Introduction

Almost forty years ago an exploratory study was published by the historical anthropologists Hauptmann and Knapp, in which they compared the Dutch colonial experience – in particular Dutch contacts with the aboriginal populations – in seventeenth-century New Netherlands (Manhattan and surroundings) and the Far Eastern island colony of Formosa (Taiwan). In this study they reached the tentative conclusion that the Dutch colonizers developed at an early date a rather successful policy towards the native tribal populations and that they placed strong emphasis on a close cooperation with them.

Because Formosa and New Amsterdam were both lost at about the same time (in 1662 and 1664 respectively), a comparison of the causes and the actual circumstances of the demise of these colonial possessions would seem an attractive proposition. The reason why I nonetheless prefer to discuss the loss of Brazil rather than the loss of New Amsterdam in this paper is quite simple. It may not be common knowledge, but New Amsterdam (New York) was not lost to the English but was actually exchanged for a large stretch of territory along the northeastern coast of South America, which nowadays would roughly coincide with the seacoast of today’s Guyana and Suriname. Not a particularly profitable barter for the Dutch in present terms, but in the second half of the seventeenth century Suriname would become an immensely wealthy region of sugar plantations operated by refugees from Dutch Brazil.

The loss of the Dutch province of Pernambuco to the Portuguese was altogether another proposition. Like the loss of Formosa, it was the result of a series of shattering military defeats and sent shock waves through the surrounding regions. If the loss of Taiwan heralded the end of

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1 Laurence M. Knapp, ‘Dutch-aboriginal interaction’,
the hegemony of the Dutch East India Company in the China Sea region but did not fundamentally impair its business operations in East Asia, the bankruptcy and demise of the West India Company was ascribed by the then French ambassador in the Republic, Pomponne, to the loss of Brazil: ‘Depuis cette perte la compagnie occidentale ne subsiste plus que languissamment.’

But there is an even more pressing reason for attempting a comparative analysis of the losses of Formosa and Brazil. Shortly after the capitulation of these colonies indignant voices could be overheard that criticized and reproached the managements of the East India Company and the West East India Company for not having sent succor to these colonies when they needed it most. The question then would be: was the loss of both colonies the result of pure negligence by the management or were there perhaps also other factors at work that were not or could not possibly have been noticed by contemporary criticasters.

The emergence of the Dutch seaborne empire.

Any study of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the West India Company (WIC) and the demise of two of their most important colonial possessions (Formosa was actually the largest territorial possession the VOC ruled at that time) should start with some contextual reference to “the Dutch Miracle”, i.e. the sudden rise of the Dutch Republic from a nation of fishermen, farmers and coastal traders to a formidable European sea power, which sent its trading ships to all directions of the globe.

During the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic was in many respects the odd man out in the family of European nations. Starting out as a league of provinces (Union of Utrecht) rising for reasons of freedom and religion – libertatis et religionis ergo – against their lawful sovereign Philip II, they transformed into a self declared republic ruled by the States-General and protected by the stadholder of the former king, William the Silent, Prince of Orange. During the seventeenth century this small country with a little more than one million people represented within the West European context an oasis of relative freedom where political and religious

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2 L.Blussé, ‘No boats to China’
3 Rowen, Pomponne’s relation de mon ambassade en Hollande, p. 43.
refugees could find shelter. After eight decades of struggle against Spain, the Dutch Republic, which *de facto* already existed since the 1580s, officially gained international recognition at the Peace of Westphalia (the Treaty of Munster in 1648).

Only a few years later the struggle for sovereignty at sea broke loose with that other emerging European sea power, Cromwellian England. No less than three Anglo-Dutch wars were fought over free navigation on the seas, in 1652-54, 1664-67 and 1672-74. The Dutch Republic experienced its most harrowing moments during the *Rampjaar* (year of disaster) of 1672, when it faced a concerted attack by its English, French and German neighbors, but managed to survive, partly by sheer luck, but mainly due to the combined military genius of its commander Prince William III of Orange and a handful of legendary admirals, such as De Ruyter and Tromp, who managed to keep the seaways open.

All this clanging with arms notwithstanding, economically and culturally the Republic experienced a Golden Age, which Simon Schama has so aptly styled with the epithet ‘the Embarrassment of Riches’. Not only did Amsterdam become the financial capital of Europe, but as the staple town of the so-called *moeder negotie* (‘mother trade’) with the Baltic, it also drew all European trade to its port and at the same time extended its tentacles as far as the Levant in the Mediterranean. In order to streamline and reorganize long distance maritime trade to other continents, the port towns of Holland and Zeeland soon joined forces and established, under the supervision of the States-General, the United East India Company (VOC) in 1602 and the United West India Company (WIC) in 1621. Owing to the meteoric growth of these large, well-funded and well-organized trade corporations – limited liability companies *avant la lettre* – the seventeenth century became the age of Dutch expansion overseas, leading to the founding of many trade settlements in Asia, Africa and the Americas. Yet, although the riches of the world overseas lured Dutch merchants, the establishment of these two companies was not merely dictated by a trade agenda. The founding of both companies was directly related to the ongoing struggle for independence against Spain and Portugal, which was fought both on land and at sea. Charles Boxer has defined the two companies, which were simultaneously used for commercial purposes and military purposes, as combinations of ‘the ledger and the sword’. As we shall see, there is much to agree with in this statement, but it should be pointed out right away that, apart from their main institutional features – chartered joint stock companies – the VOC and the WIC differed considerably in aim, organization, exploitation and performance, not in the least because
the geopolitical spheres and the trading networks in which they were designed to operate were quite different.

In their great leap overseas to the shores of Africa, America and Asia the Dutch made many gains but also suffered severe setbacks – losses which in the final analysis were the result of overextension and gross overestimation of their own financial capability and operational potential by the directorates of the VOC and WIC, the so-called Gentlemen XVII and Gentlemen XIX. As so often happens in the case of shared memory, stories of overseas success and bravoura have been recounted over and over again in the Dutch national canon, while the tales of defeat have been glossed over or have been comfortably forgotten.

In the middle of the seventeenth century two spectacular losses of colonial territory not only caused an outcry in the Netherlands and a torrent of reproaches and mutual accusations amongst those concerned, but they also dealt a heavy blow to the reputation of invincibility of the Dutch in Asian waters and in the Atlantic along the coasts of Africa and South America. I am referring to the loss of the heavily fortified colonial town of Recife in 1654 to Portuguese forces and, eight years later, the surrender of Zeelandia Castle on the island of Formosa to the Chinese warlord Zheng Chenggong alias Coxinga. In both cases – ‘t Verzuimd Braziel and ‘t Verwaarloosd Formosa – according to popular opinion, these once flourishing colonies were lost owing to gross dereliction and neglect by the central administrations of the West and East India Companies.

