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Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History

Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666–1687

(coedited with Jonathan D. Spence)
From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China

Pepper, Guns, and Parleys: The Dutch East India Company and China, 1662–1681

1688

A Global History

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PART IV

VERSAILLES, LONDON, AMSTERDAM

In 1688 the attention of politically aware Europeans was focused on a splendid French court at the center of a powerful and aggressive state; on London, capital of a realm growing in power and wealth if only it could stop tearing itself apart over religion and the family quarrels of its monarchs; and on Amsterdam, commercial capital of Europe, at the center of a confederation of cities and provinces so intricately checked and balanced that it seemed incapable of decisive action. Surveying the politics of Europe more widely, one would think of the polycentric Holy Roman Empire; anarchically elective Poland; cautious, legalistic Spain; and many others. Observers from many other parts of the world—India, China, Russia, the Ottoman Empire—would have found these differences less striking

than the singular fact that the European political world had no imperial center, no Beijing, no Agra, no Istanbul. The medieval holy Roman emperors had aspired to rule all Europe; but their power never had reached beyond the German and Italian lands and the Balkan frontier they held against the Ottomans, and now Vienna faced major rivals even within those territories.

The intense struggle for survival of each unit in this multistate system pushed all of the more adaptable of them toward new strategies for mobilization of allegiance, wealth, and manpower. This made the Europe of 1688 a cauldron of forms of political life new in Europe, such as centralizing bureaucracies, or new in the world, such as representative assemblies with real powers. It was generally accepted that rulers had the right to determine what religions would be followed in their realms. Cynical manipulation of religion by rulers and ruled, incitement of one faith against another, turned some entirely against orthodox Christianity and others toward deeper inwardness within it. Novel forms of mobilization of resources and human energy, like the Dutch East India Company and the Society of Jesus, spread European power and presence to almost every part of the world.

There were always new points of crisis on the great chessboard of European politics. In 1688 they included the election of a ruling bishop in Cologne and the birth of a crown prince in London. French armies moved. A formidable Dutch fleet set out down the Channel and landed an invasion force in England. By the end of the year the chessboard had a new configuration. That narrow Channel now divided the central antagonists. This configuration was to last from the end of 1688 to the fall of Napoleon in 1815.

The Glorious Revolution was a disaster for Penn. He was charged with treason several times and spent long periods in hiding in the years that followed. He was in Pennsylvania again from 1699 to 1701, and he spent his last years back in England. His Holy Experiment was becoming a more conventional place, with more conventional problems, including settler-Indian conflicts, but it never entirely lost its Quaker heritage or the open and democratic political culture he had sought to foster.

CHAPTER 17

A HUNDRED YEARS OF FREEDOM

Amsterdam was one of the great cities of the Europe of 1688, a likely stop on the grand tour of a young gentleman, a crossroads port with ships and canalboats going off to almost all destinations. It was prosperous and impressive in its energy and good planning, but it offered almost nothing to the baroque fondness for broad avenues, long vistas across courtyards and gardens, palatial stage sets for regal ceremony and gesture. The traveler arriving at the docks along the Ij River walked or took a boat into a series of carefully laid-out semicircular canals, the key elements in the planned growth of the city in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and today still among the finest and most distinctive of European urban landscapes. The canals were lined with handsome, tall houses, many of them with hoisting devices under their high eaves so that trunks and furniture could be moved in and out of the upper stories. The visitor probably also would see the great East India House and its warehouses, redolent of the scents of Europe's richest spice trades; one or another courtyard of small charity houses; and the thriving Jewish district, especially its splendid baroque Portuguese (Sephardic) Synagogue, with its fine dark wood pews, pulpit at one end and Ark of the Torah at the other—the Sephardic arrangement—and an uncanny sense of calm and divine presence in the light from the high windows. In a city where militant Calvinist preachers had a considerable hold on public opinion and appearances, neither Roman Catholicism nor commercial sex could make such a public display of itself;

