

Sailing the China Coast, 1622

Seyger van Rechteren

The ziefentrooster
 (“conforter of the sick”) Seyger
 van Rechteren left Amsterdam
 bound for the East Indies
 in January 1629. He sailed in the fleet of Jacques

Specx, who had been responsible for the establishment of the first Dutch settlement in Japan and was to become governor-general of the East Indies. Van Rechteren arrived in Batavia in September of that year, after travelling in the archipelago of Banda and Macassar before returning to the Netherlands at the end of 1632. The first edition of *Journal, Ghehouden door Zeyger van Rechteren: Op zyne gedane voyagie naer Osfr-Indien* came out in Zwolle in 1635. The third edition was included in volume II of the collection *Begin ende Voortgang*, of Isaac Commelin (Amsterdam, 1645) and it includes several important additions. Among these is the following excerpt regarding the expedition of Admiral Cornelis Reyersz to China between 1622 and 1624. This addition constitutes a fundamental complement to the account written by Willem Bontekoe. It deals in particular detail with the period in which Reyersz stayed in Pescadores island and the negotiations between VOC and China leading to the establishment of the Dutch in Formosa.

Source: René-Auguste Constantin de Reneville, “Voiage de Seyger van Rechteren Consolateur des Malades, Et depuis Prévot Général d’Overissel, aux Indes Orientales” [1635], in *Recueil des Voiages qui ont servi à l’établissement & aux progrès de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales* [Tome V, Amsterdam: Frederic Bernard, 1725, pp. 142-159]. The text was translated from French into English by Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.



O ziefentrooster
 (“consolador dos doentes”)
 Seyger van Rechteren partiu
 de Amesterdão com destino às Índias
 Orientais em Janeiro de 1629. *Ja integrado*

na frota de Jacques Specx, que fora responsável pelo estabelecimento da primeira feitoria holandesa no Japão e viria a ser governador-general das Índias Orientais. Van Rechteren chegou a Batávia em Setembro desse mesmo ano, tendo realizado viagens ao arquipélago de Banda e a Macassar antes de regressar aos Países Baixos em finais de 1632. A primeira edição do Journal, Ghehouden door Zeyger van Rechteren: Op zyne gedane voyagie naer Osfr-Indien saiu em Zwolle em 1635. A terceira edição surgiu integrada no volume II da colectânea Begin ende Voortgang, de Isaac Commelin (Amesterdão, 1645) e inclui vários aditamentos importantes. Entre eles encontra-se o extracto que se segue, relativo à expedição que o almirante Cornelis Reyersz realizou à China entre 1622 e 1624. Este aditamento constitui um complemento indispensável ao relato escrito por Willem Bontekoe. Trata com particular detalhe o período em que Reyersz permaneceu nas ilhas dos Pescadores e as negociações realizadas entre a VOC e a China que conduziram à fixação dos holandeses na ilha Formosa.

Fonte utilizada: René-Auguste Constantin de Reneville, “Voiage de Seyger van Rechteren Consolateur des Malades, Et depuis Prévot Général d’Overissel, aux Indes Orientales” [1635], in Recueil des Voiages qui ont servi à l’établissement & aux progrès de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales [Tome V, Amesterdão: Frederic Bernard, 1725, pp. 142-159]. O texto foi traduzido de francês para inglês por Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

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Orders for this expedition had been given by General [Jan Pietersz] Coen, and its command was entrusted to Cornelis Reyersz, who was killed during the expedition¹. The fleet comprised fourteen vessels, of which twelve sailed together and two, which met the others later, were part of the defence fleet. There were also two English vessels, and in Panderan [Phan Rang] bay, near the Macao islands, the *Hoop* and the *Trouw*, under the command of Jaques le Fèvre, also navigating under the pennant of Reyersz. Heindrich Vatch came on board the *Hoop* and also made this fatal voyage, where he died with many others.

After the unfavourable result experienced, Jaques le Fèvre pursued his course towards Japan. The others went to Pescadores and built there a fort with four bastions where they put twenty gun pieces. The one through which one gets in is called the sea bastion, in front of which there is still a half-moon where six to seven guns should still be placed.

