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## **Deshima Whispers: Information Alteration in Dutch East India Company Records (1718-1731)**

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# *Deshima Whispers*

## *Information Alteration in Dutch East India Company Records (1718-1731)*

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## Introduction

To all which particulars and whatever else may be worth noting, you will pay diligent attention, keeping a careful record or daily journal of the same, that we may get full information of all your doings and experiences, and the Company obtain due and perfect knowledge of the situation and natural features of these regions, in return for the heavy expenses to which she is put by this expedition.<sup>1</sup>

Perfect knowledge of the situation was desired by the *Heeren XVII* (Lords Seventeen) of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company - VOC). While the above instruction only applied to a Company expedition sent to explore the South-Land in 1622, VOC officials throughout Asia were required to write detailed reports of their experiences.<sup>2</sup> This policy contributed to the rise of an information network, spanning from Persia to Japan that saw local *factorijen* (trading posts) produce a variety of records (genres).<sup>3</sup> To ensure that these records reached the *Heeren XVII* in good order, they were copied and sent to the Company's Asian headquarters in Batavia (present-day Jakarta), where they were examined and processed into new reports (genres).<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the original records as well as the processed reports were sent to the Dutch Republic, where Company officials made a final selection that was to be discussed during the annual meetings of the *Heeren XVII*. Whether the processed reports provided the perfect knowledge that the Heeren XVII desired, remains to be seen. The changes made by Company officials along the way, most notably genre changes, cast doubt on the information's authenticity for a number of reasons that will be discussed in this research.

As genre plays a central role in this study, I will first explain what I mean by genre and genre changes. The traditional definition of genre in genre theory is a typification that describes formal features of form and content of a text.<sup>5</sup> When a genre of a text is defined, expectations are formed about what rules of form and content apply. For instance, when we study a

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Ernst Heeres, *The Part Borne by the Dutch in the Discovery of Australia 1606-1765* (London 1899) 20.

<sup>2</sup> Adrien Delmas, 'From Traveling to History: an Outline of the VOC writing System in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century,' in: Adrien Delmas and Nigel Penn eds., *Written Culture in a Colonial Context: Africa and the Americas 1500-1900* (Brill 2012) 98.

<sup>3</sup> Over 20 establishments participated in this network and answered directly to Batavia, see Nico Vriend, "'An unbelievable amount of paper": the information system and network of the Dutch East India Company', in: Charles Jeurgens, Ton Kappelhof and Michael Karabinos ed., *Colonial legacy in South East Asia The Dutch Archives* (2012) 72.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Ketelaar, *Archiving People: A Social History of Dutch Archives* (The Hague 2020) 248a.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Bazerman, *Shaping Written Knowledge The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science* (Madison 1988) 62.

*dagregister* (daily journal), we expect that the text is organized in accordance with its genre: a daily entry-style that reports on daily events of importance. However, genre theorists found this definition quite limiting, because it did not explain where these characteristics came from or what purpose they served, besides classification.<sup>6</sup> To that end, genre scholar Carolyn Miller published her now famous article ‘Genre as Social Action’ (1984) in which she conceptualized genre to be ‘typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations.’<sup>7</sup> Miller and others realized that the style and content features of a genre were formed as part of the action that a text performed in response to a situation. If the action was deemed effective, and a comparable situation arose, a similar action was performed, gradually giving rise to recognizable genres. With this in mind, the author of the *dagregister* found himself in a recurrent situation as an official at a VOC trading post, with the task of reporting on daily events. The first journal was simply a single text, but as his situation repeated, similar reports were written in response, over time developing specific form and content features that constrained information and assisted in performing the action (i.e., to report on daily events to his superiors) in an effective manner.

This research employs the definition of genre as communicative action. This study's purpose is not to categorize texts based on qualities using the traditional definition; rather, I believe that any recurring recognized form of communication is a genre. This allows us to investigate the occurrences of information change within the VOC information network as a result of actions rather than passive genre properties. In her research on community archives, Fiorella Foscarini illustrated how such actions (genres) revealed the actual practices of different actors behind institutional layers of descriptive appearances of genre.<sup>8</sup> I will evaluate if VOC genres also had a practical side, or if the Company's institutional organization was too strong in enforcing passive genre elements. This enables us to measure the extent to which genre imposes power over knowledge production. In the remainder of this paper, we will trace information on a single historical event as it moved from the local trading post to the Dutch Republic through various genres. The main question is: to what extent did information change when a genre shift occurred in early eighteenth-century VOC records?

Three separate archives, two of which are preserved at the Dutch National Archives in The Hague, are relevant to this study: the archives of the Dutch Factory in Japan (NFJ)<sup>9</sup> and

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<sup>6</sup> Amy J. Devitt, ‘Generalizing about genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept’, *College Composition and Communication* 44:4 (1993) 573-574.

<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Miller, ‘Genre as Social Action’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984) 151.

<sup>8</sup> Fiorella Foscarini, ‘A Genre-Based Investigation of Workplace Communities’, *Archivaria* 78 (2014) 23.

<sup>9</sup> National Archives, The Hague, Dutch Factory in Japan, access number 1.04.21 (hereafter abbreviated as NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr.)

the collection of records of the *Heeren XVII*.<sup>10</sup> The third collection, which connects the prior two, is now preserved by the National Archives of Indonesia (ANRI). These archives comprise of the archives of the *Hoge Regering* (supreme government), which consists of the administration of the Governor-General and Council of the Indies in Batavia, the highest-ranking Company representatives in Asia. Some of the records they produced are also available as copies through the VOC archives in The Hague. Each of these archives preserves a distinct set of genres, that reflect a different step in the process of knowledge production. For example, the NFJ archives represent the first stage, which encompasses genres that serve as the original reports and source texts on local events. We can assess the amount to which information changed, if at all, by examining how each archive's genre set processed the historical event in a different way.

Due to the sheer size of the VOC archives, this research is limited to the records of a single historical event that took place between the years 1718 and 1731.<sup>11</sup> The focus point is the expressive wish of the *Shōgun* (Japanese sovereign) to receive Dutch and Persian horses. While this may not appear to be a newsworthy event, it was quite the opposite. The reason for this must be sought in the context of uncertainty that defined the interactions between the VOC and the Japanese government at the time. New shogunal policies caused the trade with Japan to deteriorate and the Company's relationship with the Japanese officials suffered as a result.<sup>12</sup> In an attempt to gain the ruler's favor and improve trading conditions, the Company then complied with the Japanese wishes and delivered the highly desired horses. Because of the commercial implications of this event, the *Heeren XVII* were continuously kept up to date through official reports. However, before this information reached the *Heeren XVII*, it went through various hazards that I will briefly outline in the next paragraph.

### **The Textual Pathway**

The first step in conducting this research is to analyze the genres created by officials at the local VOC trading post. The archives of this establishment, previously located on the fan-shaped artificial island Deshima in the bay of Nagasaki, were sent to the Dutch National Archives in the 1860s, making it one of better-preserved VOC archives still in existence. They

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<sup>10</sup> National Archives, The Hague, Dutch East India Company (VOC), access number 1.04.02 (hereafter abbreviated as NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.02, inv. nr)

<sup>11</sup> The main VOC archives cover about 1277 meters in archival material, see M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, R. Raben, H. Spijkerman, Inventory of the archive of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), 1602-1795 (1811) (The Hague 1992) preface.