the visitor might also learn of a large house that contained a discreet but generally known hidden Catholic chapel or notice a tavern or music hall where a drunken sailor, apprentice, or farmer could lose his sexual inhibitions and perhaps his purse. He would be impressed by the general cleanliness, good order, and the safety of many streets even at night, which owed much to the citizens' watch groups that patrolled them regularly and also to the oil-burning streetlamps, more than two thousand of them, in use since 1670, the first in the world. (By 1688 several other cities had them, and the philosopher Leibniz had a scheme to bring them to Vienna.) Accustomed to the smells of any city full of horses and chamber pots, the visitor might still wrinkle his nose, if there was a northwest breeze, from the whale oil works.

Sooner or later the visitor was likely to be taken to the municipal House of Virtue, or workhouse. The public was admitted for a small fee to see the good work that was being done and probably to feel comfortably superior to the inmates. Here vagrants, beggars, and disturbers of the peace were confined and, it was hoped, taught how to live moral and productive lives. They had to listen to lectures or minisermons, drawing heavily on the Gospels and on the proverbs and other didactic parts of the Old Testament. They were supposed to be taught trades and paid, modestly to be sure, for their work. But the work in which most men engaged (there was a separate institution for women) required little skill and had little application outside the workhouse. The city council had given the House of Virtue a monopoly of the provision of powdered brazilwood to the local dyeworks. The wood, which yielded a red dye, was reduced to powder by teams of two men, pulling back and forth, hour after hour, a big rasp, about three feet long, with a handle on each end. The House of Virtue was known colloquially as the Rasp House. Inmates were subject to strict control, forbidden to fight or swear or use the nicknames and slang beloved of urban lowlifes. Those who would not reform might be whipped, often with a tanned bull's penis. Many visitors also reported a more serious lesson in the necessity for work, a cistern or small cellar that filled with water if not constantly pumped; the miscreant would be confined to it and told to pump or drown.

The "drowning cell" may have been just a story; but there are some fairly plausible sources, and the idea is well founded in Dutch attitudes and realities. All Amsterdam was built on pilings, just above or even below the waterline. Much of Holland was and is below sea level. From the late Middle Ages on, the region had been transformed, its habitable and productive area steadily increased, by diking and draining. The constant pumping required was done not by men or draft animals but by windmills. A polder (tract of land surrounded by dikes) poorly designed or carelessly maintained might be inundated in an hour. Dikes might be built to withstand ordinary conditions and then give way to a storm or flood worse than any seen in a century, and in the ultimate sacrifice for freedom the Dutch might open the dikes and flood their fields to stop an invader. They had done it to stop Louis XIV in 1672. The careful planning of dikes and drainage, investment in land reclamation, and constant coordination of water control in each polder produced an orderly and disciplined rural society and a form of capitalism that was not at odds with rural prosperity and actually created land. The canals and rivers gave the country a remarkable transportation network, far better than any country's roads in the seventeenth century.

So the resistant vagabond in the drowning cell was simply being taught to be a good Dutchman, to keep pumping or drown, to do his share for a country that was hardworking, uncommonly orderly and prosperous, and constantly aware of the fragility of all the works of man. All those little sermons pointed in the same direction, toward Calvinist fear of a righteous God, toward a life of prayer, Bible reading, and hard work.

Our visitor was likely to be baffled by Dutch politics. He knew something about elective monarchies and even republics, but where was the sovereignty among the Dutch? The state that exchanged ambassadors with other European sovereign states was the United Provinces of the Netherlands, but they did not seem to be very united. The stadholder, William III, prince of Orange (soon to be William III of England, Scotland, and Ireland), was not even an elective monarch, but a military commander and administrator formally appointed by the assembly of delegates of the provinces. When he came to Amsterdam, he did so not as a sovereign but as a respectful negotiator with its oligarchic rulers, likely to arouse suspicions if he arrived in too princely a state. If our visitor had entrée to some of the great houses along the canals, he might encounter an interesting variety of political opinions. Some would say that the United Provinces were an enduring union of sovereign provinces, others that it was Amsterdam and the other cities that were sovereign and that the provincial assemblies in

