to contemporary politics, she has taken interest in the mechanisms of patrimonialism in early modern history.

1.4.4: Els Jacobs

Els Jacobs (1958,-) is a maritime historian, currently employed at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, as well as the Rotterdam Research Centre for Modern Maritime History, with the task of establishing links between the Erasmus University of Rotterdam and Rotterdam museum as well as with other universities and museums. In doing this, she has been an important asset in transforming the Maritime Museum Rotterdam and the Erasmus University of Rotterdam into the center of maritime history in the Netherlands. Her inspiration in doing this has been to share her expertise on maritime history with the Dutch public. This has also made her into an important figure within memory studies in the Netherlands, as she has important functions in several cultural institutions like UNESCO. As a result of her work, Jacobs has contributed to the

elimination of national boundaries, not only in her historical research, but also between historians and museums, internationally.

Furthermore, Jacobs belongs to the post 1980 historical transformation in which maritime history underwent an increase of sociology, cultural geography, gender studies and narrative studies. Hereunder, Jacobs was mostly influenced by quantitative methods and race and gender studies, culminating with a social and economic approach. Furthermore, Jacobs transferred her revisionist outlook to her contribution on the history of Europeans in Asia. This is apparent in her extensive work *Koopman in Azie*⁵, in which she portrayed a less nationalistic and Eurocentric history of the Dutch East India Company during the eighteenth century.

1.4.5: Chris Nierstrasz

Chris Nierstrasz (1978,-) is a professor at Erasmus University Rotterdam, and prior to that, he lectured at the University of Warwick. Before he started his PhD, he finished two master theses: one in history and another one in French language and culture. He is a global historian, preoccupied with the interaction between the social sciences and the humanities. Characteristics of his published work is a global orientation on long distance trade and consumption patterns throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. So far, his most extensive projects resulted in the release of *In the Shadow of the Company: The Dutch East India Company and its Servants in the period of its Decline (1740-1796)*, published in 2012 and *Rivalry for Trade in Tea and Textiles: The Dutch and English East India Companies (1700-1800)*, published in 2015. Both of these books have been valuable sources for this project.

In the Shadow of the Company was Nierstrasz's PhD-thesis. Under the supervision of the professors J. L. Blussé and F. S. Gaastra, he was part of the TANAP⁶ project, for which the main aim was to open up archives for young Asian historians. However, the opening up of archives did not only benefit young Asian historians; it benefitted historians of the VOC in general, as Nierstrasz was able to use archives that were not only located in the Netherlands, but also in Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka.⁷ In this project, Nierstrasz applied qualitative sources, like private correspondences, in order to uncover the importance of private trade in long distance

⁵ The English translation is named *Merchant in Asia*.

⁶ Towards a New Age of Partnership.

⁷ Nierstrasz, 2012, 272.

trade for the Dutch and British trading companies in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, he applied the information that he found in his study in order to analyze the rise of the EIC and the simultaneous decline of the VOC.

When Nierstrasz wrote *Rivalry for Trade in Tea and Textiles*, at Warwick University, he was part of “Europe’s Asian Centuries, trading Eurasia project”, located at the University of Warwick and funded by the European Research Council. As part of this project, Nierstrasz focused on the global economic shift in consumption patterns that took place in the eighteenth century, and he challenged the divide between Asian and European history. More explicitly, Nierstrasz created a comparative study of Europe’s trade with India and China in tea and textiles, a historical field, which had never been studied from a global perspective before. In this project, he applied mostly quantitative sources. The findings from this project have also been of value to the historiography of the rise of the EIC, and the decline of the VOC.

1.5: Explanation of vocabulary and concepts

As the relevant historians have applied various terms in their respective literature, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of those terms. Some of the terms are recurrent among all of the historians whereas other terms have been applied, exclusively, by one or two historians.

A term which is recurrent throughout this paper, is private trade. The term is especially well used in the literature of Holden Furber, Julia Adams and Chris Nierstrasz. The term private trade can sometimes be confusing to grasp, as historians have defined it differently. Whereas Furber defines private trade as a major trade on privately owned ships, Adams sees it as a minor side trade, in which servants of the VOC were allowed to take with them a fixed quota of goods.⁸ Nierstrasz, on the other hand, argues that private trade occurred on both levels. Hereunder, he labels large-scale private trade as free trade. Small scale- private trade is simply called private trade. Nevertheless, to simplify, Nierstrasz uses private trade as a collective term for both large and small-scale private trade. For Furber, private and free trade are synonymous, and he uses them interchangeably.

To complicate the picture even more, what these historians have explained as private trade, other historians have dismissed as corruption, which is another term, recurrent in this

⁸ Furber, 1976, 159.

paper. Naturally, as our historians have contrasting opinions on private trade, they have contrasting opinions on corruption as well. What Adams and Nierstrasz explain as small-scale private trade, Furber discards as corruption. Likewise, what Furber and Nierstrasz see as large-scale private trade, Adams discards as corruption. Furthermore, many VOC historians neglect that the company dealt with private trade at all. These historians also tend to attribute corruption to the main cause that the company declined. We will come back to this later.

Moving on, there are more terms in need of clarification. However, as these do not require a paragraph each, a list is provided below. Most of the terms can be explained through synonyms, although some of them have to be explained separately.

- **Asian World Economy:** Braudel, partly inspired by World Systems theory, applies this as a synonym with the Asian trading world or the Intra Asian trade.
- **Commodity Revolution:** Shift in consumer demands, change in consumption patterns.
- **Persia:** Iran.
- **Suratte:** Surat.
- **The Dutch East India Company:** The VOC, the company.
- **The Intra Asian trade:** The Intra Asian trade was an integrated economic system, in which Europeans as well as Asians competed and cooperated in countless of commodities. The Intra Asian trade, from a Dutch perspective, was the trade that the VOC carried out between its trading posts in Asia. This was a complex, but profitable, system, in which commodities were traded throughout vast distances.
- **The traditional historiography:** In reality, both Holden Furber's and Fernand Braudel's contributions to the historiography on the decline of the VOC belong to the traditional historiography. Since these historians are in the limelight in this paper, they will not be classified among the rest of the traditional historiography, to be found in chapter 2. Therefore, with the exception of Furber and Braudel, the traditional historiography concerns literature on the VOC produced before 1960.
- **The United Provinces:** The republic, The Lowlands, patria, the Dutch state, The Netherlands.

1.6: A historiographical analysis

As a science, historiography is quite new. However, as historians have written about their predecessors for centuries, it has been around for centuries.⁹ In a historiographical analysis, emphasis will not be on a specific historical topic, but on how historians have portrayed the history of this topic.¹⁰ As such, the literature of the historians in question will be primary sources, and, in most cases, secondary literature written by other historians will be irrelevant in a historiographical analysis. Obviously, this presupposes that the literature of these historians is original. When analyzing the literature of various historians, it is of utmost importance to take into consideration personal background, historical methods etc. of the historians in question.¹¹ Therefore, we distinguish between historians who write about historiography and those who write about history in its classical form.

As mentioned, the historian in question has to be central in a historiographical analysis. At this point, the challenge is to define the historian. History, as a science, consists of several tools and methods that historians apply when they try to understand history.¹² However, in addition to tools and methods, some underlying factors might be even more important. Hereunder, it is fruitful to examine in which ways the historian is influenced by his/her time, social surroundings, ideologies, personal experiences etc. Consequently, as historians are influenced by so many factors, they are also capable of providing completely different viewpoints on the same historical topic. This is the case with the historiography of the decline of the VOC. For example, it is rather normal that a Dutch historian describes the VOC in a more positive light than a non-Dutch historian. Consequently, we can get two completely different histories of the same historical event. On this point, the English historian Edward H. Carr wrote: “When we take up a work of history, our first concern should be not with the facts which it contains but with the historian who wrote it... Study the historian before you begin to study the facts.”¹³

According to the Norwegian historian Ottar Dahl, one of the premises for writing a historiographical analysis is that there is enough literature on the topic, and that there are

⁹ Meyer & Myhre, 2000, 12.

¹⁰ Kjeldstadli, 2010, 51-52

¹¹ Myhre, 1996, 5

¹² Kjeldstadli, 2010, 55.

¹³ Carr, 1961, 22.

different interpretations on the topic.¹⁴In fact, this happens to be the case for the VOC. Furthermore, as the literature on the VOC is rather cramped, a goal in itself could be to inform readers about the limited literature on the topic.

1.7: Chronology

Event	Year
The VOC is established	1602
First Anglo-Dutch War	1652-1654
Loss of Formosa (Taiwan)	1661-1662
Second Anglo-Dutch War	1665-1667
Importation of Japanese silver stops	1670
Third Anglo-Dutch War	1672-1673
Defeat at the battle of Colachel	1741
The Seven Years War	1756-1763
British victory at Plassey	1757
Fourth Anglo-Dutch War	1780-1784
The VOC is taken over by the Dutch Republic	1796
The VOC is dissolved	1799

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¹⁴ Dahl, 1972, 2.

¹⁵ Even though the VOC was not directly involved in the Seven Years War or the battle of Plassey, the long-term impact for the VOC was significant, as we will see later in this paper.

Chapter 2: Background

2.1: A brief background on the VOC

From 1568 to 1648, Spain found itself in intense warfare against the Seventeen provinces, better known as the Benelux countries today. Before this, the Seventeen provinces, or the lowlands, had been under Spanish rule for a century. In the end, seven of these provinces broke free from Spanish rule and formed the United Provinces. Before and after its independence, the United Provinces, and the Low Countries in general, was an important economic center in Europe. One of the products that was important for its economy was spices. Until 1580, the provinces were able to trade for spices in Lisbon; however, after 1580, Portugal became part of Habsburg Spain, and joined Spain in its war against the United Provinces. Therefore, the United Provinces sent its own explorers and merchants to the Far East in order to partake in the profitable Spice trade.

In 1602, Dutch merchants from six already-existing Dutch trading companies went together to form *De Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*, abbreviated as VOC.¹⁶ The VOC was a chartered trading company that any Dutch citizen could invest in. The charter specified that the company had the right to conduct trade between South Africa and the Strait of Magellan, on the side of the Indian and Pacific Ocean. The charter was renewed with intervals of 21 year, and merchants were allowed to withdraw their investments after 10 years. Its main investors, however, were capital rich merchants, from whom 17 merchants made up the *Heeren XVII*, which was the company's central leadership, located in the Netherlands.¹⁷ Hereunder, there were four regional departments, located in Amsterdam, Friesland, Maaze and Zeeland and six "offices", located in Amsterdam, Middelburg, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, Delft and Rotterdam. Each chamber, which was located in the most important coastal cities, was supposed to equip ships and crews for expeditions eastward. The, in total 73, shareholders of the previously six trading companies, settled daily affairs.¹⁸ Meanwhile, *Heeren XVII* made the most important decisions, which were not of an everyday-nature. Due to the vast distance between Europe and Asia, there was also a regional administration for the whole of Asia in Batavia, located in Java, and better

¹⁶ Gaastra, 1992, 18.

¹⁷ Gaastra, 1991, 28.

¹⁸ Gaastra, 1991, 30.

known as Jakarta, which was the company's rendezvous. This administration was called *De Hoge Regering*¹⁹. The Governor-General led the High Government. Thanks to its complex and brilliant organization, the VOC was for a long time a step ahead of its European rivals. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that the English and their East India Company managed to catch up with the Dutch. Hereunder, the English copied many of the mechanisms that could explain some of the success of the VOC in the first place.²⁰

In reality, due to slow communication between the two continents, the majority of the decisions for the VOC were taken in Asia, not only by the High Government, but also by company officials throughout Asia. The jurisdiction of a VOC trading post depended, largely, on the size of it. Below, we will see a map and a table, which will illuminate the geographical location of the trading posts of the company. In addition, a table will follow which illuminates the size of the trading posts of the VOC.

Figure 2: The trading posts of the VOC



¹⁹ *De hoge regering* translates to the High Government.

²⁰ Gastra, 1991, 52.

On figure 2, we will only focus on the Asian part of the map. There we can see where the trading posts of the VOC were located. As we can see, the trading posts of the VOC were spread out throughout Asia. An interesting observation to make is that the VOC was well established in India before the advent of the British. Even more important than India was Ceylon and the possessions that the company had in the Indonesian Archipelago. As the possessions that the VOC had in India and Ceylon were lost for good after the Fourth Anglo Dutch War, its core areas in the Indonesian Archipelago saved the Dutch from completely losing their influence in Asia. Thus, after the dissolution of the VOC in 1799, the Dutch Republic held on to their possessions in the Indonesian Archipelago and even expanded them. Unfortunately, good maps on the VOC are scarce. What we cannot tell from this map is that there was a great difference in size from one trading post to another one. Below is a list of the number of company employees per trading post:

Figure 3: Employees of VOC trading posts in Asia, 1687-1688.

Offices	Employees
Malabar	619
Ceylon	2 631
Ambon	797
Banda	710
Ternate	417
Persia	26
Bengalen	72
Suratte	78
Makassar	467
Timor	145
Coromandel	683
Malakka	430
Sumatra	195
Siam	37
Palembang	96
Batavia	2641

Bantam	427
Japan	27
Tonkin	7
Amoy	4
Jambi	201
Japara	841
Total	11 551

21

From figure 3, we can see that the size of the trading posts varied greatly. When analyzing this table, it is important to be aware of the fact that these are only the trading posts that the VOC had in Asia. In addition, the company had a trading post in Cape Town, South Africa, in Mauritius, and off course several offices in Amsterdam. VOC factories, located in the United Provinces, for instance, numbered several thousands of workers. Another observation to make is that the VOC at this point (1687-1688) had lost one of its largest trading posts, its settlement in Formosa, which numbered 1200 employees.²²

Interestingly, whereas trading posts like Amoy had only four employees at some point, the employees of settlements like Colombo and Batavia numbered over 2600. It was no wonder that trading posts or settlements like Colombo and Batavia had more influence than trading posts like Amoy. Even though, according to the Dutch historian Femme Gaastra, the number of employees in Batavia and Colombo were approximately identical, Batavia was the rendezvous of the company for two centuries.²³ In other words, much of the trade throughout Asia had to go through Batavia, and as mentioned, the High Government was located there. Even so, as Colombo rivalled Batavia in size, it also rivalled Batavia in influence at times, not only because of its size, but also due to its central position of Ceylon in the westernmost half of Asia, and thus closer to trading posts in that area, and perhaps even more importantly, it was closer to the Dutch Republic. Hence, Colombo could receive important intelligence from patria earlier than Batavia.

²¹ Gaastra, 2008, 92.

²² Gaastra, 2008, 26.

²³ *ibidem*.

Nevertheless, despite Colombo's influence, Batavia remained the rendezvous of the VOC, and therefore the most influential trading post that the VOC had in Asia.²⁴

In order to gather revenues against the struggle for independence from Spain, the United Provinces and the VOC decided to monopolize the spice trade from Asia to Europe. In doing so, it was quite successful as it took over Portuguese possessions throughout Asia, and eventually monopolized much of the spice trade, leaving little to no room for its European competitors. In the seventeenth century, commercial and military interests went hand in hand. Especially in the early years, the company focused on the military, while they attacked the Spanish and the Portuguese throughout Asia. Unlike the Spanish and the Portuguese, the Dutch took no interest in converting the natives to Christianity. Later on, especially in the eighteenth century, the company was primarily a commercial organization led by merchants. Therefore, its main goal was usually the pursuit of profits rather than the conquest of territories or the conversion of natives to "the true faith".²⁵

In addition to the enforcement of a monopoly, the VOC upheld a so-called Intra-Asian trade, in which commodities were exchanged throughout the company's trading stations in Asia. Figure 1 on page 2 gives us a good indication of how this trade occurred. As there was little demand for European products in Asia, ships travelling from the Netherlands usually carried ballast, building materials as well as copper, gold and silver. Among these precious metals, silver was the most valuable currency at the time, and fortunately for the VOC, it was able to drain silver from Japan, often in exchange for textiles. It was an important advantage to get silver, gold and copper in Japan as there were limited amounts of these precious metals in Europe, especially silver.²⁶

As mentioned, the VOC typically got silver in Japan, in exchange for textiles, which was before that traded for spices in India. Commodities from VOC controlled areas, typically spices, were often delivered by forced labor of peasants living under VOC jurisdiction. Thereafter, silver from Japan was typically used to buy tea, silk and Porcelain in China. The company traded in many other commodities; however, the trading items just mentioned happened to be among the

²⁴ *ibidem*.

²⁵ Gaastra, 1991, 113.

²⁶ Gaastra, 2008, 134.

most important items.²⁷ Unfortunately, after 1670, the importation of cheap silver from Japan came to a halt, as Japan imposed restrictions on the formerly lucrative silver trade. Thereafter, the VOC had to import more silver from the United Provinces, which it wanted to avoid as mentioned previously. However, the VOC managed to acquire some of these precious metals from Persia and Surat.

As we know, the distance between the United Provinces and Asia is huge. The journey, which could take between 6 and 12 months, was full of danger, and many crewmembers died of diseases, especially scurvy. Once arrived in Asia, even more VOC personnel deceased, due to tropical diseases. Possibly, due to high mortality, the company hired a large percentage of their personnel from other European countries, and later on, even from Asian countries. Nevertheless, the trip must have been worth it, as the VOC doubled the amount of ships it sent to Asia from its establishment to around the turn of the seventeenth century. Its personnel, both in Europe and Asia, which in 1700 numbered around 317 000, was more than doubled to 655 000, following the turn of the seventeenth century.²⁸ It was truly the largest corporation in history until that point. However, somehow, the company went through a decline during the eighteenth century, or perhaps already in the seventeenth century. There will be more about this later. Firstly, we will start with a brief introduction of the traditional historiography on the topic below.