This fort greatly inconvenienced the trade of the Spanish with the Chinese. It is located eighteen leagues from Macao². While its construction was going on, many Chinese junks were taken; the crews were imprisoned and made to work there, in such a way that they came to have 1,500 men working on the place. However, only 200 were left, the others having died, mainly due to extreme poverty rather than to any other accidents as they did not have enough to live on to support the work they were doing, often having just half a pound of rice a day.

The Chinese did not want to return their prisoners in spite of the fact that the Dutch offered eighteen Chinese for one Dutchman or one Japanese. But they said that even if they offered a thousand Chinese for one Dutchman they would not release even one. Thus, they all died and only eleven were left. It should not be expected that our fellow countrymen would be released unless a general peace treaty was reached and if it would in fact happen.

Thus, they exercised reprisals on the imprisoned Chinese, to do the same as in China. In fact, they did not kill them, but they used them so severely, kept them in such harsh jails, finally murdering them with so many blows, tormenting them so, giving them such bad food and such little quantity that they could not live for long. Therefore, they acted in the same manner towards those they had in their hands so as to see if, when they knew of this in China, they would take other measures.

As soon as the Dutch, whom they called the *Statices* from the name of States [General of the United Provinces], were ready to cast anchor in the Pescadores, they sighted twenty armed junks on the coast, which were escorting the fishermen. As soon as they discovered the *Statices*, they started to chase them. As they wished to reason with them, they sent a yacht under the command of Mate van Meldert, who, hoisting the peace flag, followed them, and finally there were two with whom he reasoned.

He told the Chinese what their purpose was, and, after they had understood him, they told him that he had to go inside the bay to present the petition to their commander, who controlled this type of businesses and who, in turn, would inform the emperor and his council. Therefore, they did as they were told. They ordered three yachts and the same Mate Jan van Meldert to go up the river Chinchieu [Jiulong Jiang]. The people took flight, but they joined some of them, and finally they managed to speak to a mandarin inside a pagoda.

Van Meldert told him that all he was asking for was freedom to trade with the inhabitants and that they should be forbidden from trading with the Spanish from Manilles [Philippines], who were their enemies. The mandarin promised that he would let them have an answer, informing him that, with this purpose, he had to go and speak to his superiors, who would then go themselves to Quinsai³, the city where the emperor was, in order to inform him; and that in the meantime he begged him to get away from the harbour.

The mandarin took the way to Hoxio [Fuzhou], a highly populated city, which was a day's journey away and also seventy leagues from Aimoi [Amoy / Xiamen]. There it was decided to send two junks to the Pescadores with four ambassadors, the first of whom, named Ongh Sophi, a man of wits and eloquent, told the council that they did not refuse to participate in the proposed negotiation; but that, meanwhile, he prayed them to go away from that island, which was under the rule of the emperor, as he never permitted them to trade with people who had entered without his consent a territory which belonged to him, in addition to having built a fort there; if they wanted to leave the Pescadores, they could go and build their fort in another island, which was quite near, under the name of Formosa, in which case the mandarins would certainly not take notice; and that the Dutch petition

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would be sent to the king's council, promising to give their support.

The council could not be made to accede to this decision as a result of the general's orders, which were precise, and also because the bay in the other island was not deep enough. They were sorry, therefore, of having to refuse the request of this messenger, who appeared to be a man of wits, of integrity and of knowledge; who insistently begged us in a very civilised manner, saying that by taking this step he had risked his life, which could be taken from him if he went back without having obtained an agreement to his request, as if he had not done all that could have been done in this respect. It was, therefore, necessary for him to depart so uncomfortably for not having succeeded and with the fear of being punished as if it had been his fault.

As soon as he was gone, eight vessels were sent to different places, with orders to destroy, loot and burn all that they would find. Among those who had been taken prisoner there was a fisherman who had been a merchant; he promised that he would obtain freedom of trade if that was all they were asking for. He was set free, and he went to Aimo or Aimou [Amoy / Xiamen], where the *totoc* [*dudu*], meaning the soldiers' colonel, had arrived with the order of preparing a quantity of fire ships and chasing the Dutch, incurring the loss of life.

