

The Dutch in Formosa, 1632

Anonymous



Throughout the 17th century, many were the foreign soldiers and sailors taken into the fleets and garrisons of the Dutch East

Indies Company – Germans, Scandinavians, men of the Baltic, British as well as some French, Swiss and Flemish. Today relatively few known records by these men remain. The brief *Relation d'un voyage aux Indes orientales par un gentilhomme français arrivé depuis trois ans, avec une Hydrographie pour l'intelligence du dit voyage* (Paris, 1645) is the sole title in the French language published at the time by a man who travelled to the Orient on board Dutch ships. Except for the hydrographical part (which is the transcription of someone else's work) this text was probably written by a French soldier who left the Netherlands in June 1630 on board the *Vlissingen*. This was one of two ships which then left for Batavia fitted out by the Zeeland chamber of commerce. This anonymous author began by visiting Java, Formosa and the coast of the Chinese province of Fujian and Japan, being subsequently sent to the Malabar coast, Surat, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. All in all he was away from Europe for seven years and is thought to have returned to the Netherlands in August 1637 in the fleet commanded by Hans Putmans, ex-governor of Formosa. With the *Voyages et aventures aux Grandes Indes orientales* (1617-1627) of Swiss mercenary Élie Ripon, this work is the sole report known of a passage through the South China Sea at the service of the VOC written in French.

Source: Anonymous "Relation d'un voyage aux Indes orientales par un gentilhomme français", in *Mercenaires Français de la VOC – La route des Indes hollandaises au XVII^e siècle*, ed. Dirk Van der Cruysse [Paris: Éditions Chandeigne, 2003, pp. 216-226]. The text was translated from French into English by Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

No longo do século XVII, foram muitos os marinheiros e soldados estrangeiros admitidos nas frotas e nas

guarnições da Companhia Holandesa das Índias Orientais – germânicos, escandinavos, bálticos, britânicos, bem assim como alguns franceses, suíços ou flamengos, por exemplo. Conhecem-se hoje relativamente poucos escritos deixados por estes homens. A breve *Relation d'un voyage aux Indes orientales par un gentilhomme français arrivé depuis trois ans, avec une Hydrographie pour l'intelligence du dit voyage* (Paris, 1645) constitui o único título em língua francesa editado na época por um homem que experimentou viajar até ao Oriente a bordo dos navios holandeses. Com excepção da parte hidrográfica (que constitui a transcrição de uma obra alheia), este texto terá sido escrito por um soldado francês que deixou os Países Baixos em Junho de 1630 a bordo do *Vlissingen*. Tratava-se de um de dois navios que então zarparam para Batávia, equipados pela câmara de comércio zelandesa. Este anónimo começou por visitar Java, a Formosa, a costa da província chinesa de Fujian e o Japão, sendo depois enviado à costa do Malabar, a Surate, ao Golfo Pérsico e ao Mar Vermelho. Ao todo, esteve ausente da Europa cerca de sete anos, devendo ter regressado aos Países Baixos em Agosto de 1637, integrado na frota comandada por Hans Putmans, ex-governador da Formosa. Com as *Voyages et aventures aux Grandes Indes orientales* (1617-1627) do mercenário suíço Élie Ripon, esta obra constitui também a única reportagem conhecida de uma passagem pelo Mar do Sul da China ao serviço da VOC escrita em francês.

Fonte utilizada: Anónimo, "Relation d'un voyage aux Indes orientales par un gentilhomme français", in *Mercenaires Français de la VOC – La route des Indes hollandaises au XVII^e siècle*, ed. Dirk Van der Cruysse [Paris: Éditions Chandeigne, 2003, pp. 216-226]. O texto foi traduzido de francês para inglês por Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

THE STORY OF IQUAN, GREAT ADMIRAL OF CHINA

The father of Iquan was a Chinese gentleman who had his head cut off by order of a great admiral of that nation. His son (whose story we are telling) went with two of his younger brothers into the fort of Tai Youan [Dayuan], on Formosa Island, where he was reduced to selling oranges and Chinese beer to earn his living and that of his brothers. And yet, in his misery, he never stopped remembering the quality of his birth nor the wish to avenge the insults made to his house. The governor of the fort, recognising that he was a well-meaning man with a good heart, granted him an old cargo ship, with which Iquan made such good captures that within a short time he became admiral of a fleet of over eight hundred junks, which devastated all China's sea coasts, and had more than fifty heads cut off to avenge his father's death. Until then, this general had shared with the governor of the Tai Youan [Dayuan] fort, respecting their agreement, but when he saw that he was so powerful, he was not satisfied with being dishonest to them; he treated them as enemies, taking one of their vessels. After the six years that this war lasted, the king of China, seeing his provinces ruined and three of his armies destroyed, finally granted all the requests of this brave corsair and, by abiding to his law, made him his admiral, appointing him to this position. Iquan made the murderer of his father eat all his parts, one after the other, and exterminated all those of his descent.