<sup>12</sup> Feenstra Kuijper, *Japan en de Buitenwereld in de Achttiende Eeuw* ('s-Gravenhage 1921) 176.

contain over 1600 records, including *dagregisters*, *resoluties* (decisions), *memories van overgave* (final accounts), letters to the Governor-General, and other generic texts.<sup>13</sup> These documents are the products of two centuries of interaction, starting in 1609, between various levels of VOC governance and the representatives of the Japanese government. As previously mentioned, the records of this establishment were sent to Batavia, where they were processed for several different purposes. In this research they serve as the source texts and genres that offer us a point of comparison after information is processed.

The Company's information network was made up of numerous larger and smaller centers of calculation. The concept of a calculation center was introduced by the French sociologist Bruno Latour in his work *Science in Action* (1987). In order to deconstruct the process of knowledge production, Latour identified locations where information was gathered, processed and aggregated by local communities, after which it was redistributed within the same network.<sup>14</sup> These locations are therefore useful in helping us identify places where information is appropriated for the production of new genres. In addition, Latour reminds us of the fact that these transitions did not necessarily imply that knowledge was lost, but also that information may have been enriched. In Amsterdam, for instance, mapmakers used collections of ships' logs to create new maps of previously uncharted waters and coastlines, which were then circulated to further enhance the knowledge production process.<sup>15</sup> This idea is further explored in Chapter 3 of this paper.

The records of Deshima, whether *dagregisters*, *resolutions*, or *memories van overgave* were all processed once they arrived in Batavia. As a center of calculation, the *generale secretarie* (central administration) of the Governor-General and Council processed the mail of nearly all VOC establishments in Asia.<sup>16</sup> The output of the *generale secretarie* included numerous generic texts, such as *dagregisters* and the *generale eis van Indië* (general order from Asia), as well as, the *generale missive*. The latter document offered a condensed report of all incoming mail of the different VOC establishments, regarding the Company's state of business in Asia and forms an important genre shift for information.<sup>17</sup> This process made it easier to

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<sup>13</sup> M.P.H. Roessingh, Inventory of the Archives of the Dutch Factory in Japan at Hirado (1609-1641) and at Deshima, (1641-1860), 1609-1860 (The Hague 1964) 17.

<sup>14</sup> H. Jons, 'Centre of calculation', in: J. Agnew and D. N. Livingstone eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Geographical Knowledge* (London 2011) 158-160.

<sup>15</sup> Ketelaar, *Archiving People*, 237a 10.

<sup>16</sup> Vriend, 'An unbelievable amount of paper', 73.

<sup>17</sup> W.Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII Der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie Deel 2* ('s Gravenhage 1964) 112.

mobilize information, however, it also resulted in cases where the Governor-General filtered information which he deemed trivial.

The *generale missive* and other Batavian records, as well as those of the different VOC establishments, together made up the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* (Letters and Papers Received: OBP) that were sent from Batavia to the administration of the *Heeren XVII* in the Dutch Republic. These documents laid the groundwork for the three yearly meetings of the *Heeren XVII*, during which the Company's activities were discussed based on the information obtained from Asia. Special committees of directors were selected to prepare these topics. One of these committees of importance to this study, is known as the *haags besogne* (The Hague Committee). This committee scrutinized the OBP and subsequently prepared the *haags verbaal*, which served as a summary of the material read during the meeting. They furthermore compiled the *concept missive*, a document which contained a reply in response to the *generale missive* and supplementary documents sent by the Governor-General and Council.<sup>18</sup> This document essentially contains the final version of information that was originally recorded in a *Deshima dagregister* and thus serves as the endpoint of this research.

To simplify the textual pathway outlined just now we can draw an analogy with the children's game of Chinese whispers. In this game, a message is whispered from one individual to the next. Once the last person in line receives the message, he speaks it out loudly in front of the whole party. By then, the message is commonly distorted due to errors caused during the interaction process. A participant in Japan, likewise, constructed a generic message, which was whispered from its local establishment to Batavia. Afterwards, the message was incorporated into new generic messages, altering the original message. Finally, the original, as well as the newly formed messages, accompanied the return fleet to the Dutch Republic, where its finalized version was spoken out loudly by a committee of directors. The assumption is that tracing the information from genre to genre will disclose how much information changed as it was processed by different VOC authors each faced by their own situations. In the following section, we explore why genre theory hasn't been employed in VOC research before.

### **Status Quaestionis**

The impact of genre on information and, by extension, the archives that house these documents has never been fully investigated. It raises questions such as how genres evolved over time, to what extent they shaped information and what impact they had on archival documents as the

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<sup>18</sup> Meilink-Roelofs, Inventory of the VOC archive, 25.



source of historical authority. But until now these questions have remained unanswered owing to archival science's long neglect of genre theory. Only in 2012, was it first introduced as a topic in a special issue of *Archival Science*. The editors remarked that if an archivist was asked about genre, he would likely think of those 'ill-conceived lists of document types, which become longer and longer as yet another ambiguous type is added.'<sup>19</sup> The fact that they are deemed 'ill-conceived' shows that archivists, with a few exceptions like Foscarini, have made little effort to understand them beyond their taxonomical properties.

A reason why the relationship between genres and archives has not been studied is that archives were long thought to be places where only documents containing historical truths were kept. Only recently this view changed when archivists and historians refigured the concept of archives in the 1990s. This so-called 'archival turn' led scholars to recognize that archives must be studied as places that shaped our history. The basis for this reconfiguration was laid by Michel Foucault in his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).<sup>20</sup> According to him, archive (as a concept, not the institution) was first the 'law of what can be said,' and then 'the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events.'<sup>21</sup> He meant by this that archive is the information that is deemed 'sayable' by a society. Archive upholds the 'set of rules which at a given period and for a given society define the limits and forms of the sayable.'<sup>22</sup> That is, archive serves as the filter of history, which in turn produces history through a set of rules, that tolerate some, but not all, forms of knowledge.

While Foucault's theory does not consider genre, it begs the question to what extent genre contributed to the enabling and constraining of the 'sayable.' Nevertheless, colonial archives have yet to be examined through the lens of genre. In fact, Alicia Schrikker observed that the postcolonial archival turn is absent in VOC historiography in general.<sup>23</sup> Debates on the relationship between power and knowledge of the colonial archives are mostly reserved for the post-VOC period in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Under this nexus is understood that power is accumulated through the acquisition and production of knowledge, which is then used to order reality and history through classification, inclusion, exclusion, and appropriation of information. The fact that genre has been left out of this conversation until now demonstrates

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<sup>19</sup> Gillian Oliver and Wendy M. Duff, 'Genre studies and archives: introduction to the special issue', *Archival Science* 12:4 (2012) 373.

<sup>20</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press 2009) 44.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language* (New York 1972) 129.

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Politics and the Study of Discourse', in: G. Burchell and P. Miller eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago 1991) 63.

<sup>23</sup> A. Schrikker, 'Rethinking the VOC: Between Archival Management and Research Practice. Introduction.', *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 134:2 (2019) 97.

that not only archivists, but also historians, should be more aware of the effects genre has on the production of knowledge and history.