The fisherman, after obtaining an audience with the *totoc* [*dudu*], informed him what our people's intention was, and he advised him to go and seek the *toia* [*duye*]⁴ or *comen* or *comon* [*junmen*] who was one of the lords of Hoxio [Fuzhou], a city sixty or seventy leagues further inland. Before he departed, Mate van Meldert was led, in the quality of ambassador, from the pagoda where he had gone to the city of Aimo [Amoy / Xiamen].

They brought before him a document whose characters were written on a long board with a big handle, from where every one could read the reasons why this foreigner before them, who was not allowed to set foot in the country, had been, nevertheless, taken to the city. This piece of news had been spread, and a great crowd of people was seen coming from all sides.

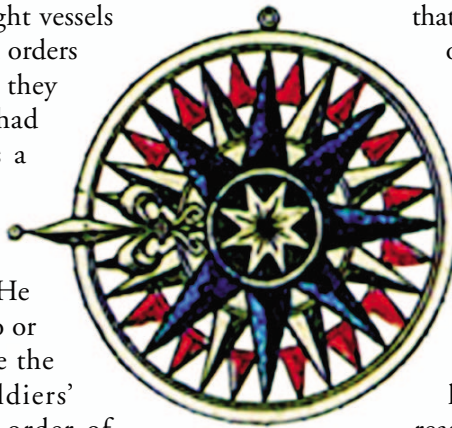
Meanwhile, they had obtained from the *totoc* [*dudu*] that the Chinese would equip two junks to go, still in that year, to Batavia, and that they would not be going to Manilles [Philippines] any more; this was also written on the board.

As soon as Van Meldert arrived in the city of Aimo [Amoy / Xiamen], he was received in a field, the place just being surrounded by trees. In the middle of this place could be seen an outhouse under which seven tables were placed with table covers falling down to the floor, and in front of each table a councillor was sitting, his feet hidden by the table covers.

He was taken before them, but before he could talk to them they wanted him to pay his respects as it is the custom in the country, having to prostrate and hit the forehead against the earth in a way strong enough for the assistants to hear. Van Meldert said

that such uses were very different from those of the Christians, who did not render such honour to any man, but that he would certainly pay them all the courtesies practiced in his country. When the interpreter transmitted this statement, they said that he should do it his way. He then stepped forward and saluted humbly the whole assembly, as it is done in Holland. Then, remaining with his head uncovered, he told them that the

reason why he had come there was due to the fact that the messenger who had been in the Pescadores did not have the full power required to negotiate; that he was coming to beg them to grant his country the favour she had been asking for the past twenty-three years, which had been promised her and had still not been granted to her in spite of the promises made to her; that the subjects of ... the lords of the States [General] of the United Provinces, meaning the East India Company, which represented all the subjects, by means of the commission it had obtained from the sovereigns had been authorised to trade in China; that in fact they had sent them a few junks, but they were only loaded with rubbish goods which had been of no use to them; that they requested the Chinese to fulfil their promises and that they should send good quality merchandise existing in their country, which would be paid to them in money or in other goods.



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“Faithful depiction of all the coasts and lands of China, Cochinchina, Cambodia, Siam, Malacca, Arakan and Pegu and all neighbouring islands, large and small...”. In Arie Pos and Rui Manuel Loureiro (eds.), Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerário, Viagem ou Navegação para as Índias Orientais ou Portuguesas* (Lisbon: CNCDP, 1977).

They promised once more to meet the Dutch’s wishes as far as this was concerned, with the condition that they should leave the island of the Pescadores and that they should depart to another island. Van Meldert said that he could not answer himself to this proposal and that it was necessary that he should go and report to his superiors, the Commander’s name being Cornelis Reyersz, staying at the Pescadores. He was dismissed and taken back to the river with great pomp and ceremony. As soon as he had returned and reported to the council what had happened, the Commander was of the opinion that he should go himself to negotiate, to be better informed of the state of things.