This new admiral, having recovered a little his good spirits and recollecting the obligations he had towards the Dutch, sent back all those still left from the vessel he had taken, and the others who had helped him, with important gifts, and continued to favour the [Dutch East India] Company, until he asked for a considerable sum of money, which he had lent to a Dutch general. He sent his brother to receive it. General [Hendrik] Brouwer received him quite well but did not pay him, and this mandarin was sent back without the money, telling him that his brother had such great indebtedness towards the company that he should not think about a sum which was nothing compared with the immense riches he had come to possess through the Dutch.

Iquan received this so impatiently that he ordered two of our vessels, which were anchored in front of Amoy [Xiamen], where the great admiral of China has

his usual residence, to leave and never to return, nor those of their nation. They promptly obeyed and went to tell of their disfavour to the governor of the Tai Youan [Dayuan] fort, who ordered forthwith seven or eight vessels to be fitted out to go and cast anchor in the China river in front of Amoy [Xiamen] and sent notice to the admiral that he had important business to inform him on behalf of the general. The Chinaman came and was taken prisoner by the governor, who called him a traitor and a *schelm*¹ a thousand times. The captain who had imprisoned him led him to a room, which had been prepared for him, where he did not want to eat anything, but in the end necessity constrained him to send to Amoy [Xiamen] asking for a certain quantity of food and fruits. Meanwhile, his brothers put their businesses in order and managed to maintain his post and make sure of his succession, while he, on his part, attempted by all means to get out of his imprisonment by trying to bribe two guards, without success, as they advised the governor of this intention.

The admiral, seeing that his secret had been discovered, asked to speak to the governor, to whom he made a lot of complaints, and the other presented a lot of reproaches against the Chinese, all connected with their ingratitude, reminding him of the obligations he had towards the Dutch, whose reputation had brought more terror to the king of China than his weapons and his merit. But finally, after a lot of reasoning on both parts, it was concluded that Iquan's brother would remain as hostage to assure their peace treaty, which was concluded immediately after. Once the two Dutch vessels were loaded in compliance with the agreement, the admiral's brother expected to be released as had been agreed, and he was very astonished when he saw that he was being taken away. [Pieter] Nuyts, who was the governor of the Tai Youan [Dayuan] fort, expected that his hostage would provide him with an island situated at the mouth of the river of Chincheo [Jiulong Jiang]; by this means he would become the master and would hold the key of this big river, which descends from the Tartarian mountains coming across this big empire. But the Council of the Indies finished with this objective (which Nuyts had told no one) by sending him to Japan, where the Dutch had a settlement and also own the island called Firando [Hirado]². The company appointed Hans Putmans to

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replace him as governor of Tai Youan [Dayuan]. When he found that Iquan's brother was a prisoner, and after obtaining as much information as he could about his predecessor's behaviour, he promptly had eight ships fitted out to take back this young Chinese, whom he released, hating what Nuyts had done, as he fully disapproved of his means.

While he was anchored there, Tusselai [Tau-Tsailak], a famous corsair who had been Iquan's lieutenant when he fought against China, arrived in front of Amoy [Xiamen] and stopped his big fleet between this city and the small Dutch fleet. As soon as this pirate recognised our flags, he came to meet our governor and asked him whether he did not want to live in peace. The Dutchman said that he wished it very much and that he would buy goods from him if he had any. Tusselai [Tau-Tsailak] answered him that he would ransack Amoy [Xiamen], and afterwards he would hand them over to him for a good price.

Hans Putmans, having thus discovered the corsair's objective, got dressed as a sailor to go through Tusselai's [Tau-Tsailak's] fleet more safely, which was placed, as we have already mentioned, between our vessels and the city, and went to inform the admiral of his enemies' purpose and offered to fight on his side. The Chinaman heard different opinions for quite a while, suspecting that it was a trick to involve him in combat. However, the freedom he had given to his brother and the horror speeches of the governor assured him finally of his honesty, and they decided to fight the next morning. Both of them passed the night giving their orders and having their ships equipped.