As previously stated, genre theory is used in this study to argue that genres are more than ‘ill-conceived collections of document categories.’ Based on Foscarini’s research which demonstrated the practical activities of documents, I suggest that examining genre as action should provide us with a method to estimate the institutional strength of the VOC information network. This theory is in line with Miller’s observation that the characteristics of genre – form and content – are fully flexible and continue to develop when situations change and require new responses.<sup>24</sup> However, frequently the early characteristics of genre become sanctioned by an organization to a point where institutional power structures continue to reinforce them.<sup>25</sup> This has resulted in local authors becoming limited in their actions through genre to the detriment of a business or organization. While this was primarily observed in modern businesses, it begs the question whether such institutional factors also constrained the VOC information system. By viewing genre as action, we may assess the (in)flexibility of VOC genres and, consequently, the implications this had for the production of knowledge. Next, I will briefly outline the methodology and structure of this paper after which we dive into the first chapter.

## **Methodology**

To examine to what extent information changes, we first need a case study that makes up that information. As mentioned, I have selected the VOC records about a single historical event, which serves as the focus point in the following chapters of this paper. This event, pertaining the delivery of horses by the VOC to Japan between 1718 and 1731, was chosen for a variety of reasons. First, horses were extremely important to the Japanese as a warrior society, making them a somewhat dynamic subject that returned often during VOC-Japanese interactions.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, the delivery of horses is discussed in a variety of genres within the VOC archives, including letters translated from Japanese. Third, the period is relatively unexplored in terms of the Company’s relationship with Japan. I want to illustrate that the VOC-Japanese relationship retains some of the dynamism that characterized the preceding century.

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<sup>24</sup> Miller, ‘Genre as Social Action’, 163.

<sup>25</sup> Bill Hart-Davidson, ‘Genres are Enacted by Writers and Readers’, in: Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle eds., *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (2015) 40.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Laver, *The Dutch East India Company in Early Modern Japan Gift Giving and Diplomacy* (2020) 42.

As I wish to compare the initial information on the event to later iterations recorded in different genres, I must first construct the original event. The first chapter therefore explores how genre influenced the making of the historical event. By chronologically investigating a series of Deshima *dagregisters*, we examine the genre's behavior and its effect on information. Once we have outlined the information that describes event, we move on to the second chapter that focuses on excerpts from different genres, including *Japanese letters*, correspondence with the Governor-General, *resoluties* and the *generale missive* which were all processed in Batavia. This chapter focuses on the question to what extent genre actions were constrained by institutional power structures that reinforced genre templates. Afterwards, the third and final chapter examines the genres of the *haags verbaal* and *concept-missive* records which communicated the event to the *Heeren XVII*. This chapter is primarily interested in seeing the mechanics of inclusion and exclusion at work. The sub-question is: to what extent was information silenced by genre? The first section in this chapter explores whether processing of information resulted in the accumulation of information. The second outlines an entire genre-chain from Deshima to the Hague to identify exclusion of information.

Ultimately, the sub-questions all examine the relation between information and genre and serve to answer the main question of this paper: to what extent did information change when a genre shift occurred in early eighteenth-century VOC records? With this in mind, we will now shift from the introduction to the first chapter.

## 1. The Shōgun whispers ‘horses’

Deshima is perhaps the most restrictive center of knowledge production in history. From 1641 to 1853, this artificial island served as the only point of contact between the Dutch and the Japanese. It was originally built for the Portuguese, who were then driven from Japan due to their Christian activities.<sup>27</sup> The Dutch were permitted to remain, but only on strict terms, which they accepted given the importance of Japanese metals, such as copper and silver, for the intra-Asian trade. These strict terms included that any incoming or outgoing correspondence by Deshima risked being inspected by Japanese supervisors. For instance, in the eighteenth century, the letters from Batavia were first handed over to Nagasaki supervisors and then read by the Nagasaki Board of Interpreters, who specialized in the study of Portuguese, and later the Dutch language, so to be able to communicate with the Dutch on Deshima.<sup>28</sup> Direct correspondence with the Japanese court was not permitted because the Company was seen as a lowly merchant vassal.<sup>29</sup> Any communication between the Dutch and the Japanese courts was thus routed through Nagasaki governor and board of interpreters, who only relayed information that did not jeopardize their local practices.

In this context the Dutch *opperhoofd* (chief) of Deshima produced the *dagregister*, or daily journal, presently preserved in the National Archives in The Hague. Approximately 200 *dagregisters* have been produced over the years. Each of these records is written by a different *opperhoofd*, because they were rotated on annual basis in accordance with Tokugawa law.<sup>30</sup> Between 1633 and 1790 they also include reports on the annual *hofreizen*.<sup>31</sup> The yearly rotation makes them even more interesting to explore in the context of genre studies, because it implies that each *dagregister* was produced by a different author with different genre expectations. When a new *opperhoofd* arrived, he would first read the *dagregisters* of his predecessors to educate himself on the current state of affairs. This also suggests that the previous *dagregisters* served as an example on how to write *dagregisters* and reinforced their form and content. As a result of these practices, the journals were managed for a year at the time and accumulated between 100 and 400 pages of information depending on the chief's desire to write, as well as the ongoing events that year.

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<sup>27</sup> Charles R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650* (London 1951) 384.

<sup>28</sup> C.R. Boxer, *Jan Compagnie in Japan, 1600-1850* (The Hague 1950) 62.

<sup>29</sup> Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: the Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press 2014) 106.

<sup>30</sup> Meilink-Roelofs, Inventory of the NFJ archives, 9.

<sup>31</sup> The *hofreis* was an annual event between 1633 and 1790. Afterwards, the *hofreis* was made only once every four years.

The *dagregister* recorded the ‘most notable things in the country of residence.’<sup>32</sup> For Deshima, we can make a distinction between two types of events. The first type is made up of yearly returning events that make up VOC operations from which was deviated little throughout the 200 years. These include the arrival of Company ships in July and August, the trading season that followed, their departure in October or November, and a period with little activity on the Deshima other than the court journey between January and May. Except for a few outlier years when the ships were shipwrecked along the way, these events repeated themselves year after year. The second type recorded any outlier events. Because life on Deshima was strictly regulated by the Japanese government, such events were rather easy to spot for the Dutch chief, as they would disrupt the monotonous routine that the Dutch had grown accustomed to.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the *dagregisters* accumulated a considerable amount of knowledge, to such an extent, that the Japanese officials themselves visited to consult these diaries.<sup>34</sup>

Like any source, the *Deshima dagregister* also deals with shortcomings. For instance, most of the company servants could not speak Japanese. There were a few exceptions, but those Dutchmen were prevented from making direct contact with the Japanese officials, because the Tokugawa protocol dictated that the Dutch could only converse with the Japanese through official mediation.<sup>35</sup> Any information recorded by the Dutch was either personally observed and interpreted, communicated by the Nagasaki Board of Interpreters or acquired through paid informants, making the entries sometimes rather questionable. In addition, the *dagregisters* are the official records of an organization. The Chiefs were fully aware that their entries would subsequently be scrutinized by the VOC administrations in Batavia and the Dutch Republic. Mistakes and questionable behavior on the behalf of the chief, were most likely excluded from the diaries in order to leave a better impression. We know, for example, that the private trade of the *opperhoofd*, but also the visits of local women were omitted from the records.<sup>36</sup> So, despite being relatively reliable sources, some information, if present in the first place, remains questionable in trustworthiness.

In what follows, we scrutinize the *dagregisters* to reconstruct the historical event. In the first section of this chapter, we examine how the event was created in response to a recurring

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<sup>32</sup> Ketelaar, *Archiving People*, 248a 10.