Drawing a comparison between the losses of these two colonies is instructive for a number of reasons. The rise and fall of these two regional emporia, which were established within the context of broader strategies of Dutch overseas expansion in the China Seas and the South Atlantic, occurred roughly at the same time. Both settlements had in common that they were directly governed by chartered trading companies with paramount power. Their policies and administrative rule were frequently commented upon and hotly debated in contemporary pamphlets and other literature, and so were the causes of their eventual demise. In particular bountiful Brazil triggered the fancy of the ordinary Dutchman, though insufficiently to induce him to emigrate there. But what makes these two examples particularly interesting for closer analysis is that their present memory – to use the apt German term, das Nachleben – still lingers in the national epos of these regions. The victory over the Dutch at Guararapes on April 19, 1648, is annually celebrated in Brazil, but curiously the reign of the Dutch governor Prince Maurice of
Nassau with his entourage of artists and savants is often hailed as an outstanding period in Brazil’s history. On the other hand, owing to the wealth of historical materials that recently have been made available from the archives of the long defunct Dutch East India Company, Taiwan’s Dutch colonial period is presently being reinvented by intellectuals and politicians as the determining moment in which the ‘national history’ of modern Taiwan began. The official viewpoint that since time immemorial the island has formed an inalienable part of the “five-thousand-year-old Chinese culture sphere” is now being replaced by the realization that Formosa and its inhabitants still belonged to the cultural realm of the Greater Indonesian culture sphere when it was pushed on the stage of global trade by the VOC four centuries ago.

Taking all these factors into consideration, any analysis of the decline and loss of these two Dutch colonies should start from the geopolitical dimensions of the Dutch struggle for independence, and squarely address the role that the directorates of the chartered India companies played in marking off the Dutch claims abroad. Within the geographical region itself, both the local conditions that were encountered (including the native populations and the European rivalry in loco) and the local native policies that were developed should be considered. At the same time the role of the media should not be ignored. Contemporary comments on colonial policies can often be found in seventeenth-century pamphlets. The change in power relations leading to the loss of the colony concerned and the causes of its loss were often commented upon in the public space, either by criticasters or by factions that tried to influence public opinion by distributing tracts with such catchy titles as “desultory discussions between a soldier, a merchant and a comforter of the sick”.

The geopolitical context

The time frame, the historical context of the Dutch struggle for independence against the Spanish monarch has already been commented upon. In spatial terms the conflict did not occur on a national or European scale but extended to all continents. The Dutch took their struggle overseas to the New World and Asia, where the Spaniards and Portuguese crowns had already pegged their claims. A century earlier, the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, as champions of the Roman Catholic Church, had been awarded by the Pope (Treaty of Tordesillas, 1494) the rights to spread the gospel and to acquire new lands for Christendom. By drawing an imaginary line from the North to the South 370 leagues west of the Canaries, the arbiter of this agreement, Pope
Alexander VI, had divided the global sphere into two halves. The Portuguese half ultimately came to consist – Brazil had not yet been discovered – of the easternmost point of South America, the African continent and most of Asia with the exception of the eastern archipelago shielding the East Asian continent. The Philippines and the Pacific Ocean – neither of them yet explored – and the Americas were claimed by the Spanish crown. The occupation of Portugal by the Duke of Alva in 1581 effectively made Philip II also king of Portugal, so that both spheres – after almost one century of separate evolution – were combined into one Iberian imperial world. It goes without saying that these grandiose claims figured more in the heads of Christian rulers than that they existed in actual reality. Because the full expanse of the oceans could not be covered by the Spaniards and the Portuguese alone – so many waters to fathom, so many coasts to explore – they were confronted with the arrival of the northern European intruders who came to demand their piece of the cake.

Both colonies discussed in this paper, Brazil and Formosa, were situated along navigational routes, which either had already existed for centuries (as was the case with Formosa) or had only recently been discovered. The Brazilian coast, representing the eastern slice that the Portuguese were entitled to under the terms of the papal bulla, was situated along the recently discovered Trade Winds route of the Europeans to Asia. Formosa, home of a score of fierce headhunting tribes, which engaged in hunting and small scale agriculture, remained until the end of the sixteenth century a virtual “no man’s land” in the periphery of the Chinese and Japanese empires. Bordering on the traditional sailing route from South China to Japan, Formosa actually derived its name from the spectacular sight its snow-covered mountain ranges offered to the Portuguese sailors passing by en route from Macao to Nagasaki. Its Portuguese name notwithstanding, it remained a virtual terra incognita until the Dutch and the Spaniards decided to settle there in 1624 on the southwestern coast and in 1625 on the northern edge of the island respectively, with the single aim to open up trade with nearby China.

Challenging the Iberian world order

The line of Tordesillas had been designed to carve out discrete Portuguese and Spanish influence spheres on the eastern and western rims of the Atlantic, yet it cut through part of the easternmost protrusion of the South American landmass and thus yielded Brazil to the claims of the
Portuguese crown. In 1494, twelve years after Portuguese traders had built a castle, St. George da Mina, on the Gold Coast of Africa, Pedro Alvarez Cabral discovered, *en route* to Asia, the coast of Brazil. Initially the Portuguese were primarily interested in developing the trade in Brazil-wood, which was in high demand as a dye, but soon they also discovered the potential of the new territory as an ideal site for sugar production, even if the native American population turned out to be of no use in the actual plantation schemes. The Portuguese establishment in Bahia de Todos os Santos dating from 1549 was followed by the founding of a slave depot at Loanda in today’s Angola to provide for the needed manpower on the sugar plantations. Thus, after half a century of exploring and settling, the Portuguese were well established on both sides of the Atlantic with access to the gold producing area of West Africa (where slaves could also be procured), as well as Loanda, which specifically could provide the newly opened sugar plantations in Brazil with the necessary labor force.

Early Dutch navigational aids like the *Torch of Navigation* by Dirk Ruyters testify how comparatively easy it was for a square-rigged ship to navigate between the Cape of Guinea in Africa and Brazil on the other side of the Atlantic. From Brazil one could head on a steadily blowing north-westerly breeze in south-easterly direction to the African coast and then on the coastal winds follow the coast as far as Guinea. From the Gold Coast a ship could sail slightly below the equator straight for Cape Roca in Brazil, from where it could either steer in northerly direction to the Spanish Main or in south-westerly direction to Bahia, Rio de Janeiro or Rio da Prata. These shipping routes enabled the Portuguese to send large shiploads of slaves from the Gold Coast or Loanda to the West to serve in the mining industry of the Spaniards or on the Portuguese sugar plantations in Brazil.

How profitable that trade was becomes clear from Ruyters’ comment: “Such an awful lot of money is made through the buying and selling of people, by the Spaniards as well as the Portuguese, that it is hard to believe. I have personally seen how a Portuguese, well known to me, traded 500 Negroes from Angola in the Bahia de Todos os Santos and made a profit of 31,000 rixdollars after deduction of all additional costs.”