2.2: Characteristics of the historiography

In order to see where the relevant historians stand in the historiography of the decline of the VOC, it is beneficial to compare them to the traditional historiography. In this chapter, we will therefore see a brief introduction on the traditional historiography on the decline of the VOC. Primarily, it must be said that the decline of the VOC has not been a very attractive topic among Dutch historians. Whereas, the topic was simply unknown to foreign scholars, Dutch historians tried to avoid it because the decline of the VOC, as well as the decline of the Dutch Republic, is a dark chapter in Dutch history. Dutch historians, reflecting a general trend among historians, always wanted to illuminate their history in a positive light. This way, the history of the VOC has for a long time been polarized into a glorified romantic history of the seventeenth century, whereas the eighteenth century has been portrayed as a dark chapter in Dutch history. As most

²⁷ Jacobs, 2000, 37.

²⁸ Gastra, 1991, 91.

historians chose to write about the former, the literature on the Dutch Golden Age, in the seventeenth century, is much more extensive than that on the eighteenth century. In fact, this pattern among Dutch historians is still evident today, as the amount of Dutch historians of the seventeenth century is much larger than on the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the amount of historians taking an interest in the decline of the VOC has increased in the twentieth century. Furthermore, a debate is taking place today, which will potentially turn the old trend upside down. As there is increased focus on the cruelties that the VOC committed against the natives during its heydays, some historians completely break with the old trend by labelling the seventeenth century as a dark chapter in Dutch history.²⁹

2.3: The historiography of the decline of the VOC

2.3.1: The first known accounts

The first known accounts of the decline of the VOC date back to the end of the eighteenth century, when the company still existed. The scholars who described the decline of the company at this time are very hard, if not impossible, to track today. Therefore, more recent historians have merely mentioned their viewpoints. The authors during the time of the company's decline argued that the company declined because of the Fourth Anglo Dutch War (1780-1784). In fact, most authors, even today, argue that this war was a factor in the decline of the VOC. However, contemporary observers portrayed it as if the Fourth Anglo Dutch War was the only reason that the company declined.³⁰ For contemporaries, this conflict turned the whole company upside down, as the VOC was heavily punished by Great Britain when it lost the Fourth Anglo Dutch War. The war was a catastrophe for the Dutch Republic as well as the VOC, both politically and economically. It is possible that academics at the time argued this because they experienced the war, and the upheavals that came with it themselves.³¹

2.3.2: Van der Oudermeulen

The first historian who gave a somewhat sharper explanation to the decline of the VOC was Cornelis van der Oudermeulen (1760-1828), who was quite a prominent figure at the time. He

²⁹ Jacobs, 2000.

³⁰ Asaerts et. Al, 1977, 285.

³¹ Ibidem.

came from a merchant family from Amsterdam, and studied Roman and Dutch law in Leiden. Later on, he became a shareholder in the VOC, as well as the West India Company³². Before his death, he became a knight in the order of the Dutch lion. With regards to his historical work on the VOC, van der Oudermeulen broke with the established opinion at the time that the VOC declined extensively because of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. With an economical orientation, van der Oudermeulen looked inward to the management of the company. Not influenced by historicism, like his predecessors, van der Oudermeulen argued that the decline of the VOC started already in 1696, and declined continuously throughout the eighteenth century.³³ The reason, he argued, was that the company's expenditures exceeded its income.³⁴

2.3.3: De Jonge

As the decline of the VOC was left, almost, untouched during the nineteenth century, Johan Karel Jacob De Jonge discussed the decline of the VOC from 1862-1895, in his *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indie*. Similar to van der Oudermeulen, de Jonge was less preoccupied with the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war. Instead, he extensively saw the decline of the VOC in terms of the corruption of company servants.³⁵ According to de Jonge this was corruption in terms of an illegal private trade conducted by company servants. These were normally servants higher up in the hierarchy of the company as these servants were exposed to less risk. Nevertheless, de Jonge asserts that any servant could perform it. De Jonge argues that this illegal private trade was extremely harmful to the company because servants stole company goods and re-sold it to competitors of the VOC.³⁶

De Jonge's discussion on the decline of the VOC was quite brief, as his focus was mostly directed towards Dutch rule over Indonesia in the nineteenth century. After de Jonge, the topic was left untouched for half a century. Nevertheless, de Jonge's viewpoint that the VOC declined because of corruption has been adopted by many VOC historians, and is still one of the main explanations to the decline of the company today.

³² In Dutch: De West-Indische Compagnie (WIC).

³³ Asaerts et. Al, 1977, 285.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ de Jonge, 1862-1895, 349.

³⁶ Ibidem.

2.3.4: Mansvelt

Through the publication of *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Handel-maatschappij* (1924), the Dutch historian William Maurits Frederik Mansvelt was the first historian of the VOC to apply quantitative methods, a long time before quantitative methods became generally established in history writing. His quantitative research led him to the conclusion that the leadership of the VOC was to be blamed for its decline, as their accounting system had become inefficient. Because of the lack of an estimation of income and outcome per trading item, the shareholders were unable to determine whether a commodity item became more profitable or vice versa.³⁷ In this way, Mansveldt argued that the company declined because of the lack of an efficient bookkeeping system.³⁸

2.3.5: Blok

Another Dutch historian, Petrus Johannes Blok, set the tone for the historiography of the decline of the VOC for much of the twentieth century. In *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Volk*, published in 1926 and one of Blok's last published works, he argues, like de Jonge, that the Dutch East India Company declined because of corruption.³⁹ Furthermore, he stressed bad leadership and an increasingly decadent lifestyle among company officials as well as servants. In contrast to de Jonge, Blok gave a direct and thorough account for the company's decline. In this way, Blok asserts that the VOC rotted up from the inside. Blok's viewpoint on the decline of the VOC as absolute and final was the darkest explanation of Dutch decline that one could imagine.⁴⁰

Blok, however, merely describes the absolute decline of the VOC as a byproduct of the absolute decline of the Dutch Republic. He did not see the company as an autonomous entity, and this might help explain why he stressed endogenous factors like corruption and decadence as the reason for the decline of the company.⁴¹ As his focus points towards the Dutch Republic, Blok explains European expansion overseas purely as a European development, in which it was

³⁷ Asaerts et. Al, 1977, 285.

³⁸ Gaastra, 2012, 159.

³⁹ De Vries, 1959, 7.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

unnecessary to pay any further attention to Asian developments, since Europeans were believed to be more advanced.⁴² Not only did Blok have a Eurocentric outlook on the history of the VOC; in line with the traditional historiography of the Dutch Golden Age, he also characterized the achievements of the VOC and the Dutch Republic in terms of dominance, conquest and control.⁴³ In this way, Blok explained that the Dutch had no problems enforcing a monopoly over the lucrative spice trade, as there is no mention of any exogenous threat to this system in his literature.⁴⁴ Both de Jonge and Blok had a nationalistic outlook in their explanation to the decline of the VOC. This outlook helps explain why they stressed internal causes to its decline, as it was unimaginable to them that the Dutch could be dragged down by anything but themselves. In this way, even in the darkest period of Dutch history, a nationalistic interpretation roamed strong.

2.3.6: Van Leur

Shortly after the death of Blok, the Dutch historian Job van Leur, one of the most influential revisionist historians of European expansion in Asia, set his mark on the historiography of the VOC. With regards to the decline of the VOC, van Leur yields to de Jonge and Blok that corruption was a cause for the decline of the company.⁴⁵ However, he does not agree with Blok that the decline of the VOC was a mere reflection of the declining performance of the Dutch Republic.⁴⁶ As he, with a sociological approach, explained that the European trading companies did not have much influence on the Asian trading system, he argued that, mostly, the position of the VOC was determined by Asian factors.⁴⁷ In this way, more than anything else, van Leur stressed the Asian context in the history of the VOC.⁴⁸

Interestingly, van Leur had several similarities with historians of the French Annales School. Similar to his contemporaries Lucien Febvre and Mark Bloch, van Leur condemned national history writing, and he stressed the importance of geography and the *longue durée*. In *Enige beschouwingen betreffende den ouden Aziatischen handel*⁴⁹, published in 1934, van Leur

⁴² Nierstrasz, 2012, 17.

⁴³ Jacobs, 1992, 218.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Disney, 1995, 181.

⁴⁶ Blussé & Gaastra, 1998, 90.

⁴⁷ Blussé & Gaastra, 1998, 90.

⁴⁸ Blussé & Gaastra, 2001, 215.

⁴⁹ Translates to "Some Observations on Traditional Asian Trade".

challenged the old Eurocentric and nationalistic wave that dominated the historiography of the VOC prior to van Leur. In this way, rather than analyzing the company in terms of internal factors, as Blok and de Jong did, van Leur put more emphasis on Asian factors, through a political, geographical and economical perspective.⁵⁰ In that respect, van Leur was quite radical as he emphasized the importance of Asian traders compared to European merchants.⁵¹

As van Leur stressed that the Dutch simply adjusted to already existing trading practices, he added that the Dutch could not really enforce a trading monopoly in Asia because native networks, already established, were too strong to allow this. In this way, van Leur neglected the rise of capitalism in the Netherlands, by asserting that the trade that the Dutch East India Company engaged in was a medieval trading system.⁵² Van Leur argues that if the VOC wanted to make a profit, they had to adjust to the Asian trading system. Van Leur was himself inspired by the new liberalistic forces that blossomed in the wake of World War I.⁵³ As opposed to Blok who was of the opinion that Europeans were superior compared to the native Asian population, Van Leur's most important message was the limited impact that the VOC had on Asian society in the early modern world.⁵⁴

Sadly, van Leur's work was forgotten, and not taken up for another 20 years.⁵⁵ As van Leur, tragically, died on board of an American ship in battle against the Japanese in 1942, he did not receive much credit for his extensive work during his lifetime. It was not until his faithful friend W. F. Wertheim translated his work to English in 1955, under the name *Indonesian trade and society*, that van Leur's work became influential. Consequently, van Leur influenced countless of historians succeeding him.

2.3.7: Glamann

Kristof Glamann (1923-2013) was a Danish historian. Being the first economic historian at the University of Copenhagen, from 1960, he was important in developing economic history as a separate historical field in Denmark. As a specialist on the economic history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he made significant contributions on the history of the Danish, Dutch,

⁵⁰ Blussé & Gaastra, 1998, 3.

⁵¹ De Vries, 2010, 713.

⁵² Gaastra, 2012, 113.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Blussé & Gaastra, 1998, 115.

⁵⁵ Blussé & Gaastra, 1998, 91.

French, Ostend and English trading companies. Of colossal importance in the historiography of the VOC was Glamann's work *Dutch-Asiatic trade 1620-1740*, first published in 1958. Glamann was especially interested in the history of the VOC, as he found out that the archives on this topic offered more opportunities than on the other trading companies. Unlike historians of the VOC prior to Glamann, he compared the VOC to the EIC, though not too often. Nevertheless, he brought back the element of explaining the decline of the VOC externally, as he stressed how British competition harmed the company.

Glamann's most important contribution concerns his findings on the various commodities that the VOC engaged in.⁵⁶ Similar to Mansveldt, Glamann used quantitative methods. In contrast to Mansvelt, Glamann argued that the shareholders and the Asian branch of the company had a good understanding of what was going on in the company. The accounting methods that were applied in the VOC were good enough to assess income and expenditures on various trading items that the company engaged in.⁵⁷ According to his findings, the percentage of trade evolving around commodities like tea and textiles increased at the expense of spices.⁵⁸ Previously, these trading items were a luxury for the rich elite. As the European trading companies, led by the VOC, increased the importation of these commodities to Europe, these items became more widespread among the larger masses of the population. In fact, Glamann argued that a commodity revolution took place in which there was a growing demand to consumption products like tea and textiles in Europe. Hereby, he discarded the old argument that the VOC upheld a stable monopoly evolving around spices. Instead, the VOC adjusted to trading items like tea and textiles that had become more profitable in the eighteenth century. However, as the extent of *Dutch-Asiatic trade, 1620-1740*, as the title suggests, only goes to 1740, it is important to notice that Glamann did not specifically seek to solve the puzzle of why the VOC declined as his work is a study of European trade to the East Indies. Nevertheless, Glamann's work was an important scholarly contribution to the historiography of the decline of the VOC, as his work inspired historians who actively sought to uncover why the VOC declined.

⁵⁶ Asaerts et. al, 1977, 285.

⁵⁷ Gaastra, 2012, 161.

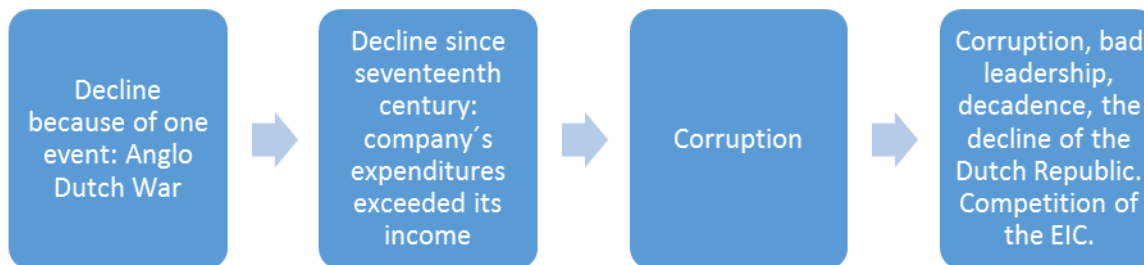
⁵⁸ Gaastra, 2012, 137.

2.4: Conclusion

As we have seen, the way that historians have explained the decline of the Dutch East India Company has differed greatly. Before van Oudermeulen, the focus was purely on a single external cause, the Fourth-Anglo Dutch war. As van der Oudermeulen managed to shift the focus to internal reasons, concerning the company's balance between income and expenditures, the Fourth Anglo Dutch War was quickly forgotten. The historians who followed van der Oudermeulen took over his emphasis on internal causes and stressed the elements of an outdated bookkeeping system, corruption, bad leadership and the connection between the decline of the United Provinces and the decline of the VOC, which is also seen as an external cause as the company was, at least indirectly, subordinate to the United Provinces.

In the following chapters we will see that many of the historians in this chapter have inspired the authors relevant to this paper. Furthermore, one of the scholars, Job van Leur, did, as mentioned, not leave a direct legacy on the historiography. However, his impact on some of the historians central in this paper was enormous. Consequently, his name will be mentioned several times in the following chapters.

Figure 3: Diagram of the traditional historiography.



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⁵⁹ As van Leur did not have an immediate impact on the historiography of the VOC, it is not necessary to include him in this figure.

Chapter 3: Holden Furber

3.1: Comparative approach and break with Blok

When Holden Furber released his book *John Company at Work* in 1948, he broke with much of the traditional historiography of the decline of the VOC. In this work, Furber broke with Blok's viewpoint that the company underwent an absolute decline. Inspired by Glamann, Furber rewrote the narrative about the decline of the VOC by comparing the VOC to the other trading companies. In this work, his focus was as much on social as on political history. Unlike Glamann, who occasionally made a few comparative remarks on the EIC, Furber actively and continuously compared the VOC and the EIC. In this way, Furber also avoided to portray the company in a national light that stressed the uniqueness of one company, which was a very predominant way to describe history at the time of Furber. Consequently, Furber managed to produce one of the most extensive comparative works on (pre)colonial history.⁶⁰ In *John Company at Work*, through his many contacts as well as through his linguistic capabilities, he compared the British, Dutch, French and Danish trading companies, based on countless of hours of research in British, Dutch, French and Danish archives, however, with particular emphasis on the Dutch and British companies.⁶¹ By comparing the VOC with the EIC, Furber managed to capture a more coherent picture of how these companies worked.

Furber's comparative angle influenced his viewpoint that the company's decline was relative, by comparing its decline to the growth of rival trading companies.⁶² In this way, Furber argues that the growth and competition of other trading companies, rather than an internal decline of the VOC caused a relative decline, in which the company was not rotten from the inside, as Blok argues. As opposed to inward-looking explanations among historians of the VOC prior to Furber, Furber's comparative outlook explains the decline of the VOC through both endogenous and exogenous factors.

⁶⁰ Blussé, 2008, 7.

⁶¹ Furber, 1948, 7.

⁶² Furber, 1976, 1.

3.2: Characteristics & influences

When Furber wrote *John Company at Work*, he put more emphasis on Asian factors in his narrative on the European trading companies.⁶³ In this way, many historians labelled Furber's view on Asian-European interaction as an "Age of Partnership", in which European and native merchants traded side-by-side. This was quite remarkable as the majority of historians of the VOC, as well as of the other trading companies were quite Eurocentric and nationalistic at the time. Inspired by Kristof Glamann, Niels Steensgaard and M.A.P Meilink-Roelofs, Furber helped to alter the traditional narrative. Furber's historiographic methods were quite different from these historians. Whereas Glamann applied quantitative methods, Furber avoided the use of it as he argued that a quantitative approach limited his interpretation of Asian-European relations. Instead, Furber favored an old-school descriptive and narrative technique, quite different from the schematic Annales School oriented technique favored by Glamann, Steensgaard and Meilink-Roelofz. However, Furber's technique had the advantage of being simpler to understand for its readers.

3.3: An Age of Partnership and the VOC

So far, the impression is, perhaps, that Furber broke completely with Eurocentric history. However, Furber's concept of an "Age of Partnership" does not hold in his narrative on the VOC. According to Furber, the VOC, with great success in the first six decades of the seventeenth century, enforced a strict monopoly, in which violence and exploitation occurred on a daily basis. As Furber argues that the Dutch strict enforcement of its monopolies led to violence and warfare, he barely mentions the Asian aspect in this. Despite being American, Furber restricts himself to the discussion of how Dutch enforcement of its monopoly led to warfare with the British. In this sense, Furber upholds a European-centered orientation in his narrative, and in this sense, his literature did not change much from the traditional historiography. Later on, we will see how Furber's opposing viewpoints on the Dutch East India Company and the other European trading companies plays in on his view on the decline of the VOC.