Therefore, he left with Van Meldert, and passing by Aimoi [Amoy / Xiamen] continued to Hoxio [Fuzhou], which is the capital city of the province of

Chinchieu or Chinceu [Fujian], situated on the river bank. On the way, every six leagues they took them to one of the Emperor’s houses where they were magnificently entertained. The distance between the villages was no more than one or two shots of a gun away. Everybody worked industriously like ants: the tiniest bits of land were cultivated. The crowd of sightseers on the way to see these foreigners was so big that it was not possible to go through them, so they had to stop often to allow themselves to be looked at.

The Chinese, who appeared to be quite pleased to entertain them, kept them a full month on the way. In Hoxio [Fuzhou] they were installed in one of the king’s palaces, which had been built by a Chinese to be a house of pleasure for one of his wives; he had sixteen wives, and he had built for each one of them a

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similar palace. This one was in the suburb, at one and a half leagues from the town hall. They were only allowed to go out to be presented before the Council of Seven, where they were told that in order to be in the position of requesting freedom of trade in China, they had to leave the island of the Pescadores, and if they did not want to do so there was nothing they could claim, neither at that moment nor ever more in the future; but if they departed to Formosa they would send them to this island and to Batavia all the merchandise they could wish for. This statement was made by the *toia* [*duye*], who had already received orders from the Council of Three and later from the Council of Seven.

The commander told them that it was not in his power to consent to this proposal and that it was necessary to inform Batavia of this situation. The Chinese, to indicate that their intention was to keep their word, offered to send immediately two junks, as long as the *Statices* provided them with an escort vessel.

Having arrived at this solution, the result was written down on a board, which was taken before them and where each of them could read what was written. On the way, when they were going back, they passed by the most beautiful countryside they had ever seen and nearly always through a crowd of people, or rather through an army.

When they were on the banks of the Chinchieu River [Jiulong Jiang], they ordered the people to go back. Two junks were there loaded with silks, and they gave them one of the *Statices* vessels as escort, took the Batavia course, to show there the answer they had received and which was written on the board in Chinese characters. However, the ships met such bad weather in their way that they could not arrive in that year, and they only returned much later when they were no longer expected. The Chinese, seeing this delay, suspected that the *Statices* did not want to sign a treaty with them, and they again sent junks to Manilles [Philippines]. The *Statices* fought them and the war restarted openly.



Some years before, they had granted the [Dutch East India] Company freedom of trade in China, but the Portuguese had prevented this concession from coming into force. The breaching of their word occasioned the war, and a lot of blood was shed on both sides. The war had restarted many times before, and despite the fact that it had just restarted again, Reyersz's orders were so precise and he was so determined to establish trade and to make the Chinese meet their promise that he ordered four vessels of the company to go to the Chienchieu River [Jiulong Jiang]; these were the *Groningen*, the *Samson* and the two yachts *Muiden* and *Erasmus*....

They came back with their first proposal, saying that if we abandoned the Pescadores and went to Tãiovan [Dayuan], about ten leagues away on Formosa Island, they would trade with us, or otherwise they were decided to continue the war.... The negotiations continued, and they finally agreed to leave the island. In fact, the Chinese assembled 15,000 warships, as many war junks as fire-ships, and junks fully loaded with stones to block up the island passage. The fort was destroyed, and the Chinese themselves worked on it. They transported most of the materials and effects to Tãiovan [Dayuan], where they intended to settle down and stop there for the merchandise trade. Thus, it was on this island that they had to remain, as the laws of the Chinese Empire did not allow them to settle in the boundaries of their jurisdiction. **RC**

NOTES

1 Cornelis Reyersz, in fact, died years later, in 1643, in Madagascar.
2 Penghu Archipelago, in fact, lies quite near Taivan [or Dayuan], and about one hundred leagues from Macao. Probably the author meant Dayuan when he wrote "Macao."

3 Quinsay was a place-name made popular by the thirteenth century travel account of Marco Polo, and identified with Hangzhou; here, it probably refers to Peking, the imperial capital of Ming China.
4 *Duye* is the official name of the *junmen*.