The next day, at daybreak, Iquan ordered his vessels to turn his ships' prows against those of Tusselai [Tau-Tsailak], who did in this combat all that a good chief can do in such an unexpected encounter. However, he was out of his mind when he saw his rear being attacked by the Dutch, who brought disorder among the corsairs and finally made this famous corsair jump into the sea, but not before getting hold of all his precious stones, which helped him to get to the bottom more rapidly. The admiral saw that, without the Dutch, he could have been again reduced to selling oranges by this famous pirate, who had already terrorised the king of China as much as he had previously done. To show his gratitude to the governor, he made him mandarin, handing to him, with his own hands, the cap and the belt, and having him transported

in a chair covered with a tiger skin, a great sign of honour among the Chinese. He also gave him a gold chain that went nine times around his neck, and at its tip hung a medal that had on one side Iquan's face and on the other the image of their combat. After that, we returned to Batavia.

During our voyage, an ambassador of a king of Aceh arrived in Batavia with significant gifts to ask our general to join his forces to those of his master in order to siege Malacca by sea, while this prince would attack it from the land. Our general told him that it was necessary to wait for an order from the Prince of Orange and from the States, just to entertain friendship with these people. What would it look like to take away this city from the Christians so as to establish there the Infidels? If the king of Aceh would give it to the Dutch in the same way that he promised him the looting, the Portuguese would, apparently, not keep it much longer.

VOYAGE FROM BATAVIA TO THE TAI YOUAN [DAYUAN] FORT IN FORMOSA ISLAND

In the month of August 1631 we departed from Batavia with two hundred Frenchmen³ to go to the Tai Youan [Dayuan] fort in the Formosa Island to replace the garrison which had reached its term. On the 7th, after leaving the channel separating the islands of Bangka and Sumatra, we discovered the islands referred to as Pulau, which are in great number. The first we saw is named Pulau Paniau, and we took water supplies from Pulau Lory, which is inhabited.

All these islands are so near each other that from afar they appear to be just one. Those which are populated, the inhabitants are from Aceh. They ran away from their country, which had been ruined by the wars of a certain king of Taprobane⁴. These people planted trees and bred a lot of animals in these islands. After staying there for one day, we left, and the next day we went along the coast of the big and rich kingdom of Cambodia, which has abundance of drugs and scented woods, [where the people] have the same laws as China and also the same religion. After three days, we discovered and hugged the coast of Cochinchina. This big province is ruled by three kings, two of which pay tribute to a third one, whom they call *tuncam* [tonking], meaning emperor. Nevertheless, this *tuncam* [tonking], as well as the king of Cambodia,

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are vassals of the king or emperor of China. Cochinchina is a very fertile country, and it does not lack either food provisions or riches. The Dutch also have a settlement in the capital of this province.

We passed then in front of the islands of Pulau-Couton, Cotou or Cotam (they are also found under the names of São João [Shangchuan] and Macao), and we continued to the Pescadores, which are in great number and so close to each other that they are separated just by small channels. At the time we were there they belonged to a great Chinese princess, who was the Emperor's aunt. In one of the smaller islands was a fort built there by the Dutch, but the Chinese, who built a fort in the big island, made the Flemish [Dutch] abandon theirs, and the Chinese destroyed both forts in one night. Most of the inhabitants of these islands are fishermen. In the middle of the biggest of the islands is a big mosque or pagoda where I entered, and I saw three large altars set up on the same side. The one in the middle was the largest, supported by four leopards, and on top of it the figure of their main god, whom they call Josse.⁵ The idol and the altar were very richly decorated and ornamented with precious stones. On the other two altars were also two other big idols, and on still another one, five images of certain important persons the Chinese said had been friends of the great Josse and who had led the life of saints.

Finally, on the 28th we arrived in Tai Youan [Dayuan], which is a fort with four bulwarks situated on a small island separated from Formosa by a small channel and whose construction started around 1625. The governor is installed there like a prince and lives there like a little king. The Portuguese also have a fort and beautiful houses thirty leagues from there to the north⁶.

DESCRIPTION OF FORMOSA ISLAND

The island rightly called Formosa lies on the Tropic of Cancer and a few leagues away from mainland China. It is more than sixty French leagues in length and thirty in width. Its soil is very fertile and is irrigated by various rivers, and if it lacks something, neighbouring China provides it, and the Chinese coming to fish in the rivers of the island bring fruits and all the other things it does not have. The [Dutch] governor takes great pleasure from hunting, as there

are all types of animals, mainly deer in great quantity. It is also possible to find there an animal which has been called by our people as the Tai Youan Devil, as big as a fox, with the head of a hog, the nose of a ferret, quite a long tail, his body covered with scales so hard and so close that a halberd cannot hurt it unless it is under the throat⁷. Usually it stays on scouring sand where it makes a hole in a moment when someone tries to hunt it. The islanders also wanted to make believe that they saw an animal similar to the horses in the stables, with the exception that it had a horn with the length of a fathom in the middle of the forehead, which could be a unicorn.