It must be said that Furber has a lot in common with Job van Leur as well. However, as there are no references about van Leur in Furber's literature, it is rather unlikely that van Leur

⁶³ Furber, 1976, 43.

inspired Furber directly. Interestingly, the literature of Kristof Glamann, Niels Steensgaard and M.A.P Meilink-Roelofs weigh heavy in Furber's second cornerstone *Rival Empires of trade in the Orient*. These historians were heavily indebted to van Leur's viewpoint towards the Asian trading world in the eighteenth century.⁶⁴ In this way, according to the Dutch scholars Leonard Blussé and Femme Gaastra, Furber took over van Leur's rejection of the Eurocentric history that dominated the historiography of eighteenth century Asia. However, one should not exaggerate Furber's break with Eurocentrism. In fact, Furber argues that the British and the Dutch trading companies shaped the Asian economy in the eighteenth century.⁶⁵ Thus, even though there are similarities between Furber and van Leur, it is, possibly, a bit far-fetched of Blussé and Gaastra to compare Furber with van Leur, in terms of a rejection of Eurocentric history.

Similar to van Leur, Furber contributed to a history that took into consideration the peoples of both Europe and Asia, and avoided the making of a nationalistic history. Despite van Leur's work on the topic, knowledge on the role that Asian merchants played in the history of the European trading companies was very scarce. According to the Dutch historian M.A.P Meilink-Roelofs, Furber's work is as significant as that of van Leur.⁶⁶ According to Meilink-Roelofs, the fact that Furber is an American gave him an advantage over European and Asian historians, making him less biased. This is because colonial history of Asia has been the field of Asian and European historians.⁶⁷ However, as mentioned above, Furber's viewpoint towards viewing European trading companies in a less Eurocentric way, by describing European and Asian merchants as partners, is not valid for the VOC. In this sense, Furber's literature on the VOC is as Eurocentric as historians argued previously, and the fact that Furber is American seems to be irrelevant, in this case.

3.4: Towards free trade

The consensus of historians have adopted Steengaards's viewpoint that the Asian trading world, in which the VOC was active, was an increasingly mercantilist world, dominated by the European trading companies with their monopolies. According to Furber, a transformation was taking place in the eighteenth century in which the EIC was becoming less and less

⁶⁴ Blussé & Gaastra, 1998, 90.

⁶⁵ Furber, 1976, 40.

⁶⁶ Meilink-Roelofs, 1979, 404.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

mercantilist.⁶⁸ At this point, the fact that Furber was a supporter of free trade and a critic of mercantilist policies has clearly marked his viewpoint on the European trading companies.⁶⁹ Obviously, as the EIC was a trading company, chartered in England, its function remained that of a mercantilist trading company. However, its trading strategy in Asia transformed throughout the eighteenth century, in which EIC servants increasingly traded privately on their own account, but under the protection of the EIC. According to Furber, this trade was on a large scale as company servants and free-burghers traded on privately owned ships, sometimes with support from merchants in Europe.⁷⁰ Through taxation of the profits that these private traders accumulated, the EIC garnered enormous profits. In return, private traders, despite having their own ships, got protection from the EIC on the way back to England. A system like this was very cheap and would ensure the company with profits, provided that company servants were loyal to the company. As long as servants were loyal to their company, private traders would strengthen their companies.⁷¹

Furber asserts that this increasingly private entrepreneurship contributed to the transformation to a new economic phase, called the age of free trade, simultaneously as the phase of mercantilism and monopolies gradually ended.⁷² Rather than banishing and punishing these private entrepreneurs, the EIC made use of it by taxing it. Then, Furber does not explain how the EIC taxed private trade. Furber argues that English private traders brought in so much wealth for the company and the mother country, that it led to the foundation of the British Empire, more than anything else.⁷³ However, it is important not to forget that the EIC remained a mercantilist trading company, as the company taxed the trade conducted by private entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, it is safe to say, that the EIC towards the end of the eighteenth century ceased to be the strict mercantilist trading company that it was in the seventeenth century. The same could not be said about the VOC, as the Dutch did not leave any room for private trade. This was not merely a question of entrepreneurial spirit among VOC servants, but also whether the VOC

⁶⁸ Furber, 1976, 126.

⁶⁹ Furber, 1976, 336.

⁷⁰ Furber, 1976, 159.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ Furber, 1976, 129.

would allow it.⁷⁴ Consequently, as the VOC did not allow private trade, VOC servants increasingly turned to corruption, as they traded privately, much like the EIC dealt with a private trade that was not taxed by the VOC. Thus, Furber has not neglected the old argument that the VOC declined because of corruption, as described by van der Oudermeulen and Blok. Similar to van der Oudermeulen and Blok, Furber is quite unclear as to how this corruption occurred.

When it comes to the Asian aspect of the decline of the VOC, Furber's understanding of monopoly and free trade is central. Furber stresses that monopolies were vulnerable; they could work for a while, but then they were doomed to collapse because it drained trading companies for resources, as it was so demanding to maintain them.⁷⁵ According to Furber, part of the reason why the free-trade oriented EIC outcompeted the monopoly-oriented VOC was due to the role that the natives had for the companies. According to Furber, the fact that native rulers and merchants welcomed free trade was an advantage to the EIC.⁷⁶ At this point, as European-Asian interactions seems to be one of his favorite topics in *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, it is quite strange that Furber does not stress the Asian aspect more in his narrative on the decline of the VOC.

Furber's comparative approach leads to his understanding that the VOC's lack of private trade and strict adherence to its monopoly practice was the major cause that the VOC was unable to maintain its trading hegemony in Asia.⁷⁷ He then argues that another important reason that free trade was superior over mercantilism was that free trade made room for greater flexibility in regards to the shift of consumption patterns, which took place around the turn of the seventeenth century, as described in the previous chapter.⁷⁸

The overriding goal of the company was to take as much wealth from Asia back to the Dutch Republic as possible, and the widespread opinion at the time was that a rigid enforcement of a monopoly was the most efficient way to do this. With Furber's opinion that a less strict enforcement of monopoly was a better strategy, he argues that the strict monopolistic

⁷⁴ Furber, 1976, 107.

⁷⁵ Furber, 1976, 52.

⁷⁶ Furber, 1976, 129.

⁷⁷ Furber, 1976, 52.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

enforcement of the VOC was doomed to lead to its decline.⁷⁹ Because of the company's support of an outdated policy, Furber describes the company as a static enterprise that was unable to adapt to shifting trading conditions. Thus, the company's conservative reluctance to allow its servants to pursue private trade led to its decline.

3.5: Furber, spices to tea and textiles

With the advent of Holden Furber's *Rival Empires of trade in the Orient* in 1976, Furber expands his focus on the impact that various trading commodities had for the decline or success of the trading companies.⁸⁰ In doing this, he was inspired by Kristof Glamann. Contrary to Glamann's *Dutch-Asiatic trade* (1958), Furber's literature was more in line with the traditional narrative in which the VOC has been portrayed to be a monopolistic trading company that did not change its policy throughout its existence. Hereunder, Furber's narrative is more in line with that of Mansvelt than with Glamann, as he too argues that the company's inefficient accounting system did not give adequate information on the various trading items that the company traded in. In this way, Furber saw the company as a static enterprise, as it was unable to adjust to merchandize that was more profitable. Unlike Glamann, Furber argues that the focus on spices was inadequate in order to retain its status as the most powerful trading company in Asia.⁸¹ In this way, he argues that the VOC lost out to the EIC as its focus on spices was at the expense of its ability to adapt to the consumer revolution, which affected Europe at the time.⁸² Especially the trade of tea and textiles underwent a significant transformation in demand in Europe, in the eighteenth century. Whereas the EIC, due to the flexibility of their private traders, quickly responded to this new demand, the VOC continued to focus on the spice trade, which grew less lucrative by the day.⁸³ Hence, Furber argues that the strict focus that the VOC had on the spice trade was at the expense of the trade of other commodities, like tea and textiles.⁸⁴

3.6: Summary

Furber, in contrast to historians prior to him, had more emphasis on a comparative viewpoint in his narrative on the decline of the VOC. In this manner, he portrayed the decline of the VOC in

⁷⁹ Furber, 1976, 275.

⁸⁰ Nierstrasz, 2015, 193.

⁸¹ Furber, 1976, 142.

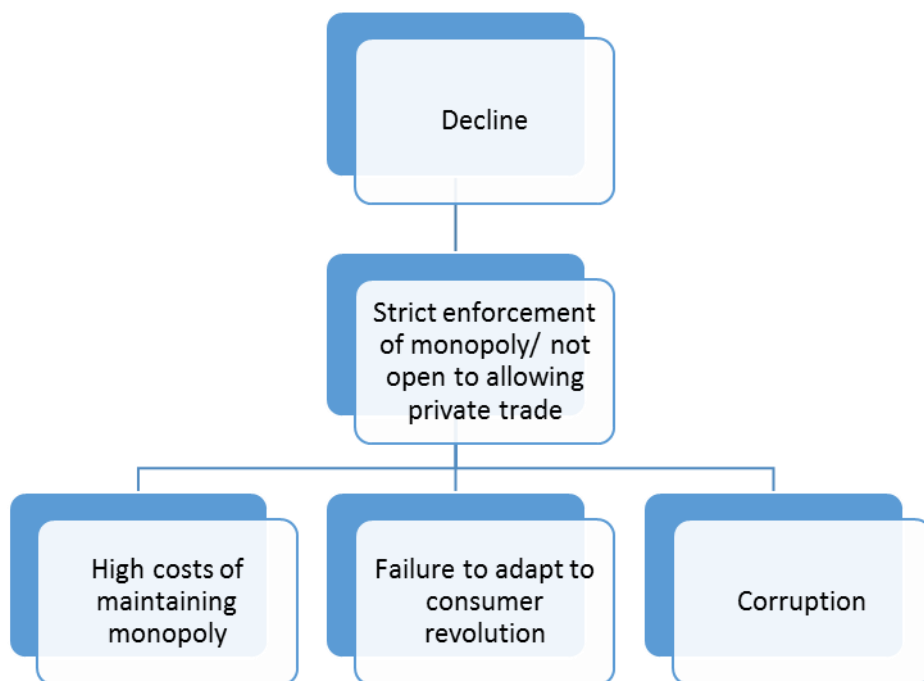
⁸² Ibidem.

⁸³ Furber, 1976, 107.

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

relation to the other trading companies, focusing on exogenous as well as endogenous factors. According to Furber, it was the rigid enforcement of its monopoly practice, combined with the prohibition of private trade, which led to the decline of the VOC. Not only did the company's strict enforcement of its monopolies demand more resources, the prohibition of private trade led to corruption as employees did not get enough incentives from the company's monopoly practice. This static adherence to its monopolies also turned the company into a static enterprise, in the eighteenth century, as the company failed to adjust to the shift in consumption patterns.

Figure 4: diagram of Furber's explanation to the decline of the VOC.



Chapter 4: Fernand Braudel

4.1: Civilization and Capitalism

In Braudel's enormous project *Civilization and Capitalism*, he discusses his work on the VOC in the two last parts, *The Wheels of Commerce* and *Perspective of the World*. In the second book, *The Wheels of Commerce*, Braudel focuses on the market economy and how it worked in relation to a non-market economy. Few pages in this work are about the Dutch East India Company. Nevertheless, in these precious few pages, Braudel discusses the geographical implications for the decline of the company.⁸⁵

In the third part of *Civilization and Capitalism*, *Perspective of the world*, Braudel's discussion on the decline of the VOC is more extensive than in *The Wheels of Commerce*. Nevertheless, even in *Perspective of the world*, the VOC is merely one among several topics that he discusses. Of criticism to both books, at least in those pages where Braudel discusses the decline of the VOC, is his lack of primary sources. Although primary sources are not completely absent in his work, his reliance on secondary sources is striking. Thus, in terms of archival research, it is clear that Furber's work is more extensive. In *Perspective of the world*, Braudel describes several topics from a global perspective that are of relevance to how the global economy worked. Hence, Braudel's work is much broader than that of Furber. This also helps explain why Braudel took an interest in the VOC, as the company was one of the most significant global firms that ever existed. Unlike many other global historians, Braudel did not apply quantitative methods in his work, neither did he take a narrative and descriptive technique like Furber did. Nevertheless, his schematic and structural orientation enabled him to write a global history, of inspiration to many historians succeeding him. In this work, his schematic global history is heavily indebted to Immanuel Wallerstein, the pioneer of World-Systems

⁸⁵ Braudel, vol. 2, 1982, 447.

theory, which is a macro-scale approach to world history.⁸⁶ Like Wallerstein, who was himself inspired by Braudel, as well as by Marxist theory and a social comparative history, Braudel welcomed a structural World Systems theory approach in his work. In this sense, Braudel emphasizes the division between core countries, semi-periphery countries and periphery-countries. Applying this to the VOC, Braudel sees the Dutch Republic and the VOC as part of it, as a core country enforcing its influence on periphery-countries in Asia. Unlike Wallerstein, who explained the decline of the VOC through his work *The Modern World-System Vol. 2: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy 1600-1750*, Braudel did not share Wallerstein's emphasis on political aspects.⁸⁷ For instance, Braudel dismisses the Anglo-Dutch wars as trivial events, which did not really affect the decline of the VOC, whereas Wallerstein, despite his structural worldview, argues that the Anglo Dutch war weighs heavy in the historiography of the decline of VOC.⁸⁸

4.2: A total history

As one of the most influential historians of the twentieth century, Braudel's viewpoints on the VOC weighs heavy in the historiography. As an Annales School historian, Braudel's explanation on the decline of the VOC is complex and includes many causes. However, compared to the established historiography, corruption was not one of them. He discredits corruption as a possible cause for decline because the English far outdid the Dutch in terms of corruption, and still ended up with a World-Empire.⁸⁹ Instead, Braudel's explanation to the decline of the company puts more emphasis on long-term structural changes, spanning all the way back to the establishment of the company. Similar to van Leur, his geographical orientation reduced the focus on national boundaries. A focus on the *longue durée* and an absence of the history of events (*histoire événementielle*) characterized the history writing of many Annales School historians, and Braudel's in particular. By focusing on a long-term global context, Braudel was able to formulate a complex and 'total history' of the VOC.

⁸⁶ Wallerstein, 1980, 54.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ Wallerstein, 1980, 54.

⁸⁹ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 530.

4.3: Free-trade & monopolies

Even though Furber acknowledges that the European trading companies enforced their monopolies in Asia, he argues that the EIC, in a larger extent than the other companies, traded more freely in Asia, in cooperation with the natives. Hence, although Furber acknowledges that the EIC always remained a mercantilist trading company, he argues that a transformation from mercantilism to free trade already started to take place within the trading world of the EIC during the second half of the eighteenth century. In contrast, Braudel is of the opinion that the trading companies, even the EIC, rigidly continued to operate through closed-off monopolies, leaving no room for free-trade. In this sense, Braudel even views the “free” trading policy by the EIC in the nineteenth century as another type of a closed off monopoly, which was not less monopolistic than the policy pursued in the eighteenth century.⁹⁰ In this way, Braudel opposes scholars like van Leur and Furber in that there were no free markets in Asia before the twentieth century. At this point, Braudel criticizes Furber for projecting mainstream ideas of his own time, in which free trade was widespread, into the eighteenth century.⁹¹ Furthermore, even though Braudel was highly appreciative of Furber’s study on the trading companies in the eighteenth century, he criticized Furber for going too far in emphasizing that the Asian-European interaction was an Age of Partnership. Instead, Braudel argues that it was necessary for the trading companies to apply violence on the native population in order to maintain a monopoly.⁹² However, it is important to keep in mind that Braudel did not glorify the monopoly-system. Even though the key to the domination of the East was through the monopolization of the spice trade, Braudel argues that the VOC went too far in trying to monopolize merchandise throughout Asia.⁹³ In fact, he argues that the VOC found itself in endless conflicts with the natives that drained the company’s resources. However, the EIC had to deal with the same problem. As such, Braudel does not view the monopoly practice of the VOC as a cause for the decline of the VOC.

4.4: The importance of the Dutch Republic

Why then, if both the EIC and the VOC rigidly upheld their monopolies, was the EIC able to outcompete the VOC in the eighteenth century? At this point, Braudel, with a global approach,

⁹⁰ Braudel, Vol. 3, 1982, 629.

⁹¹ Braudel, Vol. 3, 1982, 629.

⁹² Braudel, vol. 3 1982, 44.

⁹³ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 228.

points to the relation between company and state, as the state had a key role in enforcing the company's monopolies in Asia. Advocating for a state monopoly capitalism, Braudel argues that the company's monopoly was a combination of the state, merchants and the area that was to be exploited.⁹⁴ Therefore, Braudel asserts that it is impossible to separate the VOC from the Dutch Republic, as Furber did. This was since the Dutch state not only created, but also guaranteed Dutch monopoly in Asia.⁹⁵ Thus, the role of the state, combined with recent technological improvements, ensured that the monopolies in Asia functioned well. At this point, Braudel differs from Furber as he puts more emphasis on the importance of European factors in the decline of the company. Furber, as a professor of Asian studies, considered himself an expert on Asia. As such, it could make sense that he focused less on the role that England and the Dutch Republic played in the development of their respective trading companies.