*The agenda of the WIC*

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6 Honoré Naber, 1930:14.
The conquest of this profitable trade was the goal of the Dutch when, in 1621, they established the West-Indische Compagnie (WIC). It took a great deal more effort to establish the West India Company than its sister the East India Company, which was founded in 1602. While the necessary capital for the VOC had been amassed within a few months, it took no less than three years before the shares of the WIC had been sold – not an auspicious omen indeed. To the casual observer the Dutch East and West India Companies may have looked almost the same, but, operating in two totally different geopolitical spheres, they were actually quite different in character, if not in organization and operation.

Early attempts by the States-General to synchronize and organize trade and warfare in the Atlantic sphere under one umbrella Company, following the example of the VOC, which had successfully incorporated a number of already existing shipping companies sailing to Asia, did not work out well in the Atlantic, even though this idea had some very eloquent proponents.⁷ There were several reasons for this failure to point the noses of the merchants in the same direction: the West Indies and West Africa were destinations that were much easier to reach than the Asian regions, and thus demanded less expenditure for fitting out the ships and produced a faster return on the investment in the cargoes. A trip to the West Indies took a month or two, while the voyage around the Cape towards Java took on average at least three times longer. One did not need the overhead of a chartered India Company organization for such a short haul. This in fact was the bone of contention between the Holland and Zeeland factions that were supposed to cooperate within the WIC. The Zeeland entrepreneurs basically participated in the Company because it served as a cover for their privateering. The Amsterdam merchants had joined for a different reason. They saw the Company as a vehicle of trade. They lost their enthusiasm when it turned out that they lost more than they gained.

During the Twelve Years’ Truce (1609-1621) with Spain, Dutch ships could safely sail to Caribbean and Brazilian destinations to load salt and Brazilian sugar, commodities which were in high demand in Europe. Not until the resumption of the war in 1621 was the die cast. The West India Company was established with the declared aim to engage in aggressive privateering to damage the Spanish and the Portuguese trading interests in the Atlantic, and to gain a niche in the

⁷ See for instance the proposals by Willem Usselinx in the appendices of O. Van Rees, Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde, pp. 383 et seq.
profitable trade between West Africa and the New World. The erstwhile so profitable Dutch association with Portuguese merchants in the navigation to Brazil was now killed by privateering. During the first years of its existence the Company almost exclusively concentrated on capturing vessels of the enemy or sending predatory raids to the Brazilian coast, where anything that could not be taken away, was destroyed. In so far as strategic locations were conquered, these were so sloppily guarded or reinforced owing to a lack of capital that the Portuguese and the Spaniards could easily regain them. The conquest of Bahia by a fleet of 26 ships under the command of Jacob Willekens may serve as a case in point. This settlement with a population of New Christians (crypto-Jews), Mestizos and slaves seemed a promising proposition to the Dutch, who, suffering a lack of a sufficient supply of Dutch settlers to run their overseas colonies, were always looking for allies. The home front was overjoyed when the news reached the Netherlands, but the excitement was short-lived. On Easter Day 1625, a large armada of Spanish and Portuguese ships recaptured Bahia. It was not until the spectacular capture of the Spanish silver fleet by Admiral Piet Heyn in the bay of Matazas in Cuba in 1628, that the WIC acquired enough capital (about 11,500,000 guilders) to mount an all out campaign to occupy a few settlements along the African coast, conquer Brazil and start the offensive in the Caribbean.9

Probably the first historian to draw attention to the larger geopolitical context in which the rise and fall of the Brazilian colony should be placed – and who directly inspired C.R. Boxer to write his magisterial history of Dutch Brazil – was L’Honoré Naber. Naber was the first to show methodically how inextricably the fate of the Brazilian colony was entwined with the fortunes of the West India Company itself.10

In 1630 a fleet under the command of Hendrick Lonck succeeded in taking the port of Recife in the rich sugar producing territory of Pernambuco in Brazil. Shortly afterwards, Curaçao (1634), Statia and several other islands in the Caribbean ended up in Dutch hands as well. Even after the conquest of the coastal area around Recife, the Portuguese settlers continued to offer stiff resistance. During the heavy fighting, which soon turned into an outdrawn guerilla war, the sugar plantations were destroyed and the slaves ran away. After a five-year battle with the

9 Van Dillen, Rijkdom en Regenten, p. 152.
Portuguese, the troops of the WIC under the command of Crestofle Arciszewski at long last acquired, with the help of native Brazilian allies amongst whom the redoubtable Tapuia Indians, a large stretch of coastal land and for the time being seemed Lord and Master of the territory. Yet Arciszewski warned against the ongoing guerilla tactics of the Portuguese, who had been driven back in the hinterland, and declared that as a result of the battle most sugar mills (ingenios) had been destroyed, while the sugarcane fields were continuously set afire, so that it would take a considerable investment to revive the local economy. The directors of the WIC did not possess the necessary financial means to make this possible, and the shareholders actually insisted on quick returns and refused to invest in long term planning.\textsuperscript{11} The Company, not having at its disposal adequate financial means to conduct war, fit out privateers, restructure the sugar plantations and engage in trade, was forced to partly abolish its privileges and give private ship owners permission to trade in wood and salt. In addition the States-General extended privateering licenses to private ship owners.

\textit{Deus ex Machina}

In order to solve all these administrative problems, the WIC directorate appointed Count Johan Maurits of Nassau, a cousin of the \textit{stadholder} Frederik Hendrik, governor of Brazil with the promise that he would be provided with a fleet of 32 ships and an army of 7,000 soldiers. But in the last days of October 1636 the count put out to sea with 12 ships and 2,700 men.

The three greatest challenges that Johan Maurits faced upon his arrival in Recife, was how to solve the potential religious strife between the Protestant Dutch, the New Christians and the Catholic Portuguese and Mestizos, how to conclude confederations with the native Tapuia and Tarariu Indians, “beastly and improvident savages”\textsuperscript{12}, whose assistance he needed to fight the guerilla fighters and, finally, how to deal with the monopoly rights which the WIC wished to enforce on the newly acquired territories.

Notwithstanding considerable opposition from the church council of Recife, the governor cut the Gordian knot and declared freedom of religious service to Jews as well as Catholics, thereby rendering it possible for them to associate with Dutch rule, the more so as a local council

\textsuperscript{12} B. Schmidt, \textit{Innocence Abroad}, p. 213.
was formed in which they could make their voices heard. Attempts to convert the native Indians to the Protestant religion – such a success in Formosa as we shall see – met with disappointing results.\textsuperscript{13} The decision of the directors in Holland to impose a trade monopoly caused considerable unrest in the camps of the plantation owners (\emph{moradores}) and of the Amsterdam merchants, who clamored for free trade, but finally he succeeded in striking a deal, which implied that \emph{moradores} and the shareholders of the WIC were allowed free trade.\textsuperscript{14} Johan Maurits asserted that a population policy aimed at promoting Dutch immigration could only succeed through freedom of trade. Any hindrance of trade would lead towards “the road of ruin”. The Company should derive its income primarily from tolls and taxes on the local agricultural industry. In the end it was decided that the Company would keep the monopoly rights on the trade in slaves, timber, dyes, weapons and ammunition, but would leave the other trading activities free. Independent merchants were however forced to pay import and export tolls, which created bad blood among the merchants of Amsterdam, who, as we shall see, never wholeheartedly collaborated in the Brazilian adventure.