<sup>33</sup> Van der Velde, *The Deshima Diaries*, xviii.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, xviii.

<sup>35</sup> Van der Velde, *The Deshima Diaries*, xix.

<sup>36</sup> Van der Velde, *The Deshima Diaries*, xviii.

situation. In the second part we study how this event functioned as genre of social action. The guiding question of this chapter is: how did genre influence the creation of the historical event?

## 1.1 The Event

The *dagregisters* of VOC trading posts are a genre that most likely evolved out of the logbooks that were maintained by high-ranking ship officers. In 1655, the *Heeren XVII* instructed officers to keep a logbook at sea that recorded time, speed, and progress, as well as ‘important issues and incidents.’<sup>37</sup> Instructions for a daily journal on land were completed in 1670. The Company issued the authorities to pay attention to six areas of interest: (1) the places in possession of the Company, (2) the government and law of these places, (3) the customs and habits of the inhabitants (4) the resources of the country, (5) the army and trade of the VOC enemies and (6) the army and trade of the Company.<sup>38</sup> However, in the occurrence that we will now explore, none of these genre aspects reappear, reminding us that theory and practice can differ and that not every region that the VOC visited provided the same context.

To refresh our memory of what I mean by genre as communicate action, as outlined by Miller, I will break it down once more: the genre of *dagregisters* consists of a corpus of texts that was created in response to recurring situations perceived as similar. The recurring situation in this case is the context in which the *opperhoofd*, found himself at Deshima, with as task to report on daily events on importance. The first *dagregisters* functioned as isolated texts, but as the situation repeated itself, similar reports were written in response, over time developing form and content features that constrained information and assisted in performing the action (i.e., to report on daily events to his superiors) in an effective manner. The historical event is developed in this context; its information is constrained by the *dagregister* to match the daily entry-style, which means it is limited to concise reports connected to certain days. These characteristics assist in carrying out the action successfully, that is, they immediately present all the important aspects of information according to the expectations of VOC participants.

However, the basic genre characteristics were not the only elements that shaped the event. In our case, we have to narrow down the examination to specific fragments, which made me realize that we are dealing with a genre within a genre. The Japanese request that the Company transports Dutch horses to Japan is the recurring situation to which our genre

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<sup>37</sup> Delmas, ‘From Traveling to History’, 103-106.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, 110.

responds. The first time that this request was heavily hinted at, was during the stay of a Dutch delegation in Edo (present-day Tokyo). We read in the *dagregister* that:

[1718] The head interpreter Fatsizemon was summoned by a servant of the Shogun, which he must have felt was an honor from His Majesty, after his return, he stated that the court had asked him many curious questions regarding Dutch horses, strange animals, and other creatures.<sup>39</sup>

This excerpt formed the beginning of a series of questions relating to Dutch horses and other strange animals. In hindsight, these questions were not nearly as ‘curious’ as they appeared to be to the Dutch chief at the time. In 1716, only two years earlier, a new *Shōgun* had assumed office, who expressed a great interest for Western learning and knowledge.<sup>40</sup> To guide his political, cultural and economic reforms, Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684-1751) would frequently interrogate Dutch delegations on various subjects, ranging from astronomical, calendrical and climatic forms of knowledge, to information on the military arts, laws, and more. As we shall see, Dutch horses gradually became a major source of fascination for the *Shōgun*, which exerted pressure on the VOC-Tokugawa relationship.

A lot of elements stand out in the above fragment. In true *dagregister* fashion, it follows the form of a daily-entry style. That is, it gives a short and concise description of the event that the author wished to record along with the day and date that the event took place. These entries accumulated and documented a full year of events from roughly October to October next year per *dagregister*. The above entry does not speculate beyond the event that took place. The *opperhoofd* did not attach any thoughts or interpretations to the information that reached him. However, since the Japanese interpreters never translated anything without reason, it seems that they were ordered by the *Shōgun* to convey a message to the Dutch. That this did not impress the *opperhoofd* may be explained by the fact that it was not the first or last time that the *Shōgun* asked his servants strange questions.

A few days after the first mentioning of horses, another event was recorded. This time, not the interpreter, but the *opperhoofd* himself was confronted about horses from Holland:

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<sup>39</sup> Dagregister, 24 October 1717 – 13 October 1718, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 128, 116.

<sup>40</sup> Grant K. Goodman, *Japan: The Dutch Experience* (London 1986) 50-52.

[1718] The head interpreter brought with him a document comprising several questions, to be answered by me, and shown to the Shogun afterwards; first whether horses in Holland were larger than the Japanese, to which I answered truthfully with yes, and whether no horses could be shipped to Japan, to which I replied; due to the great distance between the patria and Batavia, this was held impossible, it being a journey spanning between 8 and 10, even 12 months, whether the horses on Batavia were not larger and better than the Japanese, to which I replied with no.<sup>41</sup>

In this fragment, the *opperhoofd* Christiaan van Vrijberge set a precedent for the future relationship between the VOC and the *Shōgun* by answering that the transportation of horses from Holland was an impossible task. During this interaction, he kept quiet that the Company had in fact delivered horses before to a different *Shōgun* in 1667, which he noted at a later point in the *dagregister*.<sup>42</sup> For a moment, we must question his motives and wonder if this type of response is unique to the *Deshima dagregisters*. The *opperhoofd* was not in a position in the first place to agree that horses would be transported from Holland to Japan, and he acted accordingly, as he was aware his superiors would be dissatisfied with his decision if he gave into Japanese requests that easily. However, on the other side of the interaction process were the Japanese, who were of the opinion that a request from the *Shōgun* could not be refused. This created difficult conditions, in which the *opperhoofd* presented an impossible task on purpose, in the hope that the Japanese would change their minds.

Unfortunately for Van Vrijberge, the Japanese did not change their minds. Shortly after he returned from his court journey to Edo, he was confronted by the Nagasaki Governor Tossa no Cammi Samma, who interrogated him. This governor had also visited Edo and was more than likely instructed by the court to question the Dutch chief a bit more on the subject of horses.<sup>43</sup> He asked why the Company refused to transport Dutch horses to Japan via Batavia. In addition, he wanted to know whether this was due to the great expenses of the operation. The Dutch chief replied that it was neither the effort or the expenses, but repeated his previous statement that it took eight, up to twelve months, to sail from Holland to Batavia, which made it an impossible endeavor to transport horses.<sup>44</sup> The question we should ask ourselves here is

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<sup>41</sup> Dagregister, 24 October 1717 – 13 October 1718, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 128, 131.