In the eighteenth century, Braudel asserts that the VOC was as fragile as the Portuguese and the Phoenician empires in terms of their buildup.⁹⁶ A small change in the balance between company and state could disarray the whole system that upheld the flow of Dutch Asiatic trade. This was exactly what happened to the VOC as the Dutch Republic, due to internal weaknesses, grew more absent towards meddling with the affairs of the VOC.^{97 98} However, Braudel did not explain the deteriorating communication between the Dutch state and the company in light of the decline of the Dutch Republic, as portrayed in the work of Petrus Johannes Blok. Instead, he argues that there was a clash of interests between state and company because a structural transformation occurred.⁹⁹ In the seventeenth century, there was a structural balance between *Heeren XVII* and the shareholders. Increasingly, since the establishment of the VOC, the powerful merchant families of the Dutch Republic interfered with this balance.¹⁰⁰ Not only did this process lead to a deterioration in the communication between company and state, it had also implications on the tea trade.

⁹⁴ Braudel, vol. 2, 1982, 444.

⁹⁵ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 632.

⁹⁶ Braudel, vol. 3 1982, 215.

⁹⁷ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 220.

⁹⁸ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 494.

⁹⁹ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 230.

¹⁰⁰ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 230.

4.5: The failure in the tea trade

The deterioration in the communication between state and company can be illustrated through the example of the tea trade. According to Braudel, the great expansion of the tea trade in the eighteenth century was a major innovation of significant importance to the trading companies.¹⁰¹ Unlike, Furber, Braudel argues that the VOC also engaged in the tea trade, which started already in the seventeenth century. Interestingly, Braudel argues that the tea trade was the most profitable trade that the European trading companies engaged in, in Asia.¹⁰² As the tea trade of the VOC went through Batavia, Braudel argues that the VOC remained locked in an inefficient system, as the detour through Batavia not only delayed the tea trade, but also degraded the quality of the tea.¹⁰³ The VOC lost out in the trade of commodities like textiles, silks, cottons, lacquer and Chinese porcelains because of the same reason. This outdated system was caused by the inefficient administration described above. The EIC, on the other hand, could easily outcompete the tea trade of the VOC by trading directly with China, through its trade in Canton. The fact that the EIC won the tea race, greatly benefitted to the growth of British power, as well as to the decline of Dutch power, in Asia. In this way, Braudel agrees with Furber in that the company was a static company, as it was not able to adapt to changing circumstances, because of an inefficient organization.

4.6: A fragile company

For Braudel, an inefficient organization was a major cause to the decline of the VOC. However, this outlook should be seen in a broader context that emphasizes geography and the *longue durée*. In contrast to Furber, Braudel puts more emphasis on long-term geographical aspects, which weighs heavy in his explanation to the decline of the VOC.

Putting the VOC in a broader perspective, Braudel looks at its historical context during the time of its establishment. Braudel argues that the Dutch expanded in Asia at a time and in a way that favored them. Around the time that the Dutch arrived in Asia, the Portuguese, who arrived a century before, were gradually losing the power that they held there. Thus, the Dutch seized the opportunity to expand, at the expense of both European and Asian rivals. When it comes to the geographical question, all the early colonial European powers, except for Portugal

¹⁰¹ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 222.

¹⁰² Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 222.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

and the United Provinces, focused their main attention on the Americas. The reason why the Dutch Republic succeeded in Asia, and not in the Americas, was due to an already established and sophisticated commercial network, meanwhile, in the Americas, the limited population of the Dutch Republic would have made a poor foundation for a colonial empire.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, moving in on the European scene, Braudel argues that European competition during the first decades of the VOC was low due to the Thirty-Years-War, which did not really affect the United Provinces.¹⁰⁵ In other words, Braudel asserts that Dutch success in Asia was based on skill and competence as much as on sheer luck, as the Dutch happened to be on the right place at the right time.

Increasingly, in the eighteenth century, to the detriment of the Dutch, competition increased. Competition did not only increase because of Europeans, but also because some Asian states grew more powerful.¹⁰⁶ At this point, Braudel distances himself from Wallerstein's World Systems theory, which he labels Eurocentric. Rather than describing a Dutch hegemony in Asia, Braudel argues, similar to van Leur and Furber, that the effect that the European trading companies had on Asia was limited until the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷ According to Braudel, this was because Asia outweighed Europe not only in population, but also in wealth.¹⁰⁸ At this point, Braudel, quite paradoxically, argues that the European trading companies rigidly enforced their monopolies on the indigenous population throughout Asia, without emphasizing that the companies were dependent upon cooperation with the natives, as Furber and van Leur did. Nevertheless, Braudel asserts that since the powerful Dutch position in Asia was gained through a number of coincidences, it was inevitable that the Dutch Republic and the VOC declined as the Asian world-system and its political climate changed in Asia, in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁹ Greatly contributing to its decline was an upheaval of the old routes and markets, which occurred during the eighteenth century.¹¹⁰ At this point, Braudel is indebted to Furber and Glamann.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 221.

¹⁰⁵ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 204.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁷ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 533.

¹⁰⁸ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 531.

¹⁰⁹ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 222.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹¹ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 686-687.

4.7: India vs Indonesia

Zooming in on the Asian scene, Braudel, with a geographical orientation, emphasizes the importance of India and the Indonesian Archipelago. Braudel points out that the main reason that the VOC was preserved for so long, despite all its flaws, was that it was in the fortunate position of having a monopoly in the Indonesian Archipelago. As the most profitable spices only grew on a few islands, it was very hard for rivals, both European and Asian, to disrupt the monopoly that the VOC enjoyed there.¹¹² However, Braudel contradicts himself in his last argument, made in *Civilization and Capitalism* vol. 3. Whereas, Braudel depicts the location of the Indonesian Archipelago positively in *Civilization and Capitalism* vol. 2, he wonders whether the Dutch focus on the Spice Islands was beneficial to the VOC in the end. This is because he argues that the company's focus on the Indonesian Archipelago could have deprived the VOC from the possibility of expanding in India, which, after all, had always dominated the Asian world system.¹¹³ Braudel argues that India was crucial for establishing a real empire in Asia, like the British achieved after the battle of Plassey.¹¹⁴ At this point, as an Annales School historian with a focus on the *longue durée*, it is quite peculiar that Braudel concedes to EIC historians who argue that the British empire in India was established after the battle of Plassey. However, quite paradoxically, Braudel points out that the EIC won over its European competitors in Canton, even before the establishment of its empire in India, because of its focus on India, which supplied the EIC with greater resources than the VOC could ever imagine.¹¹⁵

To illustrate the importance of India, Braudel explains that the smaller Danish and Swedish companies were more successful than the EIC, with their respective Intra-Asian trades, before Plassey. An important reason that the EIC turned out to become the most powerful trading company was that the British could combine their own forces with the formidable weight of India.¹¹⁶ In fact, the VOC had been in India since the early seventeenth century. Braudel further asserts that the territorial losses that the VOC suffered in India turned out to be as disastrous for the VOC as it was advantageous to the EIC. Thus, it is evident that Braudel placed more emphasis on geography than Furber.

¹¹² Braudel, vol. 2, 1982, 447.

¹¹³ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 498.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

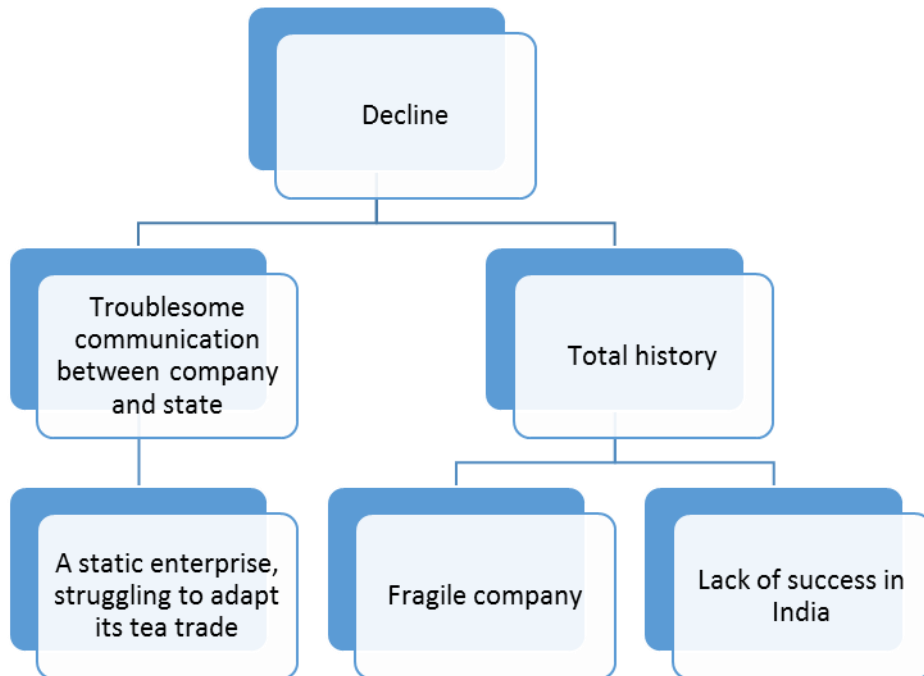
¹¹⁵ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 531.

¹¹⁶ Braudel, vol. 3, 1982, 532.

4.8: Summary

Braudel, with his Annales School approach, has attributed a wide range of factors to the decline of the VOC. Like Furber, he compares the VOC to the EIC. However, instead of explaining the decline of the company through an outdated trading strategy and a failure to allow private trade, Braudel explains the decline through a ‘total history’ approach. However, one similarity between the narratives of Furber and Braudel is their viewpoint that the VOC was a static trading company. Whereas Furber explains that the VOC was static because it rigidly upheld its monopolies, without allowing private trade, Braudel argues that the company was static because of an inefficient organization, as there was a clash of interests between state and company. Above anything else, the element of being at the right place at the right time characterizes Braudel’s narrative, as he points out that the Dutch Republic established its power in Asia at a time where there was a power vacuum in Europe, and at a time that other great European powers focused on America instead. Thus, he argues that it was inevitable that larger European countries, once these countries fully entered the Asian scene, would challenge the fragile power of the VOC, which was chartered and supported by the tiny Dutch Republic. Another cause, also geographical, is Braudel’s argument that the focus on Indonesia deprived the VOC from expansion in Asia, which, according to him, was crucial in order to control the Asian-World economy.

Figure. 5: diagram of Braudel’s explanation to the decline of the VOC.



Chapter 5: Julia Adams

5.1: A sociological approach

Primarily, Julia Adams's work on the sociological terms, patrimonial relationships and principal agent relationships is aimed at solving puzzles in contemporary politics. With patrimonial relations, Adams explains that authority is based on a strict patriarchal and hierarchal organizational structure. A system like this is hereditary and patriarchal/familial, as powerful families remain in power. With a principal-agent relationship, Adams points to the relationship between principals and their agents, to whom the principals appoint to act on their behalf. Thus, Adams explains that Great Britain, today, has some patrimonial traits as the queen inherited her power. Arguably, unlike most sociologists, Adams is of the opinion that social inquiry demands a historical approach.¹¹⁷ Therefore, her work on contemporary patrimonial politics is entrenched

¹¹⁷ Adams et.al, 2003, 30.

in her work on patrimonial politics on the European trading companies. Adams has always been fascinated by the European trading companies, and hereunder, especially by their internal mechanisms. Adams found out that the European trading companies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were of special interest to her work on patrimonial and principal-agent relationships as the consequences of these relations were crucial to the functioning of these companies, even more important than for the states that chartered the companies.

In Julia Adam's article *Principals and Agents, Colonialists and Company Men: The Decay of Colonial Control in the Dutch East Indies*, she discusses the decline of the VOC. In this work, her sociological background is evident. Adams took special interest in the Dutch East India Company, as it was the greatest European trading company, and because it was more invested in patriarchal relationships than any of the other companies. Furthermore, Adams found out that the VOC was well suited for her study on principal-agent relations as the company was more autonomous than the other European trading companies were. Another aspect, which made the VOC an interesting case study, was that the other European trading companies tried to copy the organizational setup of the VOC. Therefore, the company is of the utmost interest for the development of the global colonial system.¹¹⁸ According to Adams, the United Provinces, and later the VOC as well, were patrimonial entities, ruled by merchant families, whose power was hereditary. Furthermore, intertwined in this complex system, Adams describes how the administrators/leadership (principals) of the company and its servants (agents) functioned in a patrimonial system. The complex dynamics of both patrimonial relationships and principal-agent relationships will be explained more thoroughly later on. Adams's work on the topic was, similar to that of Furber, done through extensive archival research in multiple countries.

5.2: Collapse of the company's patrimonial chain of command

In the established historiography of the VOC, it has been acknowledged that there was a tension between various levels of authority within the company's organization. As we know, Fernand Braudel argues that the powerful merchant families in the Netherlands interfered with the delicate relationship between the Dutch East India Company and the United Provinces. Like Braudel, Adams argues that part of the reason why the VOC declined can be traced to events in the Dutch Republic, in the eighteenth century. What caused the success of the Dutch Republic in

¹¹⁸ Adams, 1996, 22.

the golden age did also lead to the success of the VOC in the same period, and what caused the decline of the Republic in the eighteenth century caused the decline of the VOC in the same period. Thus, Adams's and Braudel's outlook on the decline of the company reminds of Blok's explanation, which was that the decline of the VOC was a reflection of the decline of the Dutch republic. Therefore, it is evident that Adams has more in common with the traditional historiography than one might think at first. On the other hand, Adams was the first scholar to apply the term patrimonialism to the debate. Interestingly, she asserts that there was a strict patrimonial hierarchy in the organizational buildup of the company. Adams explains that the United Provinces and the VOC were in the pockets of the patrimonial chain of wealthy merchants since the establishment of the VOC. These merchants were the patriarchs of the elite families that ruled the United Provinces, and their main goal was to increase the influence and fortunes of their own families.

The concentration of power in the hands of an oligarchy, consisting of elite families, proved to be a formula of success in the seventeenth century. However, in the eighteenth century, the grip that these families had on both company and state became even tighter, and therefore, the arrangements of authority became more rigid and less suited to the adjustment to shifting political and economic circumstances. In this respect, Adams agrees with Braudel and her compatriot Holden Furber that the company became a static enterprise in the eighteenth century, struggling to adapt, albeit different reasons than both Furber and Braudel. However, her explanation has more in common with that of Braudel who also argues that the rich merchant families of the United Provinces interfered with the complex structure that bound company and state together. In contrast to Braudel, however, Adams stresses not merely a troublesome communication between state and company, but that a collapse of patrimonial relations, both within the Republic, within the company and between state and company occurred.¹¹⁹ The cause for this was not only the increasing power of rich merchant families or simply the sheer distance between state and company, which made communication difficult.¹²⁰ At this point, Adams assures us that the reasons for a collapse in patrimonial relations were far more complex than the reasons just mentioned. In the following paragraphs, we will take a more detailed look at how Adams explains the collapse of the company's patrimonial chain of command.

¹¹⁹ Adams, 1996, 25.

¹²⁰ Adams, 1996, 15.

5.3: Disadvantage of rendezvous

In the traditional historiography, the role of the company's rendezvous has mostly been described positively.¹²¹ Adams, however, argues that the advantages of the rendezvous were eclipsed by its disadvantages as it led to increased centralization for the VOC.¹²² Due to its centrality, Batavia had an important advantage over its principals in the Republic as well as over its lesser agents spread throughout various nodes in Asia.¹²³ In addition, Batavia's centrality was important because the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic and the lesser nodes were dependent on its cooperation. This was because the majority of merchandise and personnel that passed through the city enabled the High Government to take higher tolls than they were supposed to.¹²⁴ For the company and especially the state as a whole, Adams asserts that it was a disadvantage to have a rendezvous, as the controlling mechanisms that the Republic had towards the company were weakened. The cooperation deteriorated because the administration in Batavia often corrupted information that the Dutch Republic was supposed to receive. The consequence was that company servants increasingly formed patrimonial lineages, independent from the home country. As Adams compares the EIC to the VOC, she points out that the EIC had the advantage of not having a rendezvous. By comparing several geographical places through archival research, aided by statistical methods, Adams asserts that the decentralized nature of the EIC was beneficial.¹²⁵ At this point, even though both Furber and Adams base their research on archives from several countries, Adams criticizes Furber for looking extensively on one geographical spot, Bombay, with a narrow lens. Rather than spinning the entire company around one major node, the EIC had several important nodes, among them Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, which made it easier for England/GB to control the company because it could play off company nodes against each other.¹²⁶ By focusing on several nodes, England/GB had more influence over the EIC than the Dutch republic had over the VOC.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Adams, 1996, 220.

¹²² Adams, 1996, 21.

¹²³ Ibidem.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

¹²⁶ Adams, 1996, 20.

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

5.4: Private trade and a break of patrimonial relations

Another factor that contributed to the collapse of the patrimonial chain of command of the VOC concerns the way that Adams has seen the private trade of the company. Unlike Furber who stresses that only the EIC dealt with private trade, Adams argues that private trade was widespread through all the European trading companies.¹²⁸ Viewing the company from a social angle, Adams argues that employees of the VOC were expected to participate in a minor side trade next to the main company trade, as the company did not pay sufficient salaries to their employees.¹²⁹ In contrast to Furber, Adams argues that private trade was a side-trade that was on a small scale, financed by company servants themselves, but on company ships. Like Furber, Adams explains that private trade could be of aid to the trading companies. In Adams's case, she argues that private trade was a symbiosis as the trading company taxed the private trade of company servants. In exchange, company servants were able to enrich themselves with the support of the trading company. However, according to Adams, this was the case for the EIC, not the VOC.

Adams views the company's private trade as another cause of the collapse in patrimonial relations, because employees who dealt with private trade increasingly avoided the remittance system of the VOC in the eighteenth century. Adams explains that the trading companies were taxed through remuneration, which was the service that the trading companies offered to their servants, in order for them to receive their personal fortunes in Europe. Company servants who wanted to transfer their funds home could do so by depositing their money in the treasuries of either Batavia, Ceylon or the Cape of Good Hope, for which they would get bills of exchange that would give them back their money in the Netherlands.¹³⁰ The reason that servants could not simply take large fortunes back to Europe was because the trading companies forbade taking home private fortunes, due to the high demand for silver in Asia. Another reason was that the coin would disturb the weight of carefully calculated ballast of ships returning to Europe. Good remunerative terms included both protection and a good exchange rate.