The inhabitants of this island are well built, great hunters, and engaged in the war against slavery, leaving to their women the manufacture of *machicau*, a beverage better than Spanish wine, Frontignan or Chinese beer, and it is made from rice and roots. The women performed abortions before the Dutch went to the island and believed that it would be a dishonour to have children before thirty years had elapsed. At present, those engaging in such stupidity have to pay two hogs as a fine, which is quite hard on them, as this bad animal is like their god; these people adore only certain animals as did the Egyptians. They also keep the bodies of their ancestors in their homes with great respect. Nowadays, there are over 20,000 Christians in the island. The slave compound of Sincan is the main one on the island; the governor is judge there as well as in various other neighbouring [slave] compounds. These people are skilful with weapons, which for them are the bow and the javelin, and keep with great care in their closets the heads or other members of the bodies of the enemies they killed while making war against them, and learn the history of their house through the dead bodies they keep there, and say "my father cut this hand," or "my grandfather this head."

This people did not have a religion before we got there, but they are so good that they had no problem in accepting the Christian religion. The Portuguese and the Dutch also taught them how to get dressed. It should be pointed out that many of them had had grandparents whose names were Thomas and John before they knew any people from Europe with such names. These savages look very carefully after their compounds with permanent guard, and during the night they relieve their sentries every half hour, and

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they are protected by small bulwarks. These people are great hunters, so they often take up a certain animal which they call *vaique*, which is big like a hound in Formosa and like a hare in Java. There is a small animal like a deer, except for the fact that it has a single horn with a large knot at the top.

This island, the most beautiful among the beautiful, would be an incomparable resort if it was not for the earthquakes, which are very strong every winter. However, if the company builds there a city like Batavia, it will greatly profit from it, and even now it is profiting greatly in what respects the large trade coming from China and Japan, and the Dutch could not have such a lot of trade without this island.

Near Tai Youan [Dayuan], on the south side, is the Golden Lion Island [Lambai], which has a diameter of four to five leagues; it is a paradise. It took its name from a Dutch ship that went aground there, and all the island inhabitants were taken as slaves as they cut the throats of all those that managed to get ashore from this shipwreck. These people in bondage have a great artistic trend. While we were in Formosa, the Dutch made all the compounds of this island to pay tribute and entered into all sorts of small wars to subject the islanders, and with about one thousand men we took the city of Mattau, one of the most important of these compounds, looted and burnt it. But later, these people, who took to the woods, made peace, and nowadays Mattau, Taquerehem and nearly all these dwellings pay tribute to the [Dutch East India] Company, as is the case of Sincan and Bakaluan. The Chinese, who are witty and malicious, had encouraged these savages to rebellion, but the Chinese accustomed to this beautiful island and its natives pay quite a quantity of deer skins as tribute.

VOYAGE FROM TAI YOUAN [DAYUAN] TO CHINA

After these small wars, we were ordered, twenty four soldiers with Commander Paule, to go to China to inform Iquan that the governor was coming in person with eight ships to trade in the river of Chincheo [Jiulong Jiang], as neither the foreigners nor the Chinese can trade with each other without the admiral's permission. We found Iquan in An-hai, a small city by the sea in China, staying with his mother and his two sisters in a very beautiful house built near this city, on the side of a mountain, as are almost all houses in this

region, and being decorated like ours in France with various channels and fountains, communicating with all the rooms, which are also richly furnished....

The governor had to wait fifteen days for Iquan. During that time we observed the walls of China and the situation in Amoy [Xiamen], which is situated at the mouth of the river of Chincheo [Jiulong Jiang], which at this place may be taken for the sea so wide it is. This city, which is bigger than Paris, is also one of the largest commercial cities of China, and the great trade, mainly in silk, is the reason why its inhabitants are so very rich. The houses of many mandarins and *loyas* [*laodie*] increase the beauty of this wonderful city. These palaces are square and built with a black stone which is harder than slate. The upper floor is flat and very well protected. The houses of the craftsmen are like their houses in France, and we can see them working in the shops as in Paris. All these houses are covered with tiles. In spite of it being said that there are no poor people in China, we saw them dying of hunger, lying on a bit of straw. They did not know the meaning of alms, and when we wanted to give something to the poor, the others said, "They are dogs that did not want to work." When a father has too many children, he can drown the girls after making them cry to see whether anyone will consider feeding them. Our governor saved a small girl of this unhappiness by giving one hundred *rijksdaalders*⁸ to a poor woman to take care of her, as there are no hospitals in this country. A particularity of the Chinese is that they hire their wives and children and also themselves for two- or ten-year periods. Moreover, these people are so good with numbers that in a moment they make calculations with no mistakes which would take us several hours to solve.