which they met could not compel them to act against their own principles and interests. Amsterdam paid more than half the taxes of the entire United Provinces and usually took the lead in their politics. The central government of the provinces, such as it was, was in The Hague, which also was Prince William's residence. The lifeblood of Amsterdam was in the crowds of ships along the river, the East India House, and the other bustling warehouses that made the city Europe's most comprehensive source for luxury goods from all over the world. At the stock exchange well-dressed men kept out of the frequent rains under the arcades and bought and sold obligations of the city and provincial governments, shares in the East India and West India companies, and much more. The stock market always responded quickly to good and bad political news, never more so than in the uncertainties of the summer and fall of 1688.

Our visitor's Dutch informants might refer to library shelves lined with books and pamphlets on the intricacies of Dutch political principles and organization, but he would find that many of them were in Dutch, which few foreigners read. That was no obstacle to exchanging views with his hosts, who spoke and wrote excellent French. In their fine houses along the canals the great families of the city accumulated wealth through trade, rural landownership, investment in drainage projects, interest on their bonds, and the legal and illegal perquisites of their service as municipal officers. Well read, multilingual, often university-educated, many of them were tolerant by temperament and conviction, proud of the heritage of tolerance and "true freedom" for which they had fought for over a hundred years. Tolerance and freedom also were known to be good for trade. Amsterdam traded with peoples of all religions, and almost anyone could settle there and contribute to its wealth: Jews, Baptists, Lutherans, even Catholics if they were willing to keep low profiles. This did not mean that these thoughtful people were all skeptics or religiously indifferent. They might feel uneasy or unworthy with the blessings of prosperity or remind themselves how quickly flood or invasion, perhaps God's judgment on an unfaithful people, could destroy them. Of course death was never far away, even in a comfortable house in a safe and orderly city. Calvinist preachers always were calling for a "further reformation" of society and individual lives, for regular prayer, Bible reading, strict observation of the Sabbath, and so on; these calls increased, and met with more of a response from all classes, in moments of political tensions and uncertainty, such as 1688.

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In 1688 the United Provinces of the Netherlands were engaged in their last enterprise as a European power of the first rank, the invasion of England. They looked back proudly on a little over a hundred years of freedom, counting from their formal political union in 1579 or perhaps as important from the "great alteration" that had brought Amsterdam over to the cause of independence in 1578. The Dutch polity had been born in particularist revolt, town by town and province by province, against the taxes and controls of the Spanish Hapsburg monarchy that then ruled all of what is now the Netherlands and Belgium. The United Provinces had grown out of their alliance in their struggle for freedom. They acquired an extra dimension of unity and fervor as they became associated with, though never completely identified with, the Protestant struggle against the Roman Catholicism that the Spanish defended so stoutly. They received magnificent political and military leadership from William the Silent, prince of Orange, and generations of his descendants, but always as stadholders, delegated administrators, appointed by and ultimately answerable to the provincial States of Holland and the other six provinces and to the States General, their general decision-making body, in which each province had one vote. The States of Holland, by far the most important of the provinces, discussed only those matters already approved by their Delegated Councillors, a sort of standing committee, and referred to the towns for discussion in their councils. The constitutions of the other six provinces were roughly analogous in pattern with many singularities. Everywhere in the United Provinces the real centers of politics—some said even of sovereignty—were the towns. The town council was typically an oligarchic body, something like a board of directors of a modern corporation or university, selecting its new members out of a stratum of qualified families, reaching out to take in outsiders only at its own pleasure. The common people had no vote but frequently made themselves heard in demonstration and threatened riot, especially in times of crisis. From the great revolt of the 1570s and 1580s down through the crises of 1618, 1672, and 1688, and on to the end of the United Provinces in the days of the French Revolution, Dutch politics had a singularly local style, the great conflicts being hammered out in dozens of towns and scores of permutations by grandees, merchants, and ordinary people who had known one another all their lives.