At some point during the eighteenth century, VOC servants started to remunerate their fortunes through the EIC instead. The reason was that the VOC had limited the amount of money

¹²⁸ Adams, 1996, 23.

¹²⁹ Adams, 1996, 21.

¹³⁰ Adams, 1996, 21.

that company servants could remit through the company in order to avoid that servants exploited the system.¹³¹ As the EIC offered a better remittance, it was not strange that VOC servants used EIC services.¹³² However, in this process, the VOC lost the tax of remuneration, and VOC employees abandoned their own patrimonial chain at the expense of the VOC. In principle, Adams describes this as corruption. As already mentioned, although Adams's methods and underlying theory is quite different from that of Furber. Nevertheless, as both Furber and Adams argue that the VOC declined because of corruption, their literature is not so different after all.

5.5: Incentives

The VOC had always tried to ensure that company servants did not create patrimonial networks of their own that were independent of the United Provinces. Despite efforts by the *Heeren XVII* to send new agents to discipline older ones, the trend of company servants changing their orientation towards alternative patrimonial networks only increased in the eighteenth century, Adams asserts.¹³³ Perhaps not surprisingly, Adams, as a social historian, turned her attention to the wages of company servants. She argues that the key to avoid a breakdown in patrimonial relations to both state and company was to raise wages. Interestingly, Adams takes an economical approach as well, as she compares the wages of the VOC with contemporary reservation utility, in which wages and other incentives determine the efficiency of employee performance.¹³⁴ Only by increasing incentives, Adams argues, could company servants effectively operate for the good of the company. Unfortunately, the company was unable to do this, Adams informs us.¹³⁵ Instead, she asserts that the easiest way to halt the decline of the VOC was to provide a better remittance. Increasingly, as the VOC failed to give sufficient incentives to its company servants in the eighteenth century, it became harder to control company servants as they progressively prioritized the interests of their own family over the interests of the Dutch Republic.¹³⁶ Indonesian political patrilineages, as Adams puts it, were inevitably created by the company's own servants, resulting in a lack of commitment to the state.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Adams, 1996, 22.

¹³² Adams, 1996, 23.

¹³³ Adams, 1996, 15.

¹³⁴ Adams, 1996, 24.

¹³⁵ Adams, 1996, 26.

¹³⁶ Adams, 1996, 26.

¹³⁷ Ibidem.

Of crucial importance, Adams informs us that the patriarchal family system also applied to the elites of the VOC; in fact, this did even apply to the Governor-General himself who typically chose a friend or a family member to succeed him as Governor-General.¹³⁸ Whereas, in the seventeenth century, the Governor-General was normally elected to his post through merit, it became more common that the Governor-General, in the eighteenth century, was elected through nepotism.

5.6: Summary

Adams's explanation to the decline of the VOC evolves around patrimonialism. In short, she argues that the patrimonial relationships between principals and agents broke down within both the Republic, the company and the complex organization that bound company and state together. The change from a patrimonialism towards the families of company servants rather than towards the company itself led to lower profits, loss of military capacity as well as a lack of organizational flexibility.¹³⁹ In other words, Adams asserts that the transformation in patrimonial relations was the main cause for the decline of the company. In this respect, Adams's explanation is not so different from that of de Jonge, Blok and to a certain extent Furber, who also claimed that the company declined because of corruption. However, whereas the traditional historiography merely suggests corruption due to a lapse of morality, or in Furber's case not allowing private trade, Adams explains that corruption, or a lapse in patrimonial networks, if you will, was caused by several factors. These were the increased power of merchant families in the Dutch Republic, the sheer distance between state and company, its central system evolving around Batavia and not the least the lack of incentives that the VOC had to offer its employees, especially concerning the remuneration of private fortunes. According to Adams, the change of patrimonial relations led to the demise of the VOC. Furthermore, Adams goes so far as to say that it led to the rise of the British Empire in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁰ In this way, Adams's viewpoint is more in line with Furber than with the historians preceding him, as she includes the EIC in her outlook on the decline of the company.

Furber's main explanation to the decline of the company, in which the corruption of employees played merely a minor part, evolves around the viewpoint that the company was a

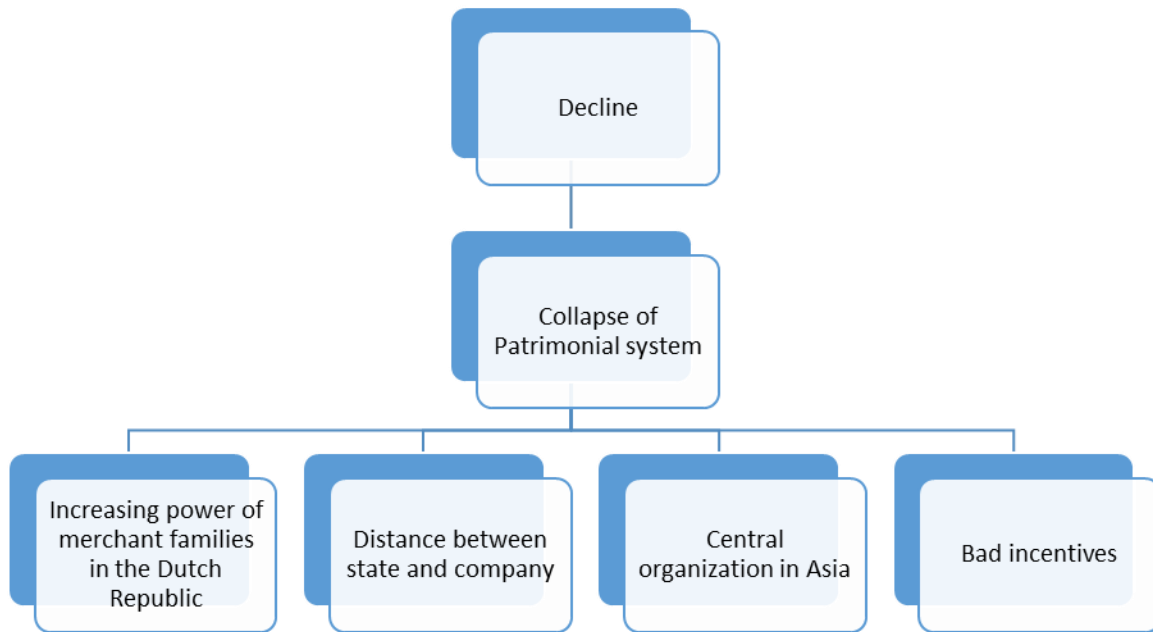
¹³⁸ Adams, 1996, 26.

¹³⁹ Adams, 1996, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Adams, 1996, 12.

static enterprise, unable to adapt to shifting trading conditions. Adams agrees with Furber on this. She argues that the breakdown in patrimonial relations made the company less flexible and unable to adapt. This is due to the deterioration of the communication within the VOC as well as between the United Provinces and the company. Furthermore, her explanation is quite similar to that of Braudel. Unlike Braudel, who stresses a deterioration in the communication between company and state, Adams puts more emphasis on a breakdown in patrimonial ties both within company, state and in between the two.

Figure 6: Diagram of Adams' explanation to the decline of the VOC.



Chapter. 6: Els Jacobs

6.1.1: *Koopman in Azie*

In *Koopman in Azie*, Jacobs gives an overly economical account of the Dutch East India Company during the eighteenth century. In her extensive project, Jacobs's objective was to give a detailed analysis of the various trading items that the VOC traded in.¹⁴¹ Therefore, Jacobs's focus was on economic exchange rather than on European expansion in Asia. This outlook also characterizes her explanation to the decline of the VOC. Jacobs's focus on trading commodities forced her to apply a broad geographical approach, however not as broad as Braudel's global approach. Nevertheless, her study on Asia is even more extensive than that of Furber and Braudel. Whereas Braudel and Furber, similar to the consensus of VOC historians, restrict themselves to archival sources on a few places, or merely one place in the case of Furber, Jacobs looked into archival resources on several locations, over a period of fifteen years. Arguably, this made her research even more extensive than that of Adams.¹⁴²

It is important to stress that Jacob's study on trading items in Asia did not come out of nowhere. Jacobs was inspired by Glamann's quantitative work on the trading commodities that the VOC dealt with. Whereas Glamann conducted a study of European trade to the East Indies, Jacobs's focus was less European-centered, as she conducted an analysis of Asiatic trade in the eighteenth century, with emphasis on Dutch sources. Furthermore, Braudel's demographic, economic and social history was also an inspiration for Jacobs's study.

6.1.2: Sociological influences in *Koopman in Asie*.

The increasing number of social historians have diversified the historiography of the VOC, which was previously dominated by political and economic historians. It must be said that social historians who cover the decline of the VOC, naturally, have an economic orientation too. However, as opposed to the old wave of social historians, the newer one was influenced by the use of quantitative methods, borrowed from the Social Sciences. With the case of Dutch expansion and decline in Asia, social history has been more on a macro scale than what normally characterizes social history. Naturally, this is because the subject deals with the decline of a commercial organization, and thus, history writing about the subject must be on a macro level,

¹⁴¹ Jacobs, 2000, 9.

¹⁴² Ibidem.

and it has to be economic, since it deals with an economical subject. In the case of Jacobs, her economical orientation is predominant throughout her literature.

Unlike Furber, Jacobs can be categorized among the new wave of social historians. After 15 years of work, Els Jacobs finished her impressive study on the maritime trade of the VOC in 2000. Jacobs was influenced by new developments within quantitative methods from the US and Great Britain, which transformed economic, political as well as demographic research.¹⁴³ The increase in quantitative methods coincided with the advent of the social sciences and computers.¹⁴⁴ With regards to the advent of computers, Jacobs decided to stick to traditional methods, as she argued that it would take too much time and energy to learn/make a computer program for her statistical research.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, by applying quantitative methods in the bookkeeping records of the VOC, Jacobs was able to compare the profitability of all the trading commodities that the VOC engaged in, something that no one had done before her. Subsequently, Jacobs's research led to a deeper insight into the history of the VOC, especially towards its decline, as she specialized on the eighteenth century, the century in which the VOC declined.

6.2.1: From static to flexible

According to Holden Furber, as the VOC supported an outdated monopoly system, the company was unable to compete with the up-and-coming private trade, and even more importantly, it was unable to adjust to the shift in consumption patterns. Consequently, Furber describes the VOC as a static enterprise, locked up in an outdated policy that had become inefficient, and characterized by corruption. Furber is not the only historian who argued that the VOC declined under the weight of tradition. In fact, until quite recently, the consensus of historians have argued this. On this point, Jacobs, half-jokingly, states that the abbreviation VOC has almost become more known as “vergaan onder corruptie”/ “declined because of corruption” than what it actually stands for.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Iggers, 2005 87.

¹⁴⁴ Bogue, 1990, 89.

¹⁴⁵ Jacobs, 2000, 224.

¹⁴⁶ Jacobs, 2000, 17.

Already before the publication of *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, Kristof Glamann, in 1958, challenged the old view that the VOC was a static enterprise.¹⁴⁷ However, Glamann's narrative on the decline of the VOC barely touches the surface of the topic. Adopting Glamann's viewpoint of the company as a flexible enterprise, Els Jacobs gave a more extensive explanation to the decline of the VOC. Like Braudel, Jacobs argues that corruption was not a cause for decline; she even went as far as stating that there was no corruption in the company.¹⁴⁸ Jacobs has criticized VOC historians, like Furber, who have attributed corruption and bad leadership as the main causes for the decline of the company for viewing the history of the company through a twentieth-century angle.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, she criticizes the mainstream of these historians for explaining the company's demise internally through a Dutch or European perspective, in which an emphasis on the Asian World-System with its traders is absent. At this point, she has also criticized historians like Braudel and Adams for putting too much emphasis on the European scene in their respective explanation to the decline of the VOC, in what Jacobs describes as Eurocentric. As Jacobs increasingly implemented Asian aspects into the narrative of the decline of the VOC, she manages to depict a company that is merely a tiny puzzle in a huge Asian trading world, which is in constant change. In this way, as will be explained more thoroughly in the following paragraphs, Jacobs explains that the company was not a static enterprise.

6.2.2: The trade of spices

Els Jacobs, while acknowledging that the VOC did not completely neglect new changes in consumption patterns, stresses that the company still obtained high profits in the spice trade, because its monopoly there stayed intact for a long time.¹⁵⁰ Although it might look like it, Jacobs's interpretation is not similar to the old viewpoint, established among VOC historians, that the company was a static organization, holding on to the spice trade. Pragmatically, Jacobs states that if the company's monopoly in the spice trade had become unprofitable in the eighteenth century, an increased focus on other trading commodities would have been chosen.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, she points out that the Spice trade remained closed off to competitors until the end

¹⁴⁷ Gaastra, 1992, 137.

¹⁴⁸ Jacobs, 200, 218.

¹⁴⁹ Jacobs, 2000, 218.

¹⁵⁰ Jacobs, 2000, 216.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

of the company's existence.¹⁵² Similar to Braudel, Jacobs argues that the reason for this was that it took a very long time for the spices to harvest, and that the spices were located on a few island which the VOC had full control of.¹⁵³ Jacobs admits that the spice trade became less profitable because of the shift in consumer demand, however, in contrast to Glamann and Furber that it, nevertheless, brought in the greatest income of the various commodities that the company traded in until the very end. Jacobs also breaks with Braudel, who questions whether the Dutch focus on spices in the Indonesian Archipelago, despite its success, was on the extent of Dutch expansion in India. Thus, Jacobs's interpretation is unique in that it stands apart from the interpretations of both old and new generations of VOC historians.¹⁵⁴

Even though, the spice trade remained profitable towards the end of the eighteenth century, Jacobs argues that spices was not the only option that the company had of generating profits. She clarifies that the company dealt with a large number of less profitable commodities as well.¹⁵⁵ In fact, the company even led the race for tea and textiles until around 1760.¹⁵⁶ At this point, Jacobs concedes to Furber and Braudel that the VOC lost its domination of tea and textiles to the EIC, a development which led to reduced profits.¹⁵⁷ However, in contrast to Braudel and Furber, who are quiet about this, the company managed to expand its trade to the coffee and sugar industry instead, which made good the profits that the company lost in the tea-and textile trade.¹⁵⁸ As Jacobs even argues that the VOC adjusted to these commodities as it saw fit, it seems more convincing that she breaks with the traditional viewpoint that the VOC was a static trading company. Nevertheless, from start to end, spices remained the most important commodity.¹⁵⁹

6.3.1: Eurocentric criticism

It is interesting to see how Eurocentric traits of the historians in this paper affect their viewpoints on the decline of the VOC. Jacobs agrees with Furber and Braudel that the power that Europeans asserted over Asians was limited. However, in the case of Furber, he has quite a European-

¹⁵² Jacobs, 2000, 36.

¹⁵³ Jacobs, 2000, 36.

¹⁵⁴ Jacobs, 2000, 38.

¹⁵⁵ Jacobs, 2000, 37.

¹⁵⁶ Jacobs, 2000, 212.

¹⁵⁷ Jacobs, 2000, 215.

¹⁵⁸ Jacobs, 2000, 219.

¹⁵⁹ Jacobs, 2000, 36.

centered view as he mostly neglects the Asian side of the story in his narrative on the VOC. Braudel, in line with the majority of VOC historians, argues that the VOC enforced a certain rule over the indigenous population in certain areas. Jacobs argues that this was not the case for the VOC, although, the EIC, after the battle of Plassey, gained a powerful position which enabled it to enforce a certain authority, over not only the indigenous population, but also over the VOC in some places. At this point, it is not easy to decide which of these historians are Eurocentric. Arguably, that question depends on perspective. Jacobs, for instance, has been criticized for whitewashing the atrocities, which the Dutch committed against the inhabitants of the Indonesian Archipelago.¹⁶⁰ In response, Jacobs has defended herself by stating that most historians did not treat the Asians as formidable trading partners and rivals, but as innocent and ignorant sheep that were dominated over by the VOC. Thus, Jacobs criticized historians like Braudel, for taking a Eurocentric viewpoint, in which wolves ruled over sheep. In this image, Jacobs regarded the native population to be sheep and the Europeans to be wolves.

It is clear that Jacobs, like Furber and Braudel criticizes Eurocentric history of Asia in the eighteenth century. However, it is important to keep in mind that Jacobs portrays an economic history of exchanges between Europeans and Asians rather than a history of European overseas expansion as Furber and Braudel do. Hence, one can say that Jacobs's narrative is less Eurocentric than that of Furber and Braudel, as it was not her main goal to uncover European trade and expansion in Asia. Instead, Jacobs sought to analyze trade in the eighteenth century from an overly Asian perspective, making her less European-centered. In her study, she mentions the role of native merchants, farmers and rulers as often as she mentions the role of European merchants or administrators. In opposition to Furber and Braudel, Jacobs breaks with the tradition of viewing Asia through a European perspective. This is despite the lack of Asian source material in her study. The reason why Jacobs restricts herself to the VOC is simple; she is a Dutch historian and the archival resources of the VOC are among the most extensive records of trading items in Asia in the eighteenth century.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Gaastra, 2008, 163.

¹⁶¹ Jacobs, 2000, 18.