When Iquan finally arrived, he was extremely kind to the governor, whom he treated wonderfully. A *cambou* [*junmen*] arrived a little later, representing the king, who had sent him to take out of jail all those he considered appropriate to go to the border of Tartary as soldiers. Iquan received him with the same honours he would have received the king had he come in person, and festivities lasted for eight days, with comedies and other amusements, after which this man went away, and we loaded our vessels with raw silk, rolls of velvet, satin, damask, sugar, brown sugar and other goods such as porcelains, which are as common as earthen vases in Paris. We became accustomed to wearing good

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clothes, to have lead, nutmeg, clove and the silver coins with which we paid for them.

The [Dutch] governor sent to Batavia eight of his loaded vessels and stayed for some time. He sent twelve muskets to the governor [of Xiamen] and two greyhounds from Surate, and managed to have him make a proposal, which he had been thinking about for a long time but did not dare to propose it himself: the admiral should grant the Dutch the same favour he was granting the Portuguese⁹, which concerned taking to them every year, to the Manilles [Philippines], nine big junks loaded with the merchandise they wanted, granting them one year to make the settlement; the Portuguese paid for the preceding year's merchandise when they brought the new cargo. An angry look, threats and complaints that the Dutch were selfish were Iquan's reply; he had the muskets stowed away and the greyhounds beaten and killed, saying that he did not care whether they would do as much to us, and that we should take these dogs to the governor so that he could see how he would have treated him if he had held him back. That made us go immediately to Batavia, where we saw the splendid wedding of our governor, who returned to Amoy [Xiamen] straightaway with twenty-one big vessels, which the [Dutch East India] Company put at his disposal to demand satisfaction for such a great insult.

Our governor made the [Chinese] admiral believe that he had come just to trade. That was sufficient for him and everybody in Amoy [Xiamen] to come to the port, overlaying the 1,500 or 1,600 junks that were there to see our fleet, which then started to thunder the cannon against those poor Chinese and dispersing nearly everybody, and all the vessels were shattered or sunk. Afterwards we went on shore and looted the Amoy [Xiamen] suburbs, which we would have taken if we had been properly led. We ran along this coast up to the mouth of the

river, looting all that was found. Then we also ransacked the city of Tanxoa [Dianqian?] and would have burnt it, but the governor did not want it to be so. During all this ruinous period, Iquan recovered his wits and prepared a large fleet, gathering junks from everywhere to fight us. He asked the governor to wait another three days and he would fight against him as an honest man and not as a traitor as the governor had done. On the agreed day he appeared and fired three shots as a signal for combat, a lot of blood being shed on both sides. The Chinese fire-ships greatly injured our vessels, which had waited anchored instead of taking to the high sea. We lost three vessels and had more than two hundred imprisoned—Flemish [Dutch] people who were spared to go as captives to the Tartaric border, from where they wrote saying that they did not expect to be released, and that there they treated them well enough.

And while retreating to Tai Youan [Dayuan], we took three big Chinese junks loaded with nearly 3,000 trunks with money, which helped us to recover our losses. Iquan promptly sent someone to arrange the peace, which was concluded on the condition that the Dutch did not return to China, but that the Chinese would bring to them all types of goods, to be paid in cash, which has been respected up to now. A little after this agreement we were sent back to Batavia. **RC**



NOTES

- 1 Rascal.
- 2 The Dutch had had a factory in Hirado, on the Japanese island of Kyushu, since 1609.
- 3 Certainly the author meant here 'two hundred soldiers.'
- 4 Taprobane, the ancient Ptolomaic name, in the Portuguese sources is usually identified with Ceylon, but perhaps here it means 'Sumatra' since the wars on the northern tip of the island involved mostly Sumatran rivals.

- 5 A word apparently derived from the Portuguese *Deus*, God.
- 6 The author is referring to the Spanish fort of Keelung, which was located on the northern coast of Formosa.
- 7 This is a reference to the pangolin or scaly anteater.
- 8 Dutch coin which was worth 2.5 gulden.
- 9 The Spanish controlled the Philippines, but the crowns of Portugal and Spain were then united, hence the confusion between Portuguese and Spanish.