<sup>42</sup> Dagregister, 24 October 1717 – 13 October 1718, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 128, 149.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, 147.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.



why the Company was so willing to gift horses in 1667, but refused to do so some 50 years later. This was most likely due to the declining trade with Japan, caused by a shogunal decree from 1715, which stated that the Company was no longer permitted to send more than 2 ships to Japan on a yearly basis.<sup>45</sup>

Well then, the Japanese must have reasoned, if transporting horses from Holland over sea is an impossible task, why not bring them over land? Clearly, they had misunderstood the implication of the *opperhoofd's* previous point:

[1718] The interpreter asked by himself whether we could not transport the horses over land through Persia. See what kind of things they want to impose on us, only to please the silly curiosity, so we may call this, of their ruler. I answered him that this was also impossible, first because we would have to pass through so many lands and kingdoms at war. And second, because we would have to pass through the burning hot wilderness of Persia, without any water or supplies, causing our horses and us to suffer and die of thirst.<sup>46</sup>

The question of the interpreter at least proves that there was no miscommunication at play in the interaction between the Japanese and the *opperhoofd*. But perhaps we should turn around the point of misunderstanding the implication. It is also possible that the *opperhoofd* did not understand the importance of a request made by the *Shōgun*. After all, he only spent 1 year on Deshima, after which he was rotated out. Even in the rare instance that an *opperhoofd* was interested in Japanese habits and culture, he was given little opportunity to learn, because he was isolated on Deshima for the majority of the time.<sup>47</sup> We can support this observation based on the frustration that the *opperhoofd* expressed in response to the request, when he called the *Shōgun's* interest a 'silly curiosity,' when horsemanship was an important branch of military science in Japan.<sup>48</sup> In any event, the reply of the *opperhoofd* again communicated an impossible task. Rather than the perilous and long journey by water, he made it apparent that they would face just as many hazards over land.

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<sup>45</sup> Kuijper, *Japan en de Buitenwereld*, 171.

<sup>46</sup> Dagregister, 24 October 1717 – 13 October 1718, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 128, 224-225.

<sup>47</sup> There is a lot of variety in how *opperhoofden* approached their stay on Deshima, see Van der Velde, *The Deshima Diaries*, xix.

<sup>48</sup> What makes this response even stranger is that horsemanship was also a military science in Europe at the time of writing.

One would think that by now, the Japanese understood the point that the *opperhoofd* was trying to make: transporting horses from Holland to Japan was out of the question. How must we interpret these interactions that shaped our historical event, in the context of genre theory? Each fragment that we have just seen, is part of the overarching genre of a *dagregister*, but that is not the only thing they have in common. They also all respond to the Japanese request of horses to be transported from Holland to Japan. This request has to be identified as the recurring situation to which the *opperhoofd* was forced to respond. The action that was produced in consequence was the scenario created by the *opperhoofd*, which emphasized that transporting horses was impossible due to the distance. The next question is whether this response turned into a recognized, recurring and successful action, which allows us to categorize it as a genre. Near the end of the *dagregister* it was at least noted that the so-called *Japansche Eijsch*, a list of goods ordered by the *Shōgun*, included no horses.<sup>49</sup> Can we conclude based on this that the actions of the *opperhoofd* were successful? Maybe, but the Nagasaki Governor still ordered him to inform the Governor-General and Council of the request anyway.<sup>50</sup> In the next section we determine whether the successors of Van Vrijberge employed similar actions in response to the situation.

## 1.2 The Genre

Now that we have identified a recurrent situation and an action in response, we must examine whether the action is deemed successful enough to turn into a genre. This is done by exploring excerpts of *dagregisters* of the successors of Van Vrijberge. As mentioned previously, these *opperhoofden* of Deshima were rotated out after a year. This meant that each time when a new *opperhoofd* arrived, he first had to familiarize himself with the current state of affairs. This was primarily done by reading the *dagregister* of his predecessor. Such experience and knowledge contributed, according to the literary historian Hans Robert Jauss, to the creation of a reference frame that assisted in the creation of future texts.<sup>51</sup> In addition, it was noted by scholars in the field of genre theory that communities – if we may call the VOC a community – fostered similar expectations and responses.<sup>52</sup> If these statements hold truth, that should mean that the successor-*opperhoofden* followed the precedent set by Van Vrijberge.

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<sup>49</sup> Dagregister, 24 October 1717 – 13 October 1718, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 128, 342.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, 'Literary History as a challenge to literary theory', *New Literary History*, 2:1 (1970) 13.

<sup>52</sup> Amy J. Devitt, 'Intertextuality in Tax Accounting: Generic, Referential, and Functional,' in: Charles Bazerman and James Paradis eds., *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* (1991) 338-340.

Furthermore, it was policy that the resigning *opperhoofd* left behind a *memorie van overgave*, or final account, for his successor. This short letter also served to update the new *opperhoofd* on the current state of affairs, and provided a general outline of the normal events that were taken care of on Deshima annually. However, no requests for horses were included in Van Vrijberge's *memorie*.<sup>53</sup> Apart from explaining the general outline of business, he only said that he had spoken to the *opperhoofd* for a short moment, before returning to Batavia. While it is possible that the new *opperhoofd* was updated informally, it is more likely that he educated himself using the *dagregister* left behind by Van Vrijberge. Consequently, he would also learn of the way that Van Vrijberge responded to the request. Now we shall see if Van Vrijberge's handling created an example for his successors to follow.

In 1720, it was recorded that the Chinese merchants, the only other faction that was permitted to trade with the Japanese in Nagasaki in the Early Modern Period, had delivered two horses. The Dutch chief was invited by the Japanese to come visit and appraise the horses, which he agreed to do. The following day it was noted in the *dagregister* that he had examined the Chinese horses in a highly subtle manner, so not to make the Japanese curious about Dutch horses again.<sup>54</sup> This implies that he was aware of the previous *opperhoofd's* interactions with the Japanese. He also stated that he had told the Japanese that the horses appeared to be no better than farm animals, for which the Chinese should be ashamed.<sup>55</sup> This, in turn, implied that the Company would have procured horses of much better quality. Maybe the *opperhoofd* realized his mistake afterwards, since the next entry regarding horses reads:

[1720] As expected, the discourse led to Batavian horses, and whether those were as large as the mentioned Chinese, I replied no, those horses were usually not as large as the Chinese. The Dutch horses were also mentioned again, which was unfortunate.<sup>56</sup>

By now the recurring situation had grown into a recurring annoyance. It also gives us another hint that the new *opperhoofd* was fully aware of the Japanese desire for horses and the previous *opperhoofd's* attempt to end these wishes, as he commented it was unfortunate that the Dutch

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<sup>53</sup> *Memorie van Christiaan van Vrijberge*, 12 October 1718, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 1911, 40.

<sup>54</sup> *Dagregister*, 1 November 1719 – 21 October 1720, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 1935, 134.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, 135.

<sup>56</sup> *Dagregister*, 1 November 1719 – 21 October 1720, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 1935, 147.

horses were mentioned again. This observation is supported by his successor as well, based on his comment while visiting Edo during the court journey:

[1721] I was amazed that His Majesty again requested horses, considering the impossibility to transport these animals across water, as was explained in the years 1718 and 1720 by the Dutch Chiefs, Van Vrijberghe and Aouwer.<sup>57</sup>

We could suggest that it was an order from the Governor-General, or perhaps the *Heeren XVII*, that no horses were transported to Japan. But the first instruction from the *Heeren XVII* regarding the request from 1718 was not given until 1721, due to the distance of the information network, about which more in chapter 3.<sup>58</sup> It appears that the *opperhoofden* were acting on their own accord and continued to follow the precedent set by Van Vrijberge.