6.3.2: The natives

Jacobs's viewpoint towards the natives has clearly affected her interpretation of the decline of the VOC, as we will see later. Inspired by van Leur, Jacobs has aided the historiography on this matter, based on extensive research, with new quantitative methods. Consequently, she criticizes the consensus of VOC historians, including Furber and Braudel, for portraying a Eurocentric history. Reflecting a movement, in the wake of the cultural turn, in which a growing number of historians of European overseas expansion have paid attention to the native side, Jacobs stresses that Europeans and Asians were equally developed in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, she points out that our understanding of the trading contracts that were written between the VOC and the natives is crucial in our understanding of how trade developed between the two. Whereas historians like van Leur, Furber and Jacobs, herself, interpret these trading contracts as proof of equal partnership between the VOC and the natives, the majority of VOC historians, among them Braudel, argue that the natives were tricked into signing contracts that were mostly or purely beneficial to Europeans.¹⁶²

In light of Jacobs's viewpoint towards the natives, she has been more concerned with commercial aspects of the company than most VOC historians. Hereunder, she has criticized the consensus for focusing too much on political aspects of the company, in which "the thunder of cannon fire and gunpowder" dominates the story.¹⁶³ Instead, Jacobs argues that the use of violence had been efficient in establishing the monopoly, but it would only lead to a reduced income in the long term.¹⁶⁴ In this way, in contrast to Braudel, she argues that the VOC only used violence as a last resort, simply because the company was unable to enforce it on a regular basis.¹⁶⁵ Thereafter, the company's success relied more on efficient organization, fast ships and the maintenance of a stable political climate.¹⁶⁶ At this point Jacobs was inspired by Furber's concept of an "Age of Partnership" as well. Unlike Furber, Jacobs applies the term to the VOC as well as to the EIC. However, what makes Jacobs's literature so different from that of Furber, as well as from Braudel, is her portrayal of the VOC as a tiny new force that had to find its way in a sophisticated and well-developed Asian economy, and more so by diplomacy than by force.

¹⁶² Jacobs, 2000, 216.

¹⁶³ Jacobs, 2000, 10.

¹⁶⁴ Jacobs, 2000, 213.

¹⁶⁵ Jacobs, 2000, 41.

¹⁶⁶ Jacobs, 2000, 213.

This could also be seen in context of Jacobs's focus on new social history, in which the cultural turn took a central place.

6.3.3: Monopoly & the natives

Like Furber, Braudel and Adams before her, Jacobs argues that the VOC upheld a strict grip on its monopolies.¹⁶⁷ Unlike these authors, Jacobs argue that the company's expenses of maintaining the monopoly did not outgrow its profits, as she argues that the costs of maintaining the monopoly system did not cost more than a third of the income from the spice trade.¹⁶⁸ At this point, Jacobs is on the same page as Braudel. Like Braudel, Jacobs asserts that it was necessary to uphold a firm grip on the monopolies of the company in order to keep the company afloat.¹⁶⁹ However, unlike Braudel, Jacobs makes clear that a monopoly could only work if there was cooperation with the native population. Naturally, as Jacobs stresses the limited impact that the Dutch had on Asia, she argues that the VOC did not enforce an absolute monopoly on the Asian population. In contrast to Furber and Braudel, Jacobs argues that the VOC made many compromises with Asian rulers in order to uphold their monopolies.¹⁷⁰ As follows, unlike, Braudel and Adams, Jacobs asserts that the Dutch monopoly system did not harm the indigenous population. Furthermore, the fact that Jacobs argues that half of the yields in the Spice Islands were traded with other European trading companies makes it quite peculiar why Jacobs decides to label the Dutch-Asiatic trading system, in many areas, as monopolies in the first place. Consequently, with the exception of the establishment of the company, Jacobs argues that there was not much violence in the era of the Dutch East India Company.¹⁷¹ Thus, Jacobs argues that the VOC was a flexible enterprise, as it succeeded in adapting its monopoly system to the natives.

6.4:1 Asian upheavals

In the previous pages, we have seen how Jacobs disagrees with Furbers's and Braudel's statement that the VOC was a static enterprise, which declined because of the weight of tradition. We have also seen how Jacobs's focus on the natives is central with regards to her argument that

¹⁶⁷ Jacobs, 2000, 209.

¹⁶⁸ Jacobs, 2000, 210.

¹⁶⁹ Jacobs, 2000, 221.

¹⁷⁰ Jacobs, 2000, 213.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem.

the VOC was a flexible enterprise, capable of adjusting to shifting circumstances. In the following pages, we will see how Jacobs explains the decline of the VOC. At this juncture, we will see that the themes that we have looked upon, previously, are central to her explanation. What makes Jacobs' explanation so unique is her focus on external causes.

According to Jacobs, a direct cause for the decline of the VOC, with its loci in Asia, were the turbulent upheavals and conflicts that occurred throughout the eighteenth century in India, the Malay Archipelago, Persia and Yemen.¹⁷² A byproduct of internal conflicts, especially the ones in the Indonesian Archipelago, was an increase of pirate and smuggling activity right under the nose of the VOC.¹⁷³ Meanwhile, in Ceylon, the king of Kandy rebelled against VOC rule, demanding a huge amount of resources from the company. Furthermore, the trade of the company got disturbed as trading routes in Persia and Yemen collapsed due to civil wars. However, perhaps most damaging was the decision of the Shogun of Japan to ban the export of silver from Japan, removing the means for the company to gain access to cheap silver, which was crucial in its Intra-Asian trade.¹⁷⁴

Despite the company's ability to adapt, these upheavals weigh heavy in the decline of the company, as the VOC was more entrenched in the trading world of Asia than any of the other companies. The Intra Asian trade of the VOC, as described in chapter 2, illustrates how entrenched the VOC was in the Asian trading world. To exemplify this, Jacobs explains that spices from the Spice Islands could typically be traded for textiles in India; and the textiles would then be traded for silver in Japan; thereafter silver from Japan was used to buy silk in China, and eventually the silk would be sold in Europe. In the wake of these upheavals, there was a deterioration in the cooperation between indigenous rulers and the company, as new contracts had to be made. Although, the "Asian upheaval argument" is quite similar to Braudel's "fragile company argument", Jacobs disagrees with Braudel's statement that the company was static. According to Jacobs, the VOC, like the other European trading companies, did not have a strong position in Asia. Thus, Jacobs agrees with Braudel that the VOC was a fragile organization, but in contrast to Braudel, Jacobs explains that it was flexible compared to the other trading companies. When it comes to Jacobs's argument that Europeans did not have a

¹⁷² Jacobs, 2000, 214.

¹⁷³ Jacobs, 2000, 214.

¹⁷⁴ Jacobs, 2000, 215.

strong position in Asia, she makes an exception for the EIC, after the battle of Plassey.¹⁷⁵ Consequently, Jacobs has the opposite viewpoint as Furber, who explains that the trade between the EIC and the natives was a peaceful and mutually benefitting trade, and that the VOC was interlocked in a violent struggle with the natives, which was doomed to lead to the decline of the company, because of its strict enforcement of the monopoly-system.

6.4.2: Competitiveness of Asian traders

Els Jacobs's stance towards the natives does not only imply that the VOC was unable to enforce military means towards them; she also argues that the company was locked in a continuous economical struggle in which the VOC had to compete with Asian merchants. At this point, Jacobs breaks with the established historiography that Europeans were superior over Asians by arguing that native merchants proved to be as much of a threat to the VOC as the company's European adversaries.¹⁷⁶ For instance, whereas the consensus of VOC historians stress the superiority of Dutch ships over Asian ones, Jacobs argues that the smaller boats that the Asian merchants used were advantageous in the Indonesian Archipelago because they could easily avoid the larger Dutch *fluyts* by hiding in narrow and shallow straits and bays.¹⁷⁷ Jacobs even states that the company's monopoly in Indonesia was open to native traders at some spots.¹⁷⁸ Besides, Jacobs argues that Asian merchants were more successful in adjusting to supply and demand in the Asian markets.¹⁷⁹

6.4.3: British Competition

In spite of Jacobs' emphasize on native elements in the decline of the company, which weigh heavy, she has to yield to Furber and Braudel that British competition contributed to its decline. As the element of native competition applied to the other European trading companies as well, Jacobs rejects that native competition in itself could have caused the decline of the company. However, as British free traders teamed up with native merchants, they formed a much larger threat.¹⁸⁰ The reason that indigenous merchants teamed up with the EIC was that the VOC, to the envy of its enemies, was the most powerful European trading company, until quite late in the

¹⁷⁵ Jacobs, 2000, 109.

¹⁷⁶ Jacobs, 2000, 67.

¹⁷⁷ Jacobs, 2000, 67.

¹⁷⁸ Jacobs, 2000, 214.

¹⁷⁹ Jacobs, 2000, 73.

¹⁸⁰ Jacobs, 2000, 111.

eighteenth century. As mentioned before, thanks to a flexible management, the VOC found ways to deal with the shift of consumption patterns.

Asian competition was in itself damaging to the European trading companies. However, conjoined with British competition, it became even more damaging to the VOC. The consequence for the company was reduced profits towards the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, the company managed to limit some of the damage by generating more income from toll, as indigenous and British free traders came to VOC areas.¹⁸² Nevertheless, the company's profits declined steadily as competition increased. In this way, despite Jacobs's criticism of VOC historians who overemphasize European elements in the decline of the VOC, she yields to Braudel that the EIC, with the weight of India, greatly contributed to the decline of the VOC. Consequently, Jacobs argues that even for the VOC, the combination of Asian upheavals and the competition of indigenous merchants and British free traders was too much to bear.¹⁸³ Concerning Jacobs's argument that Europeans and Asians were on the same level, the EIC was the exception, as the EIC was more powerful than the other European trading companies were. Although, as mentioned, the EIC did not become the dominant power in Asia until mid-eighteenth century, in fact after the battle of Plassey in 1757. Implied in Jacobs's viewpoint was that the VOC never became dominant over the indigenous population. In fact, Jacobs asserts that the VOC became subordinate to the EIC in India at the same extent as the natives after the battle of Plassey.¹⁸⁴

6.5: The impact of wars

Furber and Braudel argue that the decline of the company was imminent already at the start of the eighteenth century. Jacobs, on the other hand, argues that the VOC was at the height of its power in 1750.¹⁸⁵ Shortly after this, the decline set in.¹⁸⁶ Unlike Furber and Braudel, Jacobs argues that the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War accelerated the decline, which was already imminent.¹⁸⁷ However, in contrast to Furber, Braudel and the consensus of VOC historians, Jacobs argues that

¹⁸¹ Jacobs, 2000, 215.

¹⁸² Jacobs, 2000, 216.

¹⁸³ Jacobs, 2000, 221.

¹⁸⁴ Jacobs, 2000, 109.

¹⁸⁵ Jacobs, 2000, 220.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁷ Jacobs, 2000, 221.

the decline of the company set in late. It is interesting how Jacobs argues that the VOC was a flexible enterprise, which nevertheless, succumbed because of a changing environment with increasing political and economic competition. This was not only because of the explosive combination of native and British merchants that economically challenged the company's monopoly. It was also due to the wars that the company was engaged in towards the end of the century. Jacobs even goes as far as stating that the decline of the company was inevitable; even if the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War had not taken place, the company would have ended in 1795 anyway, as Napoleonic France invaded and occupied the United Provinces.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, warfare with the indigenous population also increased towards the end of the eighteenth century, with the rebellion in Ceylon as merely one out of many conflicts that the company was involved in.

Thus, we see that Jacobs differs from Furber, Braudel and Adams as she puts more emphasis on political factors in the decline of the company. Ironically, she devotes few pages to this, as her main work is a survey of the trading commodities that the VOC dealt with in the eighteenth century. Throughout her work, Jacobs uses elements of an Annales School methodology. Hereunder, Jacobs is merely one among several Dutch historians who was inspired by the Annales School. The Annales School, as the main driving force within European historiography in the 20th century, inspired a broad range of Dutch historians.¹⁸⁹ In fact, it was so influential that the Annales School oriented "center for the history of European expansion" was founded at the University of Leiden in 1974, in Leiden. The center, borrowing ideas and methods from the Annales School, especially as it appeared in the works of Braudel, encouraged a comparative history that focused on the *longue durée* rather than the *histoire événementielle*, as it used to do of (pre) colonial history in Asia. Thus, it is evident that the Annales School has been, and still is, an important movement among historians of the VOC. However, in the case of Jacobs' literature, the pages that are devoted to the role that political events played in the decline of the VOC breaks with an Annales School methodology, as one of their main goals was to avoid political history and the history of events.

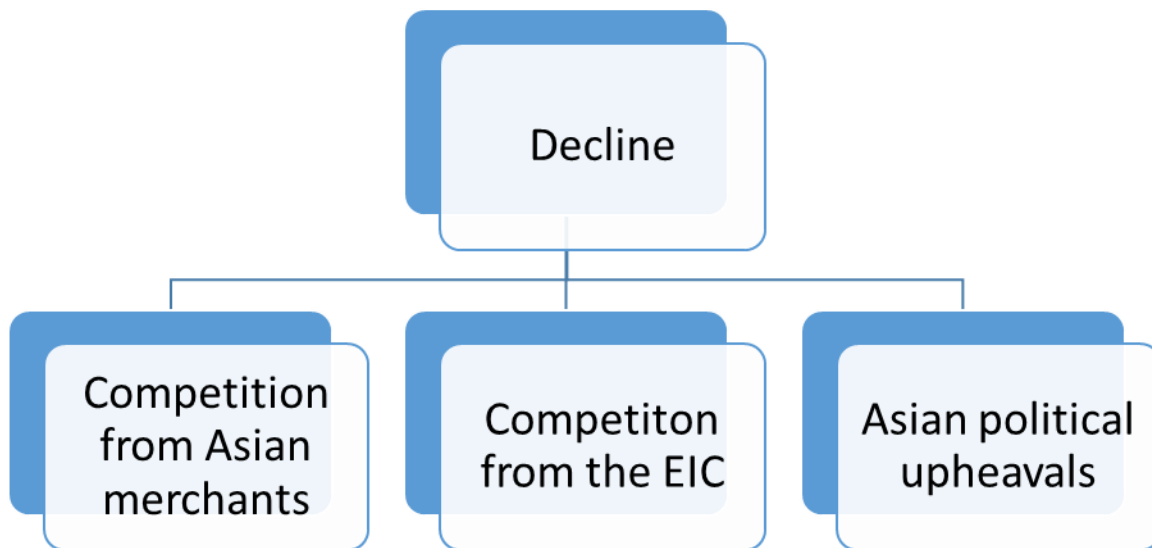
¹⁸⁸ Jacobs, 2000, 222.

¹⁸⁹ Disney, 1995, 182.

6.6: Summary

With Jacobs' economic focus on the trading commodities that the VOC dealt with in the eighteenth century, she provides new insights into the historiography of the decline of the VOC, as nobody had done an extensive quantitative study of the commodities that the VOC dealt with before her. Consequently, in contrast to Furber, Braudel and Adams, her most important finding from this study is her argument that the VOC was a flexible enterprise, which was able to trade with the natives and able to adjust to the shift in consumer demands. Furthermore, Jacobs, more than Furber and Braudel, focuses on the Asian trading world. Thus, she argues that the turbulent political upheavals throughout Asia affected the VOC because it was more entrenched in Asia than the other European companies were. Even more damaging to the company was the political and economic competition it received from the natives and from the British. In the end, the combination of the political upheavals that occurred, together with native and British economic and political competition was too much to bear for the company.

Figure. 7:



Chapter 7: Chris Nierstrasz

7.1: In the shadow of the company

With the release of his PhD thesis *In the Shadow of the Company. The Dutch East India Company and its Servants in the period of its Decline (1740-1796)*, Chris Nierstrasz challenged several arguments in the established historiography of the decline of the VOC. As Nierstrasz wrote this book as part of the TANAP project, Nierstrasz sought to portray a more global and complete history of the VOC. The TANAP project, established in 1998 by Unicef, is a project in which Dutch, South-African and Asian historians cooperate, in order to portray a more global history of the VOC.¹⁹⁰ Many of the historians in this project are from countries, where the VOC was active. The goal of the project was to further, diminish the writing of a Eurocentric history, by giving Asian and South African historians access to Dutch archives, at the same time as Dutch historians got more access to Asian and South African archives. As a result, Nierstrasz had access to more information than VOC historians had previously.

7.2: Annales School

In order to analyze Nierstrasz's work on the decline of the VOC, it is beneficial to analyze his historiographical methods and influences in relation to some of the other historians central for this paper. Nierstrasz's stay in France, with professor Haudrère, who also applied an Annales School approach in his work on the trading companies in Asia, formed Nierstrasz's methodology, in advance of his first work *In the Shadow of the Company*.¹⁹¹ In fact, an Annales

¹⁹⁰ Nierstrasz, 2012, 1.

¹⁹¹ This information was obtained through personal correspondence with Nierstrasz himself.

School approach has been widespread among VOC historians, in the wake of Braudel's work on the VOC. This is evident in this paper, as not only Braudel, but also Jacobs has elements of an Annales School methodology in her work. However, one should remember that an Annales School approach is not as remarkable as it used to be, as a large number of historians have elements of it in their historiography, not necessarily in the sense of viewing long-term structural changes, but in terms of portraying a broad and encompassing history. Hereunder, the reader should know that an Annales School methodology is a somewhat vague term to apply to contemporary historians, as traits that used to be characteristic for the Annales School are now considered normal in many historical genres. For example, the combination of two, previously separate, fields, economic and social history, characterizes the narratives of all the historians central for this paper. Nevertheless, both Jacobs and Nierstrasz found much of their inspiration in the works of Fernand Braudel.