The Dutch had to fight off the finest armies of Europe, the Spanish, in order to keep their freedom. Two stadholders, Maurice and Frederick Henry, turned out to be military organizers and strategists of the first rank. The wealth and sophistication of the town elites, the Calvinist fervor of the preachers, and the centralizing military achievement of the stadholders all reinforced one another in time of war. But when the Spanish signed a truce with their former subjects in 1609, internal stresses emerged. Theological strife between Calvinist militants and advocates of a more tolerant church under greater state control, strikingly similar to quarrels in England at the same time, coalesced with constitutional controversies between Prince Maurice and the town and province localists. With support of the Calvinists and some of the towns, Maurice won; the great advocate of Holland, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, was executed in 1619. With the expiration of the Spanish truce in 1621 Maurice and then his half brother, Frederick Henry, managed to find enough allies among the towns to wage successful war. Frederick Henry died in 1647 just as the war was winding down. His son, William II, disapproved of the peace being discussed and resisted moves to reduce military forces. He had used his alliances within the towns and the threat of military force to gain a dominant position when he suddenly died in November 1650. His only son, the future William III, was born in December.

The years that followed were remembered by the prosperous Amsterdammers as the glorious days of the "true freedom," when without a massive military threat on the land frontiers or an adult stadholder, the towns and provinces had their own way. In 1672 Louis XIV shattered this dreamworld with a massive invasion. Forts and forces had been sadly neglected. Even when the dikes were opened, the polders filled slowly. Large parts of the United Provinces were occupied by the French. In many towns there were big, but generally nonviolent, demonstrations against the ruling groups that had allowed things to come to such a terrible state. The leading figure of the "true freedom" regime, Johan de Witt, was torn to pieces by a mob in The Hague. William III was named stadholder. He now proceeded to use all his prerogatives and powers, and all the popular indignation that was on his side, to purge town councils of the partisans of the old regime. But he was not a sovereign, every town was different, and it was slow work. Some writers reminded him, perhaps with a glance across the Channel at England in the 1670s, that if he pushed too hard, he might create two permanently irreconcilable parties. In 1678 and again in 1684 Amsterdam

won the ratification of terms of peace with France of which William disapproved. In 1684 he turned from constant conflict with the towns to conciliation, never undertaking a major initiative without the cooperation of Amsterdam. The caution and feel for the intricacies of human interaction that William learned in these struggles, as well as his iron determination to forge a Protestant coalition that could resist Louis XIV, carried him to his triumph in London at the end of 1688. At the same time, some new key figures who were more conciliatory emerged in Amsterdam. One of them was Nicolaas Witsen.

The well-dressed, shrewd-looking men who return our gaze from the endless group portraits of the leaders of seventeenth-century Dutch society are not very easy to get to know across the centuries. Few of them misbehaved as spectacularly as the young dukes of the reign of Charles II. Dutch politics only occasionally manifested the polarization and extreme risk that produced such memorable and dangerous personalities in England. The many-leveled system of dispersed sovereignty and collective decision making called for men who could listen to one another and move carefully toward a new consensus.

Nicolaas Corneliszoon Witsen was an outstanding member of this political and cultural elite, a man of real learning both historical and contemporary, a key figure in the intricate minuet that led to Amsterdam's surprising commitment to Prince William's risky venture in 1688. The Witsens had been members of Amsterdam's ruling elite since the upheaval and change of government in 1578, in the founding days of the independent Netherlands. Nicolaas's father, Cornelis, is a bold central figure in one of the finest of the collective portraits, van der Helst's *Dinner for the Civic Guard*. He played a major role in the city's break with William II in 1650 and was *burgemeester* in 1653. Nicolaas, born in 1641, accompanied his father in the 1650s on a mission to England, where they were received by Cromwell and shown the pillow and the ax used in the execution of Charles I. Witsen had an excellent classical education, followed by studies at the University of Leiden, some of them with Jacobus Golius, professor of Arabic and an early investigator of other non-European languages, including Chinese. Witsen received the Doctor of Laws degree in 1664. Then he went to Moscow in the suite of a Dutch embassy. He met all kinds of people, even the patriarch Nikon, and began collecting the information on Russia and

Asia that made him probably the greatest authority on these subjects in western Europe. In 1693 he was to publish a great folio volume, *North and East Tartary*, full of information and maps. When Tsar Peter visited Holland, he was astonished by the depth of Witsen's knowledge of his empire.