On the Japanese side the recurring situation was equally frustrating. From their perspective the Company continued to refuse a request – from the *Shōgun*, no less. In 1723 a local informant notified the *opperhoofd* that a Chinese junk had delivered three horses. He then asked the head interpreter Fatzisemon whether this report was true, who replied that it had been kept a secret, but it was true a stallion and two mares, of which one giving birth, were presently located in Nagasaki. The interpreter emphasized that the Chinese had defied an ancient law on punishment of death to be able to secure and deliver horses for the *Shōgun*. They were currently awaiting word from the shogunal court on whether or not had been accepted by the *Shōgun*. If they were, it would be a great honor for the Chinese.<sup>59</sup> The next day the *opperhoofd* asked whether they had gotten an answer yet:

[1723] upon which Fatzisemon answered yes and asked me if it was not impressive that a Chinese junk could transport and deliver 3 horses, whereas the Dutch could not, despite having such great ships, as has been mentioned to us before, I replied that I was not impressed at all, as I have never seen a junk from the inside, in addition, if he was aware of the distance between China and Batavia to Nagasaki, and how unlucky the Company has been in these waters recently, he would not be impressed either, to which he agreed.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Dagregister, 9 November 1721 – 28 October 1722, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 132, 196.

<sup>58</sup> Concept missive, 30 July 1721, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 362, 51.

<sup>59</sup> Dagregister, 10 October 1723 – 5 November 1724, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2004, 86-87.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*. 88.

It remains up for debate whether the above was an elaborate ploy to pressure the Company into delivering horses. Since the Chinese were not usually permitted to send gifts to court and had always been envious of the position that the Dutch held, it does not seem too farfetched.<sup>61</sup> The Japanese may therefore have figured they could motivate the Company in this way. However, the *opperhoofd* still followed the precedent set by Van Vrijberge five years ago.

In the following years the historical event took a new turn. The *opperhoofd* noted in his journal of 1725 that he was surprised that no lord nor lady at court, nor the *Shōgun* himself, mentioned horses in any form or shape during his stay in Edo.<sup>62</sup> In addition, he commented that he was unsure whether this was out of cunning or arrogance. Does this confirm that the previous actions of impossibility paid off in response to the recurring situation? Perhaps, but even so, the efforts of the *opperhoofden* were undermined only a few months later when VOC ships arrived with five stallions and a groom by the name of Hans Jurgen Keijser.<sup>63</sup> The situation, and also the recurring situation, had changed. We can only speculate why the Company decided to deliver horses after all these years. Was the Chinese competition a factor that was deemed important enough to instigate action? Since they were the only competitor in deteriorating times, it could very well be the case. Alternatively, it was decided upon by the Governor-General and Council to mend the relationship between the Company and the *Shōgun*, in an attempt to secure better shipments of copper, which was the main reason why the VOC was in Japan in the first place, more on this in the next chapters.

## Conclusion

Now we may summarize the outlines of the historical event that we have witnessed in the *dagregisters*. In 1718, the *opperhoofd* received a request from the *Shōgun* to transport horses from Holland to Japan via Batavia. In the following years, the *opperhoofden* made it very clear that this request was impossible due to the long journey over sea and the dangers across land. During that time, the VOC was confronted by Chinese horse shipments twice. Nevertheless, the impossibility was maintained until the summer of 1725, when horses and a groom were finally delivered by the Company.

How did genre affect the creation of the event? While we studied the overarching genre of *dagregisters*, we were dealing with a corpus of texts. The content of this genre was shaped

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<sup>61</sup> Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1991) 196-197.

<sup>62</sup> *Dagregister*, 6 November 1724 – 28 October 1725, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 135, 111.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, 181.

according to its concise daily entry style, so that it could give a clear report of events to its superiors. Some of those entries were not only journal entries, but also responses to situations in their own right. If similar situations repeated themselves, then those journal entries could grow into a genre within a genre. This is what happened with our event. It became a sub-genre of the *dagregister*, as the recurring event and response repeated themselves over and over. This established the precedent that it was impossible to transfer horses, which impacted the information in the *dagregister* of the successor-*opperhoofden*. Every time a new entry was recorded, the information was linked to the previous request and placed in a context of annoyance and impossibility. This context formed the constraints for the information and at the same time reinforced the genre (i.e., action) in the next seven years or so. In the next chapter will explore the institutional power structures of genre. Whereas we have just seen that the *dagregister* was flexible enough to permit a genre within a genre, the question is if other VOC records did as well.

## 2. The Governor-General hears ‘copper’

At present I have the honor to offer Your Lordship, the detailed account of my embassy, accompanied by some more papers as far as relevant. Because an account of the first meetings in Canton, the names of places of which I have visited during this journey, and of my experiences in Peking, would result in a poor account, I have taken the liberty to deviate away from the standard style of reporting, in the hope that this report will please Your Lordship.<sup>64</sup>

The above excerpt served as an introduction to the long-unpublished account of a Dutch court journey to the Qianlong emperor of China in 1794. It was addressed to high-ranking officials of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and was written by the Dutch scholar and VOC employee Isaac Titsingh (1745-1812). These VOC men commissioned Titsingh to congratulate the Qianling Emperor on the sixtieth anniversary of his reign. While this event was bound to be spectacular, what piques my interest here is that Titsingh seemingly tried to justify his deviation from the common style of VOC reporting. As can be seen, the author thought that a brief description of the main elements would result in nothing but a poor account of his voyage. Therefore, he deviated from the common VOC approach to writing reports. While Titsingh's approach is an irregularity, it is an example of someone challenging the institutional power structures that produced genre, and hence knowledge - the subject of this chapter.

The focus in this chapter is on four genres that were processed in Batavia as a site of knowledge production. As mentioned previously, all Asian trading posts were expected to send a full copy of their administration to this center of calculation.<sup>65</sup> The administration of each council member, of which seven people in total (including the Governor-General), was in charge of processing the correspondence of these outposts. This is mirrored in the *Generale Missive*, in which each council member gave a brief overview of their allocated outposts.<sup>66</sup> The information that was previously created in the *dagregisters* of Deshima was processed either at Deshima and then sent to Batavia, or in Batavia itself. Batavia is thus the calculation center where we can observe genre shifts.

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<sup>64</sup> Frank Lequin, *Isaac Titsingh in China (1794-1796). Het onuitgegeven Journaal van zijn Ambassade naar Peking* (Alphen aan de Rijn 2005) 68.

<sup>65</sup> Vriend, 'An unbelievable amount of paper', 72.

<sup>66</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven Deel 2*, 112.

This chapter tests the (in)flexibility of VOC genres. The key question is whether genre activities were restrained by institutional power structures that reinforced genre templates. I draw inspiration for this approach from the research of Foscarini, who observed that genre as action revealed the practical actions, which were hidden behind the institutional layers of bureaucracy.<sup>67</sup> The theory is that some genres became so reinforced over time, that they turned into the only genre templates that were still sanctioned by an organization with no room for deviation.<sup>68</sup> To test this theory, we analyze four document-types: Japanese Demands, the annual letter to the Governor-General and Council, *resoluties* and the *Generale Missive*, to see whether these VOC records deviated away from the institutional genre template, in favor of action. The outcome will have consequences for how we view the practices of knowledge production within VOC information network.

## 2.1 Japanese Demands

The first document type that we examine is a set of Japanese Demands that was translated by the Nagasaki Board of Interpreters and recorded by the *opperhoofd*. These letters make up about one page of information each and are marked with the seal of the interpreters that translated them. Two of them are stored under the category of proceedings in archives of the NFJ. While they are not decisions made by the *opperhoofd* and council of Deshima, they are of decisive nature. The other two letters are stored under outgoing correspondence. The primary concern with judging the information of these letters is that they were translated by the Nagasaki interpreters who were not fluent in the Dutch language. For instance, one of them commented that he struggled to find a translation for the word ‘Governor-General’, during the translation of one of these letters.<sup>69</sup>

The Japanese Demands were first recorded in the *dagregister* on 13 October 1723, when the *opperhoofd* wrote that he had received a shogunal order that required them to deliver five horses. Their qualities were left unmentioned. In exchange, the *Shōgun* permitted the Company to increase the limit that was placed on the yearly exchange of goods. In addition to the 300000 ordinary taels, the Company was permitted to sell goods for another 160000 taels. More importantly, they were allowed to send a third ship to Japan, in addition to the ordinarily permitted two ships.<sup>70</sup> The permission to sail to Japan with 5 ships had only recently been

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<sup>67</sup> Foscarini, ‘A Genre-Based Investigation’, 17-18.