7.3: A Global Approach

What has been less common among VOC historians is a global approach. In this respect, Braudel and Nierstrasz stand out from the rest of the historiography. 30 years after Braudel's release of *Perspectives of the World*, Nierstrasz, like Braudel, portrayed the history of the VOC through a global approach. The way that global history often works, through integration and difference, is apparent in Nierstrasz's literature, as he describes how differences in the world market, in certain commodities, made the early modern world more intertwined, and on a much smaller scale affected the economy of the VOC. In contrast, the narratives of Furber and Jacobs are restricted to a regional Asian approach. In *Rivalry for Trade in Tea and Textiles*, Nierstrasz was inspired by Jacobs's extensive study, through statistical methods, of the merchandize that the company dealt with. Jacobs, however, never applied these statistics on a global scale. Nierstrasz, however, succeeded in what Jacobs failed in, by partly basing his work on Jacobs's thick statistical data, which was quite suitable for a global study.

Adams, successfully, incorporating both the European and the Asian scene in her narrative, has a somewhat more global approach, yet not on the same level as Braudel and Nierstrasz. In contrast to Adams, Braudel and Nierstrasz have focused on more than two continents, and not only included European aspects in the decline of the VOC. Braudel and Nierstrasz both wanted to portray the VOC in relation to the rest of the World, not only because the company ruled over a vast geographical area, spread out over three continents, but also

because an approach like this fosters a less Eurocentric and nationalistic portrayal of the VOC, which Nierstrasz still deems is a problem today.¹⁹² ¹⁹³ Furthermore, Nierstrasz argues that a comparative viewpoint should not only be taken towards other international players, but also internally within the company's own nodes, as too much focus on the Indonesian Archipelago has been a recurrent problem throughout the historiography of the VOC.¹⁹⁴ In order to solve this problem, Nierstrasz argues that a global approach is necessary.¹⁹⁵

7.4: The expansion of sources

Not only have European historians neglected the Asian side of the story, Asian historians, although able to describe Asian factors very well, have also, often, neglected the European impact on Asian society.¹⁹⁶ This is why, recently, Dutch and Asian historians cooperated, in the TANAP-project, to write a more coherent history of the VOC, in which Asian historians write their own history, instead of European scholars working on Asia. In the end, extending his horizon further than to that of the VOC, Nierstrasz points out that this is not only a debate in the historiography on the VOC; it is a debate in the historiography of European expansion in Asia. Understanding this debate also provides important insights into how historians have understood the VOC.¹⁹⁷

For European historians like the ones central in this paper, Asian sources would have given a better insight into the decline of the company, as it had and still has deep roots in Asia. What stands in the way of achieving this is increased cooperation between Asian and European historians and linguistic barriers. At this point, Nierstrasz admits that his inability to go into Asian archives has limited his possibilities. However, as a member of the TANAP project, Nierstrasz had the benefit of exchanging knowledge with historians who used Asian source material, as one of the main goals for the project was increased cooperation between Asian and European historians. As a result, Nierstrasz had an advantage over Furber, Braudel, Adams and Jacobs. This was also beneficial for Nierstrasz's portrayal of the VOC in a global light. In this manner, Nierstrasz points out that the history of the VOC has been Eurocentric, not in terms of

¹⁹² Ibidem.

¹⁹³ Nierstrasz, 2015, 4.

¹⁹⁴ Nierstrasz, 2012, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁶ Nierstrasz, 2012, 21.

¹⁹⁷ Nierstrasz, 2012, 15.

portraying a European dominance over the Asian population, as most historians did, or the opposite, stressing a peaceful cooperation between Europeans and Asians as Furber and Jacobs did, but rather in terms of the sources that were applied.

When it comes to his archival research, Nierstrasz, similar to Furber and Braudel, had the advantage of mastering several languages. The fact that he is fluent in English, Dutch and French has enabled him to do quite an extensive research, as many archives on the VOC are in these three languages. For instance, one of Nierstrasz's main sources on private trade was based on French letters written by a Dutch governor of Ceylon, Lubbert Jan van Eck (1719-1765). Concerning Nierstrasz's viewpoint on private trade, his definition of private trade resembles both Holden Furber's and Julia Adams' definition of private trade. However, not merely restricting it to a large-scale trade on privately owned ships, as Furber does, or to a small-scale trade, like Adams, Nierstrasz argues that private trade was both small and large scale.

7.5: Imperfect monopolies

As mentioned, Fernand Braudel, and his Annales School methodology was an important driving force and inspiration for Nierstrasz's work on the VOC. However, Holden Furber, whose methodology was narrative, descriptive and regional, rather than structural and global, was, perhaps, even more important to Nierstrasz than Braudel. Especially Furber's comparative angle was appealing to Nierstrasz. This is also evident in their respective works as they both portray an extensive comparison between the VOC and the EIC. Like Furber, Nierstrasz emphasized the importance of private trade for the trading companies. However, Nierstrasz does not agree with all of Furber's ideas. Even though the company wanted to pursue a monopoly, Nierstrasz argues that it never really could do this efficiently as the problem was that several trading companies attempted to enforce monopolies, making the competition too tough.¹⁹⁸ In this way, unlike Furber, Nierstrasz argues that the VOC dealt with private trade on the same level as the EIC. Unlike Furber, Nierstrasz does not agree that the VOC and the EIC had a different trading strategy. Also different from Furber who stresses that the VOC, rigidly, upheld a closed off and inefficient trading monopoly, Nierstrasz argues that both the VOC and the EIC followed the same goal: to constantly look for the perfect balance between monopoly and private trade.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Nierstrasz, 2015, 21.

¹⁹⁹ Nierstrasz. 2015, 39.

As Nierstrasz argues that both the EIC and the VOC juggled monopoly and private trade, he came up with the term “imperfect monopoly”, arguing that every monopoly was imperfect and that the Dutch monopoly system in Asia was more “perfect” than the British one.²⁰⁰ In this manner, Nierstrasz stressed that a weak monopoly often led to increased private trading, because private trade had to substitute for company trade. The fact that private trade was less widespread in a strong company like the VOC is quite understandable to Nierstrasz, as the company had a better grip on its monopolies.²⁰¹ In contrast, the EIC did not have much of a choice in allowing private trade, as it operated on a smaller base than the VOC. Too much company trade was too expensive for a trading company in the end, even for the VOC. On the other hand, too much freedom to employees could lead to corruption.²⁰² Unlike Furber who argues that the VOC had to deal with corruption, Nierstrasz, asserts that employees in both companies engaged in corrupt activities.²⁰³ Furthermore, Nierstrasz reminds us that private trade was only profitable if it was in the interest of the company.²⁰⁴ If it was, the company’s monopoly and private trade strengthened each other.²⁰⁵ At this point, Nierstrasz differs with Furber, as Furber explains the success of the EIC, almost, purely through the freedom that its servants enjoyed.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, Nierstrasz argues that the private trade of neither the VOC nor the EIC should be seen at odds with their respective company trade. Private trade merely supplemented company trade.²⁰⁷

7.6: Private trade & commodities

In his newest book *Rivalry in Tea and Textiles*, based on his earlier work *In the Shadow of the Company*, Nierstrasz does not only stress the company’s flexibility in terms of its private trade, but also its adaptability towards consumer demands. As Nierstrasz wrote this book as part of Maxine Berg’s Asian Centuries Project, at the University of Warwick, he was preoccupied with portraying a new global history of Eurasian trade. In addition, influenced by the TANAP project, Nierstrasz was able to provide a new picture of how the consumer revolution affected the VOC in the eighteenth century.

²⁰⁰ Nierstrasz, 2015, 38.

²⁰¹ Nierstrasz, 2012, 234.

²⁰² Nierstrasz, 2012, 235.

²⁰³ Nierstrasz, 2012, 10.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem.

²⁰⁵ Nierstrasz, 2012, 153.

²⁰⁶ Nierstrasz, 2012, 190.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem.

Subordinate to the discussion on the company's adaptability towards change in the eighteenth century is an investigation of the commodities that the VOC dealt with. When analyzing the impact that the consumer revolution had on the decline of the VOC, it is appropriate to take a closer look at the consumer revolution in a broader historical context. It is important not to forget that the consumer revolution was an international phenomenon, which affected a great number of countries, all over the world, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Arguably, the most important commodities of the eighteenth century, tea and textiles, played a part in the disruptions of the known world, such as the British conquest of India, the American Revolution, as well as the Industrial Revolution.²⁰⁸

Concerning the consumer revolution, Nierstrasz points out that there are two predominant viewpoints. Nierstrasz categorizes himself and Furber as historians of consumption. This means that both Nierstrasz and Furber argue that colonial wares were consumed widely, even among the poor, in the Dutch Republic as well as in Great Britain, in what has been called the birth of consumer society.²⁰⁹ Consequently, Nierstrasz has, similar to Furber, attributed more significance to the increased consumer demand for commodities like tea and textiles. In contrast, Braudel and Jacobs saw commodities like tea and textiles as a luxury for the elite on the same line as spices.²¹⁰ Adams, on the other hand, has not mentioned the consumer revolution in her work.

As both Furber and Nierstrasz point out that the trade of tea and textiles was more important than that of any other commodity, they have focused their main attention on these commodities. As Furber argues that the VOC upheld a rigid monopoly, he depicts the strategy of the VOC as backward. At this point, Nierstrasz criticizes Furber for adopting a simplistic national stereotyping from British historians, in which the British were seen through a lens, characterized by a British superiority of later times.²¹¹

Rather than seeing the spice trade as a Dutch trade, and the tea and textile trade as British, Nierstrasz argues that both companies participated in every commodity and constantly adapted their commercial policies as supply and demand changed over time. This way,

²⁰⁸ Nierstrasz, 2015, 190.

²⁰⁹ Nierstrasz, 2015, 10.

²¹⁰ Jacobs, 1992, 15.

²¹¹ Nierstrasz, 2015, 67.

Nierstrasz appears to have a less static view than Furber.²¹² In contrast to Furber, Nierstrasz claims that the EIC followed a similar strategy as the VOC did, not only about balancing company and private trade, but also about the adjustment to new commodities as they saw fit. Thus, trading companies, normally, made rational decisions whether they wanted to allow private trade or not, depending on whether the company viewed it as profitable or not. Consequently, it was normal that private trade was allowed in areas or in commodities that the company was less interested in.²¹³ Putting the struggle for commodities in a global perspective, Nierstrasz argues that the commodities that the VOC dealt with were merely part of a broader world economy. In this way, unlike Furber, with a global perspective, Nierstrasz has produced a significant contribution towards the discussion whether the VOC was a static or flexible enterprise. The conclusion that Nierstrasz arrives at is that the VOC was a flexible company that continuously adapted to consumer demands, mostly to the Asian World-economy, but also to Europe, and even the Americas.²¹⁴ Thus, among the historians central for this paper, only Jacobs and Nierstrasz are of the opinion that the VOC managed to adjust to the commodity revolution.

7.7: The rules changed

So far, in this chapter, we have seen how Nierstrasz has argued that the strategies and goals towards trade in the VOC and the EIC were quite similar. Both trading companies balanced company and private trade, and both companies continuously adjusted to new commodities as they saw fit. Why then, did the VOC decline? We have seen how Nierstrasz breaks with much of the established historiography on the decline of the VOC; however, one explanation remains. Nierstrasz does not completely dismiss the age-old argument, already claimed by scholars like Blok, that the VOC declined as a result of the Dutch Republic's decline, a viewpoint that Els Jacobs labels as Eurocentric.²¹⁵ However, rather than viewing the decline of the VOC as a direct consequence of the decline of the United Provinces, Nierstrasz's viewpoint is more complex than that. Nierstrasz explains the sudden growth of military power by its European rivals to an increase in state support from Great Britain and France to the British and French trading companies, starting with the war of the Austrian succession (1746-48), and thereafter the Seven

²¹² Nierstrasz, 2015, 22.

²¹³ Nierstrasz, 2015, 67.

²¹⁴ Nierstrasz, 2015, 22.

²¹⁵ Nierstrasz, 2012, 15.

Year's War (1756-63).²¹⁶ This sudden growth of military power, due to increased state support, marked a turning point in the history of European expansion in Asia, as European trading companies had not received such support previously.²¹⁷ Thus, Nierstrasz asserts that before the British interfered with the EIC, the EIC did not have an advantage compared to the VOC. The only reason that the EIC bypassed the VOC was due to state support received from Great Britain. A viewpoint like this collides with that of Furber, Braudel and Jacobs who argue that Europeans had a limited impact on Asia in the eighteenth century.

In the Seven Years War, the EIC, aided by Great Britain, kicked the French out of India. According to Nierstrasz, the dramatic increase in military power created many new possibilities for the EIC to boost its economy.²¹⁸ In the aftermath of this victory, as state support from Great Britain increased, the EIC transformed itself from a trading company to a land based empire.²¹⁹ At this point, Nierstrasz argues that the EIC, similarly to the VOC; never sought to expand its territory for the sake of expansion; instead, it always sought to protect the trading interests of the company.²²⁰ Furthermore, it is important not to forget that neither of the companies wanted to be overtaken by the home state. Although the EIC kept existing, its possessions were practically taken over by the British state. In this sense, the VOC was more successful in maintaining its autonomy, but in the end, that autonomy proved to be a disadvantage.

In the case of the EIC, private traders had a crucial role in expanding the company's possessions. Therefore, private traders tended to initiate the expansion of EIC territory.²²¹ In this manner, territorial conquest normally led to long-term profits for the company and short-term profits by private traders. In addition to income from trade, profits from taxes and tolls from conquered areas became the driving force of the EIC, and company servants became administrators rather than merchants.²²² Nevertheless, private traders, who now had better terms than ever before, with the protection of the strongest trading company in Asia, continued to play

²¹⁶ Nierstrasz 2015, 49.

²¹⁷ Ibidem.

²¹⁸ Nierstrasz, 2012, 26.

²¹⁹ Ibidem.

²²⁰ Nierstrasz, 2012, 13.

²²¹ Ibidem.

²²² Nierstrasz, 2012, 162.

a vital role in the economy of the EIC.²²³ Unfortunately, as mentioned, VOC employees were much less successful due to inadequate support from the Dutch Republic.

Due to lack of state support, the fact that the EIC and the VOC had the same trading strategies did not foster equal opportunities for the companies.²²⁴ The main reason for this was the lack of protection and cooperation that VOC employees attained from the company.²²⁵ Furthermore, a lack of state support also made it harder for the company to find indigenous allies, as an important function of the military was to gain the respect of native rulers.²²⁶ In many places, collaboration with the indigenous population was crucial for the establishment of a European trading company.²²⁷ As the EIC took over the powerful position of the VOC, the VOC was often forced to pay huge sums to the natives just for the sake of trade, whereas, the EIC was able to trade freely.²²⁸ Before this, it used to be the other way around, as the might of the VOC forced natives to pay tribute to the VOC. At this point, Nierstrasz, like Braudel, criticizes Furber and Jacobs for portraying the interaction between Europeans and natives in terms of a peaceful and mutual cooperation. More than Braudel, Nierstrasz argues that Furber and Jacobs's positive description of the natives backfires, as it is a denial and whitewashing of the violence that was inflicted by Europeans upon the native population.

Consequently, Nierstrasz agrees with Adams that VOC servants did not have the same possibilities of amassing private fortunes as EIC servants had.²²⁹ As mentioned previously, Furber and Adams argue that the legislation about private trade hindered the company from adapting. Nierstrasz, on the other hand, argues that it was less protection from the mother country that made private trade hard for the VOC.²³⁰ Accelerating its decline even more, with all the disadvantages that the VOC faced in the eighteenth century, the VOC was unable to control its private trade.²³¹ Consequently, private trade turned into corruption.

²²³ Ibidem.

²²⁴ Nierstrasz, 2012, 25.

²²⁵ Nierstrasz, 2012, 203.

²²⁶ Nierstrasz, 2012, 42.

²²⁷ Nierstrasz, 2012, 19.

²²⁸ Ibidem.

²²⁹ Nierstrasz, 2012, 203.

²³⁰ Ibidem.

²³¹ Nierstrasz, 2012, 140.

7.8: Summary

As we have seen, in the established historiography, Furber interprets the rise of British power in Asia, in the eighteenth century, as a result of the success of English private trade as well as the flexibility of the EIC in adapting to the shift in consumer demands.²³² In contrast, Furber argues that the VOC was a static company that did not adjust to shifting trading patterns because it had not allowed private trade. However, in contrast to Furber, Nierstrasz argues that the company managed to adjust to these changes. Breaking with the predominant viewpoint that the VOC was a static company, Nierstrasz argues that the company was as flexible as the EIC, not only in terms of adjusting to the shift of consumer demands, but also in terms of private trade.²³³ In fact, the company even managed to revive its trade in the first half of the eighteenth century, and it remained the largest and wealthiest trading company until the 1760s.²³⁴ The real cause for the decline of the VOC was British competition, which was also the reason why the other European trading companies collapsed.