Those Portuguese \emph{moradores} who accepted Dutch rule were given the opportunity to repair the war damages to their estates and in addition a smaller number of Dutchmen who had distinguished themselves during the military campaigns also set their hand to the spade. The sizeable enterprising Jewish component in Pernambuco society “who would rather see two Orange flags than one Inquisitor” came to constitute the other economic pillar on which the colony rested.

On June 25, 1637, Johan Maurits dispatched a fleet of seven ships from Recife to the Gold Coast to conquer the Portuguese fortress of São Jorge da Mina for the Company and on 29 August this fortress, which was of eminent importance for the slave trade, fell into Dutch hands. Johan Maurits was so successful in his efforts to restructure the colony that in 1640, in a sermon held in Bahia, the Jesuit priest Viera even lamented that the Lord seemed to allow the work of pious Portuguese Catholics to be ruined by the unfaithful and perverted Dutch heretics and pirates.\textsuperscript{15} But however great a diplomat, patron of the arts and sciences Johan Maurits may have been, he was certainly not frugal with the means that were put at his disposal. As a result of this, the colony and with it the WIC ran into even deeper debt.

\textsuperscript{13} José de Mello, \textit{Nederlanders in Brazilië}, 217-22.
\textsuperscript{15} C.R.Boxer, \textit{De Nederlanders in Brazilië}, p, 134.
The Portuguese secession from Spain

In December 1640 the population of Portugal rose successfully against Spanish rule and elected the Duke of Braganza as their new king. Political circles in the Dutch Republic reacted favorably, as they hoped to gain a new ally in their struggle against the Spanish crown. Not until June 12, 1641, was a peace treaty concluded between the Republic and Portugal, which contained so many unresolved issues that the ratification ceremony had to be postponed for many more months.

Johan Maurits, who was aware of these developments, dispatched a fleet of 21 ships with 3,000 soldiers on board to Angola to overpower the Portuguese slave depots at São Paolo de Loanda from where the Portuguese and the Spaniards had been exporting some 15,000 slaves a year to the gold mines in Mexico. By securing this slave station, the WIC would have access to a potentially constant supply of manpower. Taking advantage of the credulity of the Portuguese who believed that the Dutch had become their allies against Spain by signing the peace treaty, Johan Maurits made a surprise attack on São Luis, the capital of the Portuguese colony of Maranhão bordering on the north, and thus succeeded in completing the policy of expansion along the Brazilian coast to an extent of 1,500 miles. When the peace treaty with Brazil was finally ratified at Recife on July 3, 1642, the Dutch governor could look with some satisfaction at his recent exploits, but he should have noticed that his opportunistic, if not hypocritical, behavior fundamentally changed the opinion of his Portuguese neighbors, who no longer saw him as a noble and magnanimous person. In 1644, Johan Maurits, having spent seven years in Brazil, handed in his resignation and returned to the Netherlands, where a beautiful mansion awaited him, the construction of which had been personally supervised in his absence by his close friend and neighbor, Constantijn Huygens.\(^{16}\)

Financial restraints

In theory the circle of commerce was now closed: the agenda of securing strategic footholds on the Gold Coast, Angola and Brazil to create the intended triangular trade pattern had been carried

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\(^{16}\) In this same building, nowadays the Mauritshuis Museum, a large commemorative exhibition was held in 1980. See the museum guide by E. van den Boogaart and F. Duparc, *Zo wijd de wereld strekt.*
out, even if at a very high cost. After the jubilations about the seizure of the silver fleet in 1628, the Company, lacking other financial windfalls, started to build up a huge deficit. By 1636 it was already 18 million guilders in debt and by 1640 its finances were in total disarray.17 It is ironic that the same company that had been able to dispatch large military expeditions to Brazil and Angola, on account of its efficient organizational capacities and the booty from the silver fleet, was reigned in by the financial circuit in Amsterdam when it realized that the investments did not yield any profits.

When in 1644 the States-General were called upon to renew the charter of the by now already technically bankrupt WIC, the Gentlemen XIX claimed that their enterprise had played an invaluable role in the war against Spain by fitting out more than 800 privateers with 67,000 hands between 1623 and 1636. Over the past years the WIC had had 24,000 people on its pay roll, having spent in all some 45 million guilders. That huge investment had, according to the Directors, yielded a booty of 600 seized, burned or sunk Spanish ships and a total damage to the Spanish crown of 75 million guilders.

Because it was clear that they were not able to raise enough funds to keep the Brazilian administration functioning, the Gentlemen XIX suggested that their own Company should be united with the East India Company into one large national trading enterprise. This same proposal was also put forward by Johan Maurits in September 1644 upon his return from Brazil. He intimated that he would only be willing to continue serving the WIC, if the Brazilian administration received better funding from the Dutch Republic.18 Thus a period of eight years came to an end in which a remarkably liberal administration had succeeded, by removing the direct causes of friction between the Catholic, Jewish and Dutch Protestant communities, in creating an apparently peaceful cohabitation of Portuguese, Dutch and native Americans.

Within the present narrative only little space can be allotted to a final judgment of the merits and demerits of this remarkable ruler with cosmopolitan aspirations, his personal motto being *Qua patet orbis* - As far as the world extends. The surviving works of art in European museums and the various contemporary studies on Brazilian society carried out by his entourage attest to his enlightened if extravagant patronage. Johan Maurits is said to have employed no less than 46 artists and scientists, who were continually registering the flora, fauna, topography and

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ethnography of Brazil. Among the painters Frans Post (1612-1680) and Albert Eeckhout (1610-1665) are best remembered for their oil paintings of landscapes, plantation life and, last but not least, the redoubtable cannibalistic Tapuya tribes, paintings which have been preserved in the royal Danish collection in Copenhagen, in the Louvre in Paris and in Johan Maurits’ former residence, the Mauritshuis Museum in The Hague.

Among the contemporary works of learning should be cited Caspar van Baerle’s (Barleaus) remonstration of Johan Maurits’ reign Reum per Octonium in Brasilia et alibi nuper gestarum (Amsterdam 1647), and the remarkable Historia Naturalis Brasiliae of Georg Marcgraf (1611-1644) and Willem Piso (1611-1678), a magnum opus of 12 volumes and 429 illustrations, which appeared one year later, not to mention the travelogues which several of his former staff members published in later years.