<sup>68</sup> Hart-Davidson, ‘Genres are Enacted’, 40.

<sup>69</sup> Missive aan de Gouverneur-Generaal en Raad van India, 5 October 1724, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2013, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Dagregister, 30 October 1722 – 18 October 1723, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 133, 222-224.



revoked in 1715 and was the main reason for friction between the Company and the Japanese since then because their copper exports suffered the consequences. This therefore seemed a great opportunity for the VOC to regain the favor of the *Shōgun*.<sup>71</sup>

However, one year later the new *opperhoofd* was asked by the interpreters what he thought of the order:

[1724] If, due to the long duration of the journey, the Governor-General has not yet read these orders, one can imagine how such malevolent orders, that subject the will of the Company to that of the Japanese, was received with great resentment by the Company.<sup>72</sup>

At first glance, the Japanese Demand did not appear that malevolent. It simply stated that the *opperhoofden* Hendrik Durven and Johannes Thedens were ordered in name of the Nagasaki Governor Tossa no Cammi Samma to send the letter to the Governor-General Hendrik Zwaardercroon and the Council in Batavia. However, it was a direct consequence of the repeated scenario of impossibility that had previously been constructed by the *opperhoofden* at Deshima. The Japanese recognized the recurring action, but did not acknowledge its truth. In response, a different action began to dominate the interaction between the Company and the Japanese. The content of the Japanese Demand reads as follows:

[1723] His Majesty orders the Company to deliver five horses, of which 3 stallions and 2 mares, with a height of 4 Japanese feet and five or six thumbs, for which in return the Company may negotiate 160000 taels in addition to the ordinarily permitted 300000 taels. As well as a third ship in addition to the ordinarily permitted two ships.

The horses need to be black, white or brown, their country's origin does not matter, as long as it is known, including their age. As long as the Company cannot fulfil the request of their height, the Company is excused from sending the horses.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Feenstra, *Japan en de Buitenwereld*, 174.

<sup>72</sup> Dagregister, 10 October 1723 – 5 November 1724, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2004, 275-276.

<sup>73</sup> Translaat, 13 October 1723, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 7, 69.

The *opperhoofden* wrote in response to receiving the letter that they feared for the consequences, despite the positive news that their trade limit would be increased and a third ship was allowed.<sup>74</sup> This feeling is explained by the fact that they were given a direct order by the Japanese. They did not expect the Governor-General and Council to comply with an order that made the Company ‘dance to the tune’ of the Japanese, to put it in the words of one *opperhoofd*.<sup>75</sup>

What exactly happened with the letter? It was first communicated to the Dutch by the Nagasaki interpreters, who recorded it, after which it was sent to Batavia. The events after that are unclear. It is unlikely that the Governor-General and Council were unaware of its existence, but no reply was ever sent. One possible reason for this is that the *Heeren XVII* had ordered the Governor-General not to send any horses to the Shogun only two years earlier in 1721, which they thought would set in motion a bad chain of events.<sup>76</sup> But just like the Company refused to hear the request, the Japanese refused to listen to silence. On 3 September 1724 another letter was recorded in the same fashion, and again were the *opperhoofden* ordered to send it to Batavia. This letter was intriguing because, while it reiterated the demands, it did so in an entirely different style than its predecessor:

[1724] Last year, in name of the Shogun and Councilors was written that the *opperhoofd* was ordered to bring with him large horses for His Majesty, but with the shipment of this year, nothing has occurred. Supposedly so, because no horses in the right colors and measurements exist on and around Java.

The year before that, no horses were delivered either, because, according to the *opperhoofd*, the sea was so dangerous, that the Company should be excused from this risky and expensive endeavor.

Hence why the Company is permitted to trade an additional 160000 taels on addition to the ordinary 300000 taels due to the dangers and expenses. To which the *opperhoofd* agreed last year.

Nonetheless, again no horses were delivered this time, about which the shogunal court is very angry that Batavia does not comply.

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<sup>74</sup> Dagregister, 10 October 1723 – 5 November 1724, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2004, 222-224.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>76</sup> Concept missive, 30 July 1721, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 362, 51.

So that next year Batavia cannot permit this mistake again. Everything above is decreed by the Shogunal Councilors which has to be made clear to the Governor-General!<sup>77</sup>

If we categorize both letters under the ‘traditional’ genre of Japanese Demands, then it allows us to conclude that some flexibility was at play here. Where the first order outlined the demand in concise language: the horses, including their specifications in exchange for a reward, the language and formatting of the second order followed an entirely different style. From a Japanese perspective, they instigated a different action in response to the recurring situation. They stated their reasoning why the Company was supposed to transport horses to Japan. This was not only ordered, but the efforts would also be rewarded, and the *opperhoofd* had agreed to see to it. However, the *dagregister* made no comment that the *opperhoofd* had ever agreed to the Japanese request.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps the *opperhoofd* omitted this fact because it would anger his superiors if he gave in to the demands, but it is also possible that miscommunication was at play, given the skill of the Nagasaki interpreters in the Dutch language.

Though I must admit that the sample data used here is too low to draw real conclusions for this genre. In addition to the above letter, a copy of the first letter of 13 October 1723 was sent a second time to Batavia on 5 November 1724.<sup>79</sup> Following that, a fourth letter was sent on 29 September 1725, in which the *opperhoofden* were again ordered by the Nagasaki Governor to draw up an order that was translated by the interpreters for the Governor-General and Council in Batavia.<sup>80</sup> Instead of making a straightforward demand, the shogunal court submitted five queries this time, all of which were about horses. They were related to the delivery of five stallions by the Company in the summer of 1725. While the *Shōgun* was pleased about this delivery, he still wished for mares to be delivered. The questions therefore served to explore the options of the Company in procuring and transporting Persian mares to Japan. Previously, this was held impossible, but now that the Governor-General had sent horses, the *opperhoofden* had lost their credibility. Which explains why the new demand for Persian mares was sent to the Governor-General and Council in Batavia, despite the *opperhoofd*'s explanation that this was impossible.

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<sup>77</sup> Translaat, 3 September 1724, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 347, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Dagregister, 10 October 1723 – 5 November 1724, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2004, 222-224.

<sup>79</sup> Translaat, 5 November 1724, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 347, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Translaat, 29 September 1725, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 7, 85.

Because the fourth letter was yet another Japanese Demand that was structured differently, it is difficult to identify any institutional structures that shaped the information in these letters. Only the opening that addressed the letter to the Governor-General and Council and the ending that was marked with the seals of the Nagasaki Board of Interpreters were the same in all letters. Perhaps the Japanese were experimenting with several actions to their recurring situation to determine which one worked best, while the Company continued to argue that the request was impossible.