Witsen made the usual rich young man's visits to Paris and Rome, studied briefly at Oxford, and in 1670 settled down to a long career in the service of his native city. In 1671 he published a major book, *Ancient and Modern Shipbuilding*, in which his descriptions of ancient shipping showed considerable erudition in Greek and Latin sources. He skipped the Middle Ages almost entirely and then gave a comprehensive survey of the shipbuilding techniques of his own time. His political career moved rapidly after the upheaval of 1672, and in 1674 he was named for the first time to the Delegated Councillors. In 1676 he served, on the recommendation of William III, as a delegate of the States General with the army. Already he seems to have been part of the slow and tentative reconciliation between William and the great city. He built a splendid house on the Heerengracht, one of the main canals. In 1682 he was named for the first time one of the four *burgemeesters*. He sympathized with William's desire to strengthen the army and oppose Louis's slow aggression from the south, but he feared the risks as long as England was so unstable, with a possibility that it might ally with Louis. William saw his point but took the threat of French aggression more seriously. The positions of the many other towns were as usual complicated and ambiguous. Witsen also was organizing efforts to aid the Huguenot refugees who were flooding into Holland, reinforcing a widespread sense of the menace of French tyranny to Protestant Europe.

Witsen's letters are not easy reading. The style is formal, full of polite phrases. There are many references to conversations too sensitive to summarize on paper, to more and less appropriate ways to communicate with a dignitary without loss of face for anyone concerned. They are masterpieces of indirection, of avoidance of confrontation, of incremental movement toward difficult decisions. Just keep writing, he seems to say to himself, just keep everyone in touch, and something will work out. We're all in this together. William III could not have asked for a better counterpart in the delicate reconciliation between the stadholder and Amsterdam in the 1680s.

In 1688 Witsen was engaged in mundane discussions with an envoy from the tsars in Moscow, helped supervise major improvements in the fortifications and water control system around the town of Naarden, was

involved in efforts to secure the ransom of some Dutch prisoners in Algiers, and was concluding a term as Amsterdam's representative on the Delegated Councillors in The Hague but was having to delay his move back to Amsterdam because his wife was in poor health. At the same time he was deeply involved with the delicate communication and decision making leading up to Amsterdam's commitment to the invasion of England.

October 27, 1688, was a day of fasting and prayer throughout the United Provinces for the success of Prince William's great venture to England. In Haarlem prayers were said in the Reformed, French Calvinist, Remonstrant, Lutheran, and Mennonite churches. In Amsterdam there was a special prayer to the God of Israel in the magnificent Portuguese Synagogue: ". . . bless, guard, favor, support, save, exalt, enhance, and raise to the most glittering peak of success the Noble and Mighty States of Holland and West-Friesland, the High and Mighty States General of the United Provinces, and His Highness the Prince of Orange, Stadholder and Captain-General by sea and land of these provinces, with all their allies, and the noble and illustrious burgomasters and magistracy of this city of Amsterdam."

The Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam had every reason to support William and his cause. Although hard-line Calvinists deplored tolerating them, the House of Orange favored them because of their major contributions as international traders and financers of military campaigns and their singular usefulness as back door communicators with Spain and Portugal. In Amsterdam they had a vigorous community life, with many schools and clubs, some of which were the places to go for stock market deals after hours. They produced a sophisticated literature largely in Spanish, the language of their most systematic and principled persecutors, with fondness for baroque conceits and formalisms not that different from Sor Juana's. An outstanding example of this literature, published in 1688, was Joseph Penso de la Vega's *Confusion of Confusions*, which seems to be the first book ever published on the art of stock market speculation. It takes the form of a dialogue among a philosopher, a merchant, and a stockbroker. The stockbroker does most of the explaining. There are three ways to profit from the market, he says: like a prince, holding your stock and living off the dividends; like a merchant, trying to gauge trends, buy, sell, buy