If the above would suggest, however, that Johan Maurits left the Dutch colony in north-east Brazil as a thriving agricultural establishment where Dutch rule had taken root, a note of warning should be sounded. In demographic terms the Brazilian settlement was not a successful colonial enterprise at all, because, quite frankly, the Dutchmen were not willing to emigrate to Recife in any large number.19

The Achilles heel of the Dutch administration was its dependence on the goodwill of its largely Jewish and Catholic subjects, who Johan Maurits had courted with his lenient religious policies and liberal advances of capital, enabling them to rebuild their plantations. It would be up to his successors to collect these advances in due time, but as we shall see that was an idle hope. In the autumn of 1644, the first signs of a brewing unrest in the countryside reached the ears of the High Council, the triumvirate that had succeeded Johan Maurits as the highest governing body. The Portuguese moradores, deeply in debt to the Dutch, prepared a revolt in order to liberate themselves from their creditors and restore Portuguese sovereignty.

King João IV of Portugal, an immensely rich entrepreneur, thoroughly understood that, thanks to their abundant sugar production, the remaining Portuguese settlements Bahia and Rio, which Johan Maurits had never succeeded in subduing, served as a “vacca de leite”, on which his impoverished country fed. In view of the Dutch privateering, the merchants from Vianna and Oporto could no longer risk their ships on the navigational routes to Brazil, but when in 1642 a commercial treaty was signed with England, this brought relief by enabling them to make use of

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19 See Remonstrantie in O’Callaghan, Documents, pp. 62-68.
English shipping. Initially the king did not have his hands free to come to the military assistance of his Brazilian subjects suffering under Dutch overlordship, but of course he did not let an opportunity pass to give them tacit or at least moral support.20

The beginning of the end

The run of military clashes that eventually led to the loss of Brazil ensures a fascinating tale of stratagems, bribery, treason and dogged perseverance on both sides. Here I can only deal with this episode in the briefest possible way. The spontaneous revolt which erupted in the spring of 1645 was an autonomous one in which an experienced guerilla leader of the earlier Dutch-Portuguese clashes, André Vidal de Negreiros joined forces with a former confidant of Maurits, João Fernandes Viera, who was presently serving as sheriff of Recife. Their original conspiracy involved a massacre of the Dutch elite, which was to be carried out during lavish marriage celebrations to which they would all be invited. When the scheme was revealed, a popular revolt broke out on June 20, 1645, which was only partly suppressed by the Dutch authorities and which kept lingering on in the hinterland of Recife. The aftermath of a visit of a large Portuguese fleet calling at Recife in early August to receive victuals there – the triumvirate was obliged to supply them because they were not at war with the Portuguese king – showed, however, that the latter was by no means impartial. Shortly afterwards Portuguese troops were sent with the same fleet from Bahia to Zernaim, which was subsequently captured from the Dutch. The loss of this town meant the turning point of Dutch hegemony in North-east Brazil.

On 16 August two Dutch army commanders, Van Hoochstraten and Van der Ley, were bribed and they surrendered the important fortress of Pontael, which commanded the access to the southern entry of the Cabo San Augustinho, so that the enemy could make use of this strategic location to safely disembark troops. Recife was now surrounded and the WIC had lost control of most of its territorial possessions in northern Brazil. In 1646 a relief fleet was sent from Holland, but the troops that it carried did not have enough striking power to dislodge the Portuguese besiegers from their positions around Recife.

A daring Dutch attempt in February 1647 to carry out a counter strike and occupy the island of Itaparica in the bay of Bahia failed and thus any hope of cutting off the supply lines

between Bahia and the rebels in Pernambuco Province was dashed. When the States-General learned that the Portuguese king João IV had sent the *Armada Real do Mar Oceano* to protect Bahia from further Dutch attacks, it took action at last: it was decided to put an end to the Brazilian revolt. This resolution, however, was not welcomed by the Amsterdam merchant elite, which by that time had come to realize that the Brazilian adventure was a losing proposition, and that the carrying trade to the ports of Portugal and Portuguese Brazil was too important and profitable to put at risk through a war with that country. Yet, as long as Amsterdam was not willing to offer financial succor to the WIC, the political elite of Zeeland Province refused to sign the Treaty of Munster, which was to put an end to the Eighty Years’ War with Spain. Finally the Amsterdam merchants gave in and offered to subsidize a new relief fleet if their Zeeland colleagues would sign the Treaty of Munster.

Amidst all this squabbling and horse dealing, Johan Maurits declared himself willing to consider a request of the States-General to shoulder the governorship of Brazil once again on the condition that he would be provided with an army of 12,000 troops, an overly generous financial settlement, and, last but not least, supreme civil and military authority, without the interference of the Gentlemen XIX, *nota bene* the directors of the WIC. These demands were so outrageous that an old fox of the Brazilian campaign, Lieutenant-General Sigismund Von Schoppe was selected as supreme commander.

When in December 1647, after long delays, a battle fleet with only 2,497 soldiers on board was dispatched under the command of the renowned admiral Witte de With, news had already arrived in Amsterdam that one month earlier King João IV had dispatched a Royal Ocean Fleet with 2,350 soldiers, 1,000 sailors and 450 gentlemen-volunteers to Brazil. In other words the WIC was checkmated.

On 17 April 1648 a major clash took place at Guararapes between 4,500 Dutch troops under the command of Von Schoppe and a much smaller Portuguese force, a battle in which the Dutch, who had not studied the local geographical conditions well, were soundly beaten and routed. In the meantime, another Portuguese force was dispatched from Bahia to Angola, where it forced the Dutch local garrison to surrender. A second battle of Guararapes, in which the Portuguese commander maneuvered his Dutch opponents to an exposed position where they could find no shelter from the blazing sun, so that the troops were soon thirsting for water, resulted in a second crushing defeat, whereby the Dutch side lost more than a thousand men,
including a hundred officers. With this second defeat, the fate of the Dutch colony was sealed. Of the 5,600 men Schoppe had been able to deploy on the battlefield three thousand had died or been taken prisoner within less than a year. Admiral Witte de With, in the meantime, had spent twelve months of standing by without being able to do anything and was literally “at his wits’ end”:

“As far as I am concerned, if I have to end my life here (and I hope it will not be so) I would rather serve the Turk, provided I could also serve my God freely, than the Company here. Yes, I feel I can say that an honest man is too good to end his life in this miserable place, and I hope that God Almighty will one day rescue us from this misery.”

On November 9, he decided to be the captain of his own soul and sailed home to Holland, where upon his return he was promptly accused of high treason and put under arrest, but set free not long afterwards, because even his judges were convinced of the hopeless situation in Brazil. Five more ship commanders were to follow De With’s example and by December 1649 there was no Dutch ship left to defend the roadstead of Recife.

The coup de grace was not dealt until four years later, when the Dutch Republic was involved in the first Anglo-Dutch War and could not afford to send another war fleet to assist Recife, even if supply ships were still being sent. The point is that apart from the Zeeland faction nobody was willing to throw good money after bad any longer. The Amsterdam elite had long given up on the Brazilian colony, preferring to engage in peaceful trade with Portugal.

