



J. Thomas Lindblad, Alicia Schrikker (eds.), **Het verre gezicht. Politieke en culturele relaties tussen Nederland en Azië, Afrika en Amerika. Opstellen aangeboden aan Leonard Blussé** (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2011, 447 p., ISBN 978 90 5194 422 8).

The tradition of the *Festschrift* is an honourable one but one that seems to be fast disappearing in the pragmatic culture that these days seems to have enveloped academic institutions world-wide. This volume collects together contributions from 27 of Leonard Blussé's colleagues whose own work grew from his or was inspired by him. Two chapters each on the 'young' and the 'old' Blussé capture those inspirational qualities to which anyone who had even the briefest experience of a Blussé 'performance' will attest. Not least amongst this number will be the students who benefitted from the thorough training in historical research they received from him through the 'TANAP' (Towards a New Age of Partnership) and 'Encompass' (Encountering a Common Past in Asia) postgraduate scholarship programs at Leiden – as one of them makes clear in his contribution.

This volume reflects the good and the anachronistic elements of the *Festschrift* tradition. Sixteen of the 27 contributors were/are based at Leiden University, and only one is/was located outside the Netherlands – in Asia. Given the nature of the volume this is perhaps inevitable, but nevertheless surprising given Blussé's large international network of colleagues, co-workers and interests. Fortunately others have already filled that breach. (See *Large and Broad: The Dutch Impact on Early Modern Asia: Essays in Honour of Leonard Blussé* (Tokyo 2010) a collection of twelve chapters by Japanese historians edited by one of Blussé's long terms Japanese associates, Yoko Nagazumi).

The West's encounter with the East is what defines the Blussé legacy and this frames the organisation of *Het verre gezicht*. After a brief introduction which includes the two biographical sketches, the book's six sections valiantly attempt to reflect the extent of Blussé's interests. In translation they read 'The Indian Ocean in the 17th century', 'Java and Ceylon in the Eighteenth Century', 'The Atlantic Ocean', 'The Far East', 'Netherlands Indies', 'China and the Netherlands'. The final section, 'East and West', focuses on the contemporary European – more specifically Dutch – legacy of that earlier period of globalisation, and the volume is rounded out with a nine page bibliography of Blussé's

publications. Within each of these sections, contributors reflect in their own writing some of the enthusiasms and preoccupations of their departing colleague.

As the subtitle for the volume – ‘Political and cultural relations between the Netherlands and Asia, Africa and America’ – suggests the volume collects a miscellany of articles that fossick amongst the fascinating histories of the golden age of Dutch global enterprise. These, as the useful editorial introduction points out, range from portraits of individuals (8), to political relations (6), and intercultural relations (6). A further three articles deal specifically with the VOC which, arguably, frames the Blussé oeuvre, and several venture into contemporary ‘East-West’ issues, including the Netherlands’ ‘postcolonial’ migration.

There is no space to discuss individual chapters in such a short review as this but as a whole, the volume does not aim to provide a systematic overview of the multiple operations of the VOC and its legacy. There are indeed few articles here that reflect on broader ‘political and cultural relations’: contributions by Natalie Evers on ‘West Afrikaanse vrouwen en interculturele relaties in prekoloniaal Elmina’, Cátia Antunes’s on ‘Nederlands-Portuguese koloniale interactie in de zeventiende eeuw’ and Frans-Paul van der Putten’s on China’s development since the end of the nineteenth century, ‘Van semi-kolonie naar economische wereldmacht’, form insightful exceptions. Most articles are of a more anecdotal kind, nuggets of gold from the different eras and areas that reflect the kind of interests for which Blussé is so well known. Among the highlights here are portraits of individuals such as the account by Alicia Schrikker of those VOC officials ‘left behind’ after the English take-over of Ceylon and Paul van der Velde’s study of the Japanese interpreter, Imamura Gen’emon Eisie. The mythical mermaids of Victor Enthoven’s account (‘Mythische watergrazers’) and Kees van Dijk’s discussion of the debate on whether or not Banda Aceh needed a racecourse provide enjoyable reading which, in their own way, shed light on more serious cultural questions in two very different moments and contexts. Other accounts of discrete political machinations are well written and no doubt well chosen moments in the long history of West-East relations but inevitably need a broader canvas.

The nature of this book project (compounded by language), will unfortunately mean that the research exhibited here will remain (largely) closed to an Anglophone readership. On the other hand, this showcase of Dutch studies, the majority of which draw almost exclusively on Dutch secondary and archival literature, also points to the extent to which Dutch historiography may still need to integrate itself – or be integrated – into the broader international (read Anglophone) scholarship on what has become the exciting field of global history. This is not to say that scholarship must inevitably be reflected in the current dominant global language of English. However the challenge of writing global history which inspired the career of Leonard Blussé and which he has inspired so many to pursue, means that our nationally-oriented research must reflect and feed into the writing of transnational histories.

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