options, and so on; or as a "player," making deals for others and earning commissions. The best example of stockowning, the stockbroker says, is the Dutch East India Company; a share is worth six times its original value in 1602 and has paid dividends totaling 1,482⅓ percent on the original price. But still there are many who think there is something unnatural about the stock market. To be sure, sometimes it seems like the Leaning Tower of Pisa; no matter from which side you look at it, it seems about to collapse in that direction. But he goes on to show how it is possible to invest sensibly for various purposes and how the market actually works.

It is oddly appropriate that a baroque style and sensibility should be brought to bear in this pioneer analysis of the intricacies of early modern capitalism. As in the pamphlet wars over political regulation of economic behavior in seventeenth-century England, a moral assessment of an economic practice often focused on its selfishness and inequity, while a more pragmatic view pointed to its hidden benefits. Capitalism always breeds these debates, right down to recent arguments about the pros and cons of derivatives, hedge funds, and dot.com IPOs. No one loves a speculator. So who better to make the case for the usefulness of speculation than an outsider writing elegantly and intricately in the language of the persecutors of his people? It also is noteworthy that *Confusion of Confusions* was published in August or September 1688, just as the Amsterdam stock market took a nosedive on the first rumors of William's risky enterprise against England. The book urges investing in the great East India and West India stocks, not panicking, and holding for the long term.

How was it that all the delicate web of influences and decisions of the United Provinces came together in support of William's assault on England? The Dutch state had been able to project its power beyond its frontiers in a few important naval engagements, notably in the Baltic. It had created an enormously successful military and commercial power halfway around the earth in the East India Company, and it had fought Spain's finest to a standstill on its land frontiers. But it had never mounted anything like this combined sea-land invasion, one of the riskiest forms of military action in any age. Here again, we find that the overreaching of Louis XIV plays a key part in the story. French concessions on tariffs had helped lure the rulers of Amsterdam and the other trading towns into the peace of 1678. Dutch merchants were selling more in French ports and also were

carrying larger shares of France's exports. In 1687 Louis first banned imports of Dutch herring except for those that had been preserved with French salt. Then he revoked the 1678 tariff concessions. In 1688 several towns called for retaliatory measures against French trade and were more and more inclined to go along with William's moves toward an invasion. William was negotiating to hire large numbers of foreign troops, fourteen thousand Germans and six thousand Swedes, to man the frontiers of the United Provinces while their own best regiments invaded England. The agreements had to be ratified by the provinces. Most of Amsterdam's rulers continued to hope that Louis would back down and a confrontation could be avoided. But in 1688 the Sun King was not backing down in large matters or small. Incensed by Dutch threats, he had Dutch ships seized in French ports. On September 29 the States of Holland passed a secret resolution giving full support to the assault on England.

In November, as William's fleet made its way down the Channel on its way to its astonishing victories, the Church Consistory in Amsterdam petitioned the *burgemeesters* for more vigorous suppression of prostitution, closing of taverns on Sunday, and suppression of dance halls, "since Fatherland and Church are threatened with very dark clouds." Those particular clouds lifted, but the situation of the United Provinces did not improve. Heavily taxed, they made major contributions to the long war against France. William as stadholder-king, now resident in London and preoccupied with consolidating his position there, managed to keep control of Dutch politics until his death in 1702. Thereafter the anti-Orange rulers of the towns and provinces regained influence, and Holland decided not to appoint a new stadholder. The United Provinces in the eighteenth century often were neutral in European wars. Their cloth and other industries declined, and their business enterprise shifted toward financial services and transit trade. By the time of the French Revolution Holland seemed to be in deep economic and political decline. It was as if now that the floodwaters were not so threatening, the people had stopped pumping.