## **2.2 Annual Letter to the Governor-General and Council**

The second genre that we explore in this chapter is the personal report of the *opperhoofd* of Deshima addressed to the Governor-General and Council. The ten reports examined vary from 20 to 60 pages and provide a summarized account of the events in Japan during a year's time. The highlights of such a year include references to the entries in the *dagregister* for more expansive elaborations. The fact that it refers to *dagregister* entries implies that it is most likely the primary source for this report, which means that we are observing a genre shift here, as information from the *dagregister* was appropriated by the letter. The same considerations that apply to the examination of *dagregisters* also apply to this letter. Namely, that we must keep in mind that this is an official document sent by a servant to his superior.

While the Japanese Demands were constructed in response to the refusal of the Company to deliver horses. This report simply responded to the requirement to write and send a personal report about the current state of affairs in Deshima. Naturally that meant that several fragments of this report covered information on the request for horses. Next, we will analyze these fragments for signs of flexibility within this genre.

[1718] We were escorted to another room, in which two minions and 6 doctors of the Shogun visited us, each of whom asked several questions. As documented under the entries of 30 and 31 March and 2 and 5 April, only is of importance that the Shogun carries a great interest in strange animals, especially Dutch horses and Cassowary Birds. About which horses we were not only asked questions several times, but even after demonstrating the impossibility of bringing them to Batavia, the Governor Tossa, still asked whether it was because of the great costs that we could not send them, upon which I replied the same again. Nevertheless, on the 8th of June was I informed through the

Nagasaki Governor that the Shogun had ordered to deliver Dutch horses to Japan, with as comment that it would be wise to deliver them to please the curiosity of the Shogun.<sup>81</sup>

The above fragment does not follow the daily entry-style; nonetheless, it offers a very concise description of events. As we see, it includes references to the dates of entry in the *dagregister* about events that we have previously discussed. In comparison to the *dagregister* excerpts on pages 13-15 of this paper, we see that only two elements are missing from the information: the *opperhoofd's* expressed frustration and the exact reason why transporting horses to Batavia was impossible. The frustration was most likely omitted because he was writing a formal letter to his superior, but the other information appears to have been lost in the writing process for no apparent reason. In general, the above fragment is representative of the bulk of letters written to the Governor-General.

However, in addition to the generic reports, a few outliers were discovered that offered more than simple summarizations of the *dagregisters'* contents. The report of one of these *opperhoofden* is also an outlier because the *opperhoofd* broke with the earlier set precedent of impossibility. In response to being asked by the Japanese whether he thought horses would be delivered or not, he replied that he could not guarantee the delivery, nor that it was held an impossibility.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps because he saw reasons for the Company to send horses, reasons which he outlined in his letter to the Governor-General:

[1724] If we acquire the horses and send them, we may greatly benefit of this, so we should consider what kind of goods we could send to receive the promised 572141 Taels in exchange for trade, in addition, we should ask whether we are permitted to receive golden coubangs as replacement mineral, in case the copper supply is lacking again.<sup>83</sup>

In the 10 different letters examined, only a few Company servants made suggestions on how to proceed to the Governor-General. Given that the recurring situation of the *opperhoofd* was the responsibility of reporting on the current state of affairs, we can recognize the above

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<sup>81</sup> Missive aan de Gouverneur-Generaal en Raad van India, 12 October 1718, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 1911, 9.

<sup>82</sup> Missive aan de Gouverneur-Generaal en Raad van India, 5 October 1724, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2013, 26.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*.

anomaly as a flexibility of the genre that existed within the reinforced template. This permitted the *opperhoofden* to break with the genre template to include their own suggestions as information. This information was new in the sense that it was not found in the *dagregisters*.

The other letter of interest here is written by *opperhoofd* Boockestijn. This letter was written several years after the first horses had arrived on Deshima, which were accompanied by the groom Hans Jurgen Keijser back then. At the shogunal court, Keijser quickly rose to prominence and was requested to organize shows, train horses in the European style, and build a European horse track and stable in Edo.<sup>84</sup> At one point, the *Shōgun* even ordered Keijser to be promoted from Corporal to Sergeant. A reason why this would also benefit the Company was included in the letter to the Governor-General:

[1729] Whether it would not benefit the Company to promote Hans Jurgen Keijser with the rank of sergeant and allow him to move to Edo for 6 months to train horses so that he will have access to the courtiers in Edo, and so that he is able to converse with the princes of this land, an opportunity which has not been seen available to the Company since 1643, [...] so to benefit the Company's trade at court directly.<sup>85</sup>

The general observable trend in these letters is that they mirrored the information in the *dagregisters*. The genre shift changed the information when a higher level of formality was required, but this did not filter out information by a lot. More importantly, in a few cases the genre included suggestions and advice by the *opperhoofden*, which was not commonly shared by all reports. These fragments changed information by adding personal speculation and opinions on how to proceed. This illustrates that outside of the institutional structure of a strict summary of the *dagregister* with references, some flexibilities were permitted that showed more practical discussions that kept the VOC servants occupied.

### 2.3 Resoluties

The third genre that we now take a look at is the *resolutie*. More specifically, we look at a sub-genre of promotion documents. In general, these records describe the deliberations and decisions of the *opperhoofd* and council of Deshima during a private meeting. They cover one

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<sup>84</sup> Dagregister, 22 October 1728 – 12 October 1729, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 139, 254.

<sup>85</sup> Missive aan de Gouverneur-Generaal en Raad van India, 12 October 1729, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2134, 42-43

page of information at most and discuss promotions and employment, general decisions, Japanese announcements, trade agreements, and more. These records are anonymous in the sense that they do not reveal individual opinions in regards to decisions made.<sup>86</sup>

The promotion genre is written by the *opperhoofd* of Deshima. Each record starts in similar fashion by reporting that the *opperhoofd* and all council members have gathered to approve of the promotion and corresponding wage increase for the person in question. For example, in 1722, after the death of the *onderkoopman* (junior merchant) Johannes Luijke, the *opperhoofd* and council had to promote someone in his stead.<sup>87</sup> Several records were examined, all of which shared the same template with little additional information beyond what was seen as necessary, except for one. This record is the promotion document of the previously mentioned groom Hans Jurgen Keijser, that dealt with the decision of promoting Hans Jurgen Keijser from Corporal to Sergeant, as requested by the *Shōgun*. This document followed the same format as the others *resoluties*, but after that part, it deviated and offered an explanation why Keijser was promoted:

[1729] The Council has gathered and Keijser has appeared in regard to the request, that his service ends on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1730 and that he will leave for Edo tomorrow on the Shogun's expenses, to train the horses and built a Dutch stable, that he will be promoted with the rank of Sergeant, which has been approved unanimously on approbation [...] we also agreed to give him a list of 10 articles that he must follow at all cost during his stay in Edo:

First, that if His Majesty or the secret council and favorite Canototono no Cammi Samma or other councilors, or your pupil, lord Mattazemon, asks after the horses, you will say that these animals, after many great difficulties and dangers were procured in Persia, after which they were sent to the Governor-General in Batavia in the month of January, after which His Lordship sent these horses with the last shipment to His Majesty to express his gratitude.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Roessingh, Inventory of the Archives of the Dutch Factory in Japan, 24.

<sup>87</sup> Resolutie, 1721, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 7, 56.

<sup>88</sup> Resolutie, 3 September 1729, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 7, 114.

While we cannot discuss the entire *resolutie*, the point should be clear. The general power structures reinforced a