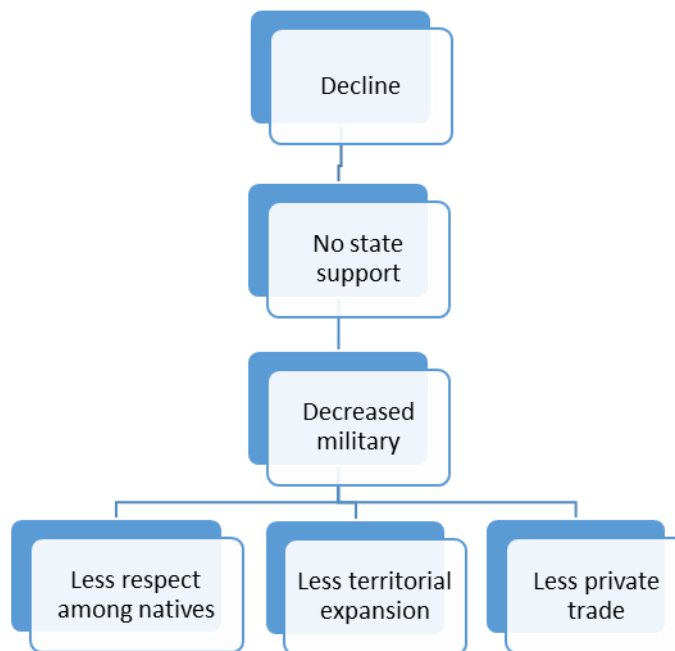


Figure. 8:

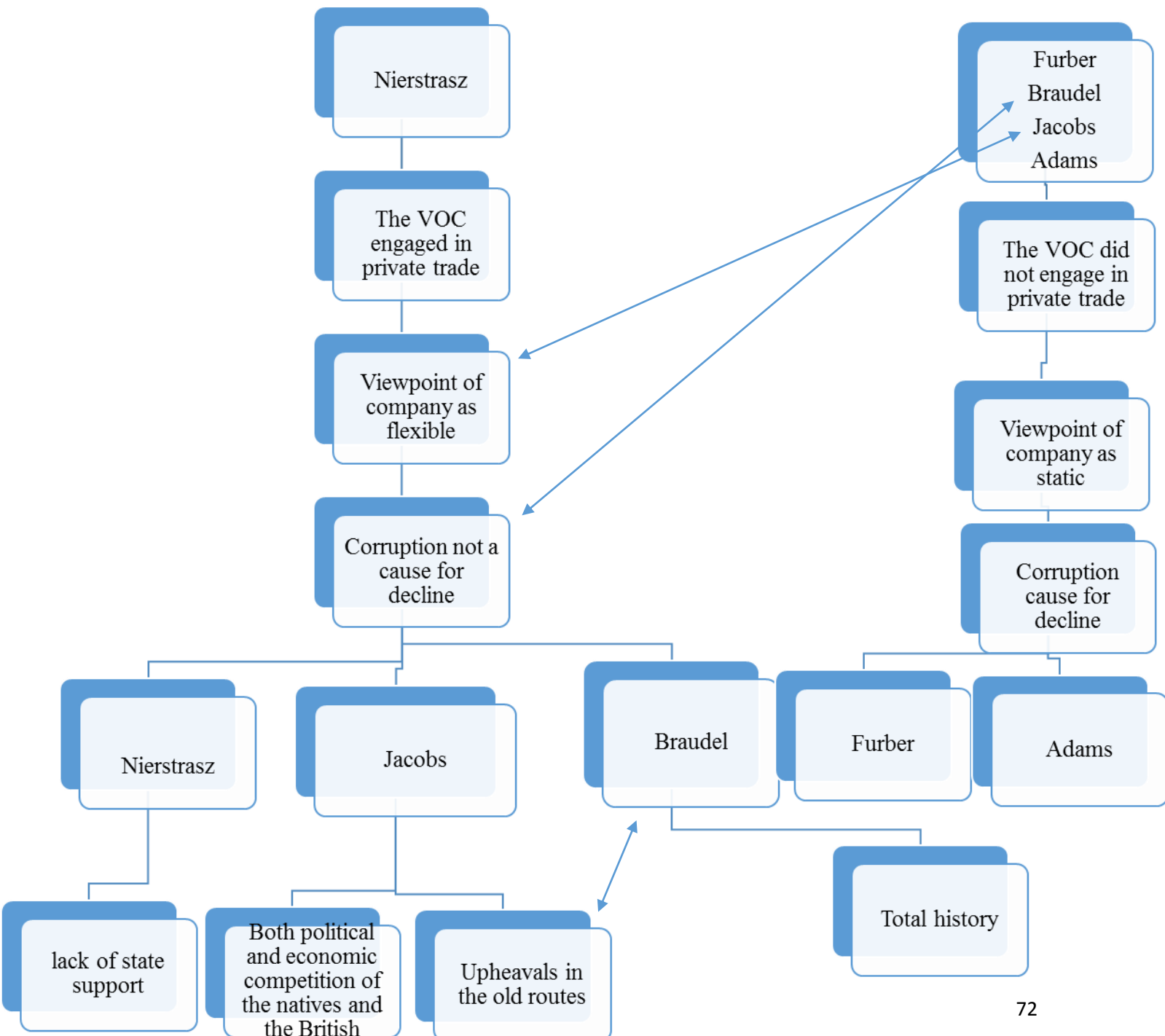
²³² Nierstrasz, 2012, 24.

²³³ Nierstrasz, 2012, 15.

²³⁴ Nierstrasz, 2012, 87.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Figure 9:



8.1: About the literature

In this historiographical analysis, the main goal was to analyze the literature of the five historians that are central for this paper. As a reminder, these scholars are among the most important historians of the historiography of the decline of the VOC, and together, their literature represent the main explanations to the decline of the company. As we see in figure 9, it is possible to draw a connection between the arguments of our historians. Starting from the upper left corner, we see that Nierstrasz is the only historian who argues that the VOC engaged with private trade on the same line as the EIC. However, it is more complex than that. Julia Adams argues that the VOC, in the seventeenth century, was dealing with private trade. However, she argues that the private trade of the company in the seventeenth century evolved to corruption in the eighteenth century, because company employees started to avoid the company's patrimonial chain of command. The same can be said for Furber. In fact, Furber's and Adams' literature is not so different from the traditional historiography, as they both argue that the VOC declined because of corruption and its inability to adapt to changing trading circumstances.

All of our main historians in this paper have an opinion whether the VOC was a static or flexible enterprise during its decline. The terms static and flexible are often linked to the commodity revolution, which according to many historians occurred during the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the terms flexible and static are also often linked to whether the employees of the VOC conducted private trade or not, but not necessarily. Of the historians in this paper, Chris Nierstrasz is the only one who argues that VOC employees dealt with private trade. Consequently, he also argues that the VOC was a flexible enterprise. Conversely, Furber, Braudel and Adams, the three of them neglecting the role of private trade in the eighteenth century, see the VOC as a static enterprise, unable to adapt to shifting circumstances in the eighteenth century. Jacobs, being the exception, also neglecting that the VOC dealt with private trade, argues, like Nierstrasz, that the VOC was a flexible company, able to adapt to shifting trading circumstances.

As mentioned, the viewpoint of seeing the VOC in the eighteenth century, as a static enterprise, unable to adapt to shifting trading circumstances, usually includes the viewpoint that VOC employees dealt with corruption, not merely in the literature of Furber and Adams, but also in the traditional historiography. Fernand Braudel seems to be an exception as he neglects

corruption as a cause for the decline of the company. Apart from Braudel, Nierstrasz and Jacobs dismiss that corruption was a cause for the decline of the company. Unlike Braudel, they both argue that the VOC was a flexible company. Instead of attributing failure to the organization of the company or the conduct of its employees, Nierstrasz and Jacobs focus on the political events that troubled the company in the eighteenth century. At this point, whereas Nierstrasz focuses on the long-term impact of the lack of state support that the VOC received, Jacobs expands her focus from British and indigenous economic competition to political competition with the British and the natives, through warfare. Furthermore, Jacobs points to the impact that the turbulent upheavals, which affected Asia throughout the eighteenth century, had on the VOC. However, this argument was, already before Jacobs, applied by Fernand Braudel. Characteristic for Braudel's explanation to the decline of the VOC, similarly to the rest of his literature, is his focus on portraying a global 'total history'. In this sense, Braudel expands his framework, both in time and space, to two centuries and to Europe as well as the Americas. Thus, time and geography are keywords in Braudel's methodology.

8.2: The correlation between literature, historical schools & personal background

To an extent, it is evident that the personal background, time and the historiographical schools of the historians in question have influenced their viewpoints. Most of the time, this is also evident in their literature; however, it is not always easy to see this, and sometimes, the literature of historians belonging to different historical schools, applying different methods, can be strikingly similar. Similarly, the literature of historians from the same historical school with a similar methodology can sometimes be very different.

It is easier to view some of the historians in light of the historical school that they belong to than other ones. For instance, Braudel's literature on the decline of the VOC is very characteristic of the Annales School. Consequently, much of Braudel's literature can be explained through his Annales School approach. A *longue durée* and 'total history' approach is quite recurring in his literature. His global approach also contrasts with Furber's regional Asian focus. Similarly, it is quite clear from Adams's literature that she is a social historian as she focuses on sociological terms like patrimonialism, and perhaps even more striking is her emphasis on the average VOC employee. Furber is harder to categorize, as his methodology is

not specifically characteristic of one historical school. At best, we can categorize him as a historian of South Asian studies. This is also the subject that he taught at the University of Pennsylvania from 1950-73. Furthermore, his literature on the European trading companies is characterized by elements of social and economic influences. In contrast to our other historians, Furber has more in common with the traditional historiography, in terms of not only his archival research, but also when it comes to his national stereotyping, which is a characteristic of the traditional historiography.

As mentioned, Braudel and Furber applied contrasting methods and theories in the making of their respective literature. As such, their viewpoints towards the decline of the VOC are markedly different, however, not in all areas. Sometimes, historians of different historical traditions applying different methods can come to similar conclusions. Despite their many differences, they both argue that the VOC was a static company, unable to adjust to the commodity revolution. Furthermore, Adams, who is as different from both of them as Braudel is from Furber, also argues that the VOC was unable to adapt, albeit for different reasons than both Furber and Braudel. Apart from this, their respective explanations have little in common. Furber focuses on private trade, corruption and the company's monopoly practice. Braudel puts more emphasis on time and place. The same can be concluded from the comparison between Furber and Adams. Despite their methodologically and scholarly differences, they both argue that the VOC declined because of corruption. Similar to Furber, Jacobs and Nierstrasz are harder to categorize into a historical school than Braudel and Adams. However, social, economic and political aspects are recurring in their respective narratives.

Even though the historians central to this paper have contrasting personal backgrounds and historical methodologies, it is clear that they have inspired each other. In Jacobs's case, it is especially clear that she has drawn inspiration from both Furber and Braudel. Her regional study on trading items throughout Asia in the eighteenth century is especially inspired by Furber, who himself solely focused on the Asian trading world. Jacobs expanded Furber's focus on South Asia to the whole of Asia, not only in terms of her geographical reach in her literature, but also with regards to her archival research. Nevertheless, both Furber and Jacobs can be categorized under the subcategory Asian studies. Furthermore, much of Jacob's methodology is inspired by Fernand Braudel. Consequently, her methodology has many parallels with the Annales School.

Like Braudel, she focused on geography as well as on social and economic history. However, unlike Braudel, who puts the decline of the VOC in a global context, Jacobs does not expand her focus beyond Asia. Another break with Braudel concerns her emphasis of the political events during the last decades of the eighteenth century that occurred as the company declined. Furthermore, her social focus inspired by new social history with the use of quantitative methods weighs heavy in her literature. Hereunder, Jacobs added an element in her study that is not present in the literature of Furber and Braudel. With Jacobs's influence from new social history, she was also influenced by the cultural turn, which could help explain her radical viewpoints towards how she saw the interaction between the VOC and the natives.

Despite the fact that Jacobs took much of her inspiration from Furber and Braudel, her outcome is quite different. Instead of arguing that the VOC was a static trading company, unable to adapt to the commodity revolution, she argues that the company remained flexible. Like Furber and Braudel, she agrees that the company continued to focus on spices, but unlike them, she points out that spices remained profitable throughout the eighteenth century. In addition, Jacobs argues that the VOC engaged in a broad range of other trading items as well.

All the historians preceding Nierstrasz in this paper, namely Furber, Braudel, Adams and Jacobs, inspired our most recent historian. Whereas Nierstrasz's Annales School-inspired methodology was inspired by Braudel, his comparative angle, especially towards the private trade of the Dutch and English trading companies was taken from Furber. On the other hand, Nierstrasz adopted Braudel's global perspective, especially with regards to trading items, as portrayed in *Rivalry for Trade in Tea and Textiles*. Furthermore, Adams influenced him to focus on the average company servant, especially where he treats the private trade of average company servants. From Jacobs, Nierstrasz attained extensive statistics on the trading items that the VOC engaged in. In addition to his methodological inspiration from Braudel, in terms of the Annales School, Nierstrasz also adopted Braudel's global approach.

Furthermore, like Jacobs, Nierstrasz was inspired by the Annales School, and similar to Jacobs, not to the extent that he can be categorized as an Annales School historian. Braudel's narrative is permeated by an Annales School approach with a focus on a 'total history' taking into consideration economic, social and especially geographical factors. Nierstrasz, on the other hand, merely influenced by the Annales School, also puts much emphasis on political factors,

namely the lack of state support for the company. Similar to Nierstrasz, Jacobs, despite her influence by the Annales School, stressed the importance of the political events that the company was engaged in towards the end of the eighteenth century, and as we know, Annales School historians generally do not discuss politics in the making of history.

Furthermore, the fact that there is a gap in time between the publications of our historians is evident. For instance, in Furber's case, his appraisal of British private trade is a national stereotyping that was very common at the time of his publications. Furber seems to be more Eurocentric than what some historians have said about him. He argues, after all, that the British and Dutch trading companies formed the bulk of the Asian economy in the eighteenth century. Evidently, Furber's concept of an Age of partnership does not apply to the VOC. Nierstrasz, on the other hand, manages to see the Dutch and English trading companies through a global approach, rather than through a national framework. A global approach, pioneered by historians like Braudel is more common today. At this point, Braudel was the first historian to have a global approach in the historiography of the decline of the VOC.

8.3 Objectivity

As mentioned previously, the scholars in this paper have internally inspired each other and built on each other's knowledge. Increased accessibility to new sources as well as new quantitative methods has enabled historians like Jacobs to build upon the literature of historians like Furber and Braudel. Nierstrasz, with access to even more sources through the TANAP project as well as the use of quantitative methods drew upon the literature of our four first historians. Thus, the historiography of the VOC made an internal development, in which the respective historians built their narratives on what was written previously.

Traditionally, external factors, in the shape of personal conviction and ideology, among historians of the early 20th century and before was more predominant before than today.²³⁵ This was because historians at the time had to make history purely in the old Rankean way, almost without drawing any inspiration from what was written previously, quite logically because there was little or no preexisting literature on most historical topics, including the VOC. However, the literature of some historians today is largely externally inspired. There are historians like Braudel and Adams whose literature is more characterized by external factors in the form of a different

²³⁵ Thue, Fredrik, 2016

methodology. In the case of Braudel, it is evident that his Annales School approach influences his literature more than anything else does. Additionally, Adams took a different angle on the decline of the VOC, mostly inspired by sociology. Her sociological influences might even weigh heavier in her literature than the preexisting literature that she drew inspiration from. To a lesser extent, the same could be argued about Furber, Jacobs and Nierstrasz, although their external influences are less predominant in their respective literature. Similarly, Braudel and Adams have been inspired by what historians have written before them. In this respect, both internal and external influences characterize the literature of our historians, although to a different extent.

We can conclude that external influences in the respective literature of Braudel and Adams weigh heavier than in the respective literature of Furber, Jacobs and Nierstrasz. Does this necessarily imply that the literature of Braudel and Adams is more objective? As mentioned previously, it is evident that a historian is influenced by his/her personal upbringing, interests and the society he/she lives in. However, one does not know whether these factors influence the choice of a historical topic, the making of history or perhaps both.²³⁶ At this point, the Norwegian historian Ottar Dahl states that even if a historian is more independent in the making of history, it is not necessarily implied that he/she is wrong or less objective.²³⁷ Thus, there is no guideline to define the objectivity and truthfulness of the historians in this paper.

Paradoxically, despite the fact that Braudel was more externally influenced by his historical school, he made good use of secondary source material. Adams, on the other hand, built her sociologically inspired arguments on her extensive archival research. If we should view primary sources as more objective and truthful than secondary sources, Furber, Adams, Jacobs and Nierstrasz would be better off than Braudel. However, even though primary sources are, at least theoretically, preferable over secondary sources, primary sources can be interpreted wrongly.²³⁸ In addition, the information itself in the primary source might not be completely accurate or objective. As mentioned, there is not a specific guideline when it comes to the interpretations provided by our historians.

²³⁶ Dahl, 1973, 130.

²³⁷ Dahl, 1973, 131.

²³⁸ Iggers, 2005, chap. 1.

Appendices

Figure 10: A Dutch painting of the VOC ship “The Seven Provincien”.



Figure 11: A Japanese painting of a VOC ship.



Figure 12: The harbor of Batavia, the rendezvous of the VOC, in 1726. The Dutch minister and author Francois Valentijn (1666-1727) drew this painting.



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Figures:

Figure 1: Retrieved from Pinterest on the 18th of April 2018.

https://www.google.no/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fs-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com%2Foriginals%2F5b%2F8f%2Fa5%2F5b8fa5b3cd6cf00d0123562f43474a98.jpg&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.pinterest.co.uk%2Fpin%2F429179039479804272%2F&docid=uHTovIRTRn-T5M&tbnid=GzQXh-XJHj_2RM%3A&vet=10ahUKEwi68tTjIMTaAhWH6CwKHYJUDUIQMwiaASgWMBY..i&w=776&h=536&itg=1&bih=587&biw=1229&q=voc%20map&ved=0ahUKEwi68tTjIMTaAhWH6CwKHYJUDUIQMwiaASgWMBY&iact=mrc&uact=8

Figure 2: Retrieved from Pinterest on the 4th of May 2018.

<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/5d/79/dd/5d79dd5c9563930dd18ef213a9191f5a.png>

Figure 10: Retrieved from Pinterest on the 21th of May 2018.

<https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/345721708874604667/?lp=true> 7

Figure 11: Retrieved from Reddit on the 21th of May 2018.

https://www.reddit.com/r/vexillology/comments/3vnmxy/japanese_art_of_dutch_voc_ship_rthen_etherlands/

Figure 12: Retrieved from Catawiki on the 21th of May 2018.

<https://veiling.catawiki.nl/kavels/7359781-indonesi-jakarta-voc-fran-ois-valentijn-batavia-in-t-verschiet-1726>