When the Portuguese fleet of 66 sails, sent to lay siege to Recife, arrived there in December 1653, even a few ships from Amsterdam could be discerned among them. After all the lines of defense surrounding the town had one by one surrendered to the enemy, the High Council of Recife decided on 22 January 1654 to capitulate and six days later at Taborda it handed over the keys of the capital of a colony “that could rightly be called a kingdom because of its many fine and rich fruits which it can yield every year, a land which our Dutch nation has now possessed for twenty-four years less 18 days and which has cost the lives of so many thousands of brave soldiers and citizens before they could possess it.”

Aftermath

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21 For this quotation and a more detailed survey of the above, see Van der Straaten, Brazil, A Destiny, pp. 129-30. 22 A contemporary chronicler quoted in Van der Straaten, Brazil, A Destiny, p. 137.
Under the conditions of the Taborda capitulation all Dutch citizens and their Portuguese families were allowed either to stay or to leave the country. Among these were some 5,000 New Christians of Portuguese origin. Some of them moved to Suriname, where they introduced new production methods and gave a tremendous boost to the sugar industry in the years that followed. More than 600 persons are said to have sailed to the Dutch Republic, while the rest settled in Curaçao and New Amsterdam (New York), where they trusted they would be allowed to practice their religion in freedom. When the news of the capitulation reached the Netherlands, there were outcries for a declaration of war against Portugal. The first Anglo-Dutch War was over, but, for the time being, the straightened circumstances of the provincial admiralties, not to speak of the WIC which was bankrupt, made it impossible to take the combined actions that would be required under these circumstances: a blockade of the Tagus, which would make all Portuguese shipping impossible, and an expedition to Brazil to reconquer the lost possessions.

Renewed tension between Sweden and Denmark in the summer of 1655, which threatened to impair the Dutch shipping through the Sund, forced the Dutch Republic to set priorities and led to the decision to send a fleet to the Baltic first. Not until the summer of 1657 did the States-General decide to declare war on Portugal unless it immediately returned Recife, Loanda and the island of São Tomé. A fleet was sent under Admiral De Ruyter to enforce the ultimatum and he did indeed blockade the Tagus for several weeks before December storms forced him to return home. Negotiations continued and at long last on May 24, 1662, a peace treaty was signed which obliged the Portuguese crown to pay a compensation of four million cruzados for the loss of Brazil and special privileges, which entitled the Dutch to the same trading rights as the English in Portugal and its overseas possessions. The compensation, which had to be paid out within a period of sixteen years, became an outdrawn affair. Boxer mentions that the last cruzado was reimbursed in 1830(!).

Neglected Formosa

In 1675 a booklet with the telling title ‘t Verwaarloosde Formosa (The Neglected Formosa) appeared, in which the anonymous author C.E.S. stressed that the loss of this once thriving colony to the Chinese in 1662 was not the fault of its governor Frederik Coyett, but was due to

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the negligence of the Governor-General and Council in Batavia, who had failed to send adequate assistance when this was needed. One year earlier, in 1674, Coyett, who had been banished to the island of Banda, had been allowed to return to the Netherlands at the intercession of the Prince of Orange. Although C.E.S. (Coyett et socii?) presents a persuasive case that the governor could not really be blamed for the loss of Zeelandia Castle, over which the VOC had held sway for 37 years, one may wonder whether the loss of the Formosan colony could have been avoided. Considering the major political upheavals that occurred in China in those years, it is quite improbable that the Dutch could have held on to this colony. If there was one phenomenon that Western observers could not have understood at the time, it was the impact of the dynastic change from Ming to Qing that shook the Chinese world order. The intrusion of the Dutch in the Far East at the beginning of the seventeenth century coincided with the reunification of Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate and the decline of the Ming dynasty. The Manchu invasion in 1644 and the subsequent establishment of a new dynasty led to a protracted civil war, which would continue until the island of Taiwan was wrested out of the hands of the last Ming loyalist in 1683. It was the fate of the Dutch that they were drawn into the dynastic struggle, a military affair of enormous proportions, in which the VOC could not afford to participate for an extended period of time, if only because it only cost money and did not promise any kind of worthwhile remuneration in the future.

The establishment of a trading settlement on Formosa in 1624 was the rather unexpected outcome of the execution of the megalomaniacal plan designed by Governor-General Jan Pietersz Coen to gain a Dutch foothold on the south-eastern shore of China and thus drive the Spanish and Portuguese rivals out of competition in the eastern seas. Since 1619 the Dutch had tried to intercept (in collaboration with the English) all Spanish and Portuguese ships sailing in Chinese and Japanese waters. Chinese junks heading for Manila were also boarded and their cargoes seized in order to isolate the Spanish enemy as much as possible. The Twelve Years’ Truce was clearly not respected in the Far East.

In 1621, Shogun Tokugawa Hidetada put a stop to this privateering, threatening the Dutch and the English that he would abolish their trading privileges if they continued to direct their hostile operations from the Japanese port of Hirado, where both nations possessed a trade factory. On the advice of the head of the Hirado factory, Leonard Camps, the Dutch Governor-General now drafted a plan which in theory would solve the problem once and for all. He dispatched a
fleet under the command of Commander Cornelis Reijersen with the explicit order to conquer Macao and henceforth replace the Portuguese as middlemen in the trade between China and Japan. Coen believed, somewhat optimistically, that once the Dutch East India Company had replaced the Portuguese at Macao and had secured a foothold in China (hopefully without any protest from the Chinese imperial government) its ships would be able to provide China and Japan with all the tropical products they needed from the Malay archipelago. At the same time this would ensure that Chinese silks would be delivered to the Japanese market, while China would be provided in exchange with all the Japanese silver it needed.

The attack on Macao in June 1622 was a total failure and on the instruction of Governor-General Coen, Commander Reijersen thereupon occupied the Pescadores archipelago in front of the Chinese coastal province of Fujian. Two years later the Dutch were chased from this island by a large Chinese fleet and they withdrew to nearby Formosa, an island inhabited by Austro-Malay speaking tribes, which were chronically involved in internecine strife. On a sand spit at the entrance of the bay of Tayouan on the south-western coast of the island, Zeelandia Castle was built. It was to serve as the headquarters of the VOC in the Far East.

Subsequent attempts to open the trade with the nearby Chinese province of Fujian were obstructed by the Chinese mandarins and frustrated by Fujianese pirate bands, who alternately teamed up with the Dutch and then again sought alliances with other bands or even surrendered to the imperial authorities to reappear on the waves of the South China Sea under the flag of the Chinese imperial navy. This was indeed the case with Zheng Zhilong alias Nicholas Iquan, a former freebooter and smuggler, who, after a short stint as an interpreter and a privateer with the Dutch East India Company, ended up as a high naval officer and in fact as the self declared spokesman of the Fujianese provincial administration in its dealings with the Dutch. In 1633, Zheng’s naval forces dealt a resounding defeat to a Dutch squadron that was enforcing a blockade of the Bay of Amoy. From that moment he was able to set the terms of the negotiations with the Dutch authorities on Taiwan, with whom a modus operandi was arrived at. No longer would the VOC be allowed to send its ships to the Chinese coast, but Zheng would guarantee to the Dutch trading factory on Formosa a steady supply of Chinese export commodities and other necessities on Chinese junks. Thus at an early date the Zheng family obtained control of virtually all communications with Dutch Formosa.
The Zheng factor

Meanwhile, the Ming court in Peking was losing its grip on the seaboard provinces owing to inland rebellions and continuous fighting with the Manchus on the northern border. Taking advantage of the unstable political situation, Zheng Zhilong and his lineage group were able to strengthen a power base in Fujian, which was financed by a fledging overseas trading network that soon bypassed the Dutch on Formosa with a direct shipping route to Japan. Notwithstanding the Manchu successes on the battlefield, the Zheng clan remained loyal to the Ming crown pretenders until Zheng Zhilong surrendered in Fuzhou to the Qing authorities in 1648. A decision which he was soon to regret, as he was taken hostage and whisked away to the imperial capital, when the Manchu authorities found out that his son Zheng Chenggong and most of his own followers decided to continue the struggle.

Probably the most intriguing detail of the rise and fall of Dutch rule over Formosa was the uneasy relationship with the Zheng lineage, which continued to influence further developments on the island. Thanks to the deals that were made in the 1630s with Zheng Zhilong, not only did Dutch trade with China take off, but he is also said to have mediated in the steady supply of Chinese manpower to develop sugar plantations and start wet rice cultivation in the western plains of the island. Thus the development of the island was very much a cooperative effort between the Dutch colonial administration and Chinese settlers and traders, a pattern that could also be seen elsewhere in the Nanyang.

When mutual relations hardened as a result of the military setbacks Zheng Chenggong suffered in the second half of the 1650s, rumors about an imminent invasion of the formidable army of this warlord began to reach Formosa. After his dramatic all out attack on the city of Nanjing in 1660 had been beaten off, Zheng Chenggong, hotly pursued by the Qing army, crossed the Taiwan Strait in the spring of 1661 and landed near Zeelandia Castle with a mighty force of 20,000 well trained soldiers. It took a siege of no less than eight months to force the Dutch garrison to surrender on February 1, 1662.

In a separate contribution about the military aspect of the various confrontations the Dutch had with the Chinese on the Pescadores archipelago, in the bay of Amoy and finally on the island of Formosa itself, I have recently stressed that not only was the Dutch East India Company forced to engage in military operations which overreached its logistical potential, but it was also – its superior fire power and better ships notwithstanding – at every occasion finally beaten by
the sheer number of soldiers, ships and guns that the Chinese enemy was able to raise or bring onto the battlefield.24 Just as was the case in Brazil, the final denouement of the siege was hastened by the loss of morale and the desertion of instrumental officers or former councilors who could inform the enemy on the weak points of the Dutch. I shall leave out these issues, which in the end decided the military conflict. From a comparative viewpoint it would seem to be more interesting to look at the extent to which the Dutch colonizers followed the same patterns of colonization in Taiwan as they did in Brazil and to what extent they made the same mistakes, or rather stumbled into the same traps.

The roughly 35 years that Dutch rule lasted on Formosa can be divided in several discrete periods, from which specific traits of the administration and the challenges it faced can be extrapolated. It took more than a decade (1624-1633) before the VOC was able to find a trustworthy counterpart in China and was able to gain a share of the trade between Southeast Asia, China and Japan.

Although the attention of the first governors of Formosa was basically directed at the development of trade, with the assistance of several protestant ministers they gradually developed a native policy towards the aboriginal population, which was in many respects highly original and efficient. In order to create an environment which could consistently provide the garrison of the castle and the crews of the ships that called at the Tayouan roadstead with sufficient food, a determined effort was made to create a Pax Neerlandica among the ever warring tribes, by carrying out punitive expeditions with Formosan allies against aggressive neighbors, even going so far as to depopulate an island whose inhabitants had killed and eaten the crews of two wrecked Dutch ships. The basically acephalous village communities of the western plains were provided with headmen with proper insignia such as hats, capes and sticks and once a year a diet was organized with these representatives of the suzerain villages in which they were asked to swear allegiance to the States-General of the Netherlands. Two pioneering ministers, Georgius Candidius and Robertus Junius, settled in native villages, learned the local vernacular, carried out conversions and played a major role in the campaign of pacification. Their pastoral tasks soon mushroomed to such widely divergent tasks as gathering the local taxes which the hunting people had to pay in deer hides (a popular item in Japan) and the administration of justice, which led to the creation of the playful pun that on Formosa “the herten (in Dutch meaning both “hearts” and

24 L. Blussé, ‘De Chinese nachtmerrie’
“deer”) were converted because of the hides.”²⁵ By 1635 the south-western plains had been pacified to such an extent that even the Governor-General in Batavia, who until then had seen the establishment on Formosa as an entrepot for the China-Japan trade, now suddenly discovered the island’s great potential as an agricultural colony. Governor-General Brouwer wrote in 1636, “The Company shall beget in a short time such a delightful colony as the Portuguese in India [could only wish they] have ever had. Even Ceylon cannot compare to [Formosa] in terms of the temperate climate, healthy air, fertility of the soil, situated outside the jurisdiction of any mighty potentate, inhabited by a rude and stupid heathen people, but close to the mighty kingdom of China, where from as many poor and enterprising people will flow to this colony as one could wish.”²⁶ That prophecy turned out to be absolutely right.

The following decade of 1635-45 can perhaps be best defined as the age of discovery cum pacification of the island, including the expulsion in 1641 of the Spaniards who had built fortresses in the north of the island. The exploratory expeditions which were sent to the tribes living to the south and east of the central chain of mountains that dominate the center of the island, were prompted and inspired by rumors about gold mines in the east. These expeditions brought the Dutch into contact with no less aggressive but socially quite differently organized tribes with strong rulers and rather developed hierarchical relationships. In these years attempts were made to extend the levying of taxes to the outlying regions, which, although the operation in the end was not quite practical and made little sense in terms of yield, at least led to the further extension of peace among the tribes who traditionally had been chronically at war with each other. Meanwhile the western plains were slowly transforming from hunting ground into agricultural territory tilled by Chinese immigrants. The slightly irreverent catch phrase “Taiwan made in Holland” makes sense if one realizes that owing to the efforts of the Dutch colonial state to create a relatively peaceful environment among the native peoples, Chinese farmers were able to settle down and start tilling the soil, thereby dramatically changing the ecology of the western plains. By carefully maintaining the alliances with the aboriginal people through administrative measures but even more so by stationing clergymen and lay preachers (ziekentroosters) in the villages, the colonial administration helped to keep in check the burgeoning numbers of Chinese immigrants who crossed over to Formosa as the Chinese civil war reached the southern provinces.

²⁵ L. Blussé, Tribuut aan China, p. 54.
²⁶ Ibidem, p.54.
The Dutch elite was only too happy to gain access to Chinese manpower for its private agricultural enterprises. Chinese men also came to serve as shopkeepers and tax farmers in the same way as the Jews were playing an instrumental role in the Brazilian economy. Taxes, which in the past had been collected by the clerics or Dutch soldiers, were now farmed out to Chinese tax farmers, who thereby got a firm grasp on native economic life. The administration of the Chinese was entrusted to ten headmen or cabessas, who had to report regularly to the authorities in Zeelandia Castle.

Anno 1650 the Dutch colonial administration at Zeelandia Castle was ruling over an extensive territory, consisting of 315 native villages which had pledged allegiance to the Company. The colony, which in the 1620s had started off as a modest trading settlement serving as a central rendez-vous for all shipping in the South and East China Seas, was now gradually turning into a large territorial possession with a strong agricultural export sector. The total income from trade and taxes amounted to more than 1,500,000 guilders. How booming agriculture was becomes clear from the statement that 5,000 morgen or 10,000 acres of land had been brought under cultivation with an annual production of 1,500 tons of refined sugar. These rapid developments so inebriated the heads of the Dutch administrators that they thought it safe to double the poll tax of the roughly 15,000 Chinese immigrants then toiling in the countryside. This rash measure and the extortions by their own headmen stirred up bad feelings among the Chinese agricultural laborers, who rose in revolt in September 1652. The rebellion was crushed in due time with the help of the native allies who gladly grabbed the opportunity to temporarily relapse into their old cannibalistic customs and consequently turned the pursuit of the routed rebels into a bloodbath, or to couch it in the words of a contemporary observer: “You call it a Chinese war, don’t mince any words about it, say rather Chinese massacre!”

After this dramatic episode the colony did not regain its former glory. After a rapid succession of natural disasters the island even seemed doomed. Locust plagues struck the island over and over again, probably caused by the changes in the local ecology, which witnessed the turning of former hunting fields into agricultural domains. Unprecedented severe typhoons destroyed the crops on the land and even washed away defensive works guarding the entrance of the bay. No less detrimental to the economic life on the island was the silting up of the bay of Tayouan, which made it impossible for the East Indiamen of the Company to find a berth in calm

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27 Ibidem, p. 59.
And to heap insult upon injury, the irascible Zheng Chenggong alias Coxinga struck a heavy blow to the Dutch trade with China by imposing an embargo on all Chinese trade with Formosa when he discovered that the VOC had sent an envoy to the Qing court in Peking. Thereby the umbilical cord was cut that connected the island economy with the Chinese mainland.

Since the silk trade with China had come to a halt some years earlier on account of the civil war which had ravaged the Chinese silk producing regions, the Company had already replaced the supply of raw silk from China with silk from Tonkin and Bengal. By the end of the 1650s the once thriving colony of Taiwan had become a shadow of its former self and had lost its central position in the China Sea trade. But the worst was yet to come.

On Saturday 30 April 1661, to his great consternation, the guard of Zeelandia Castle saw the contours of Zheng Chenggong’s invasion fleet of 400 hundred junks emerging from the early morning mist. Beyond the shooting range of the guns on the castle walls, some 20,000 well-armed picked soldiers disembarked, all hardened by years of battle experience on the Chinese mainland. The Dutch garrison of less than 1,000 men attempted a few unsuccessful sorties, but was soon enclosed by the Chinese enemy who continued to lay siege to the castle. During Coxinga’s nine months’ long siege of Zeelandia roughly 1,100 Dutch men, women and children, who had been surprised by the sudden invasion in the countryside and had not been able to seek refuge in the castle, were killed, but after the surrender by Governor Coyett on February 1, 1662, the garrison was allowed to leave the castle and return home to Batavia.

**Conclusion**

Dutch Recife and Dutch Zeelandia Castle at Tayouan had a lot in common but also differed in several aspects. Both fortresses with their adjoining towns were strategically situated behind reefs and sandbanks and overlooked a quiet lagoon where ships could safely anchor. When their hinterland was opened up and the native tribes had been brought under political control, these two castle towns came to serve as capitals of the most important territorial possessions of the WIC and the VOC.

In this contribution I have cited various reasons why and how these colonies met their demise. In both colonies native policies were developed which seemed quite successful and were
partly used to keep in check the groups of Portuguese and Chinese settlers who really formed the life-blood of the colony for want of Dutch settlers and entrepreneurs. Both the Portuguese and Chinese settlers however became so heavily indebted to the all enveloping Company administration that they rose in revolt. The impact of the loss of the colonies on the two companies was different. The VOC with its possessions and investments widely spread over Asia could easily write off the loss of Formosa. When, after conquering the island in 1683, the Manchus alluded to a possible return of the former colony to the Dutch, they were not interested anymore. In the meantime the corridors of trade had been altered so fundamentally that the possession of Taiwan, which in addition did not offer deep anchorage, was no longer necessary. The greatest shock to the Company was that its reputation of being an invincible opponent had been shattered by an Asian general.

The impact of the loss of Brazil on the WIC was of a totally different category: it sealed the doom of the Company. The observation of Louis XIV’s ambassador in the Dutch Republic that the loss of Brazil eventually also dragged the WIC along, was echoed by and has met with approval from historians ever since. Le Long wrote in 1714 that the Company was flourishing until “Portuguese treachery took away Brazil, the loss of which depressed it much”. Luzac, writing in 1781, even asserted that “the loss of Brazil hit the WIC so hard, that it could not recover anymore from that wound”. This feeling is shared by Van Hoboken, who wrote an in-depth study of the role that the unfortunate admiral Witte de With played or refused to play in the last phase of death agony of the Brazilian colony. According to him (and Charles Boxer) consolidation of the position of the Brazilian colony would not only have enabled the Company to regain the lost capital invested in that colony, but would also have made it possible to develop from a privateering enterprise into a colonial trading company and colonial ruler like its counterpart in Asia, the VOC. 28 Yet one may wonder whether that ever was a sound proposition. From the 1630s onwards the WIC was not able to protect its own privileges on the African and Brazilian coasts because of frequent incursions from Dutch private interlopers. In addition, the West Indian products which it imported were also brought in large quantities to Europe by the other nations who possessed colonies in the Americas, making it impossible to set its own prices. It is clear that immediately after the capture of the Spanish silver fleet in 1628, the Company had largely overestimated its own financial means when it got its teeth into the Brazilian adventure.

The loss of the colony became inevitable when its administrators were no longer able, without receiving help from outside, to face the increasing pressure from the Portuguese colony to the south and the rebellion by its own restive Portuguese underlings.

“Neglected Formosa” and “Abandoned Brazil”, were they willfully given up by the WIC and VOC administrations? From the above it will be clear that many factors played a role in the loss of both colonies, but if one would have to come up with one overarching explanation for the loss of Zeelandia and Recife, this explanation should probably be sought in the unprecedented ambitious schemes of the Dutch India Company organizations, which triggered large scale operations that could not be sustained in the long run. May this serve as a lesson for overly ambitious multinationals in our age of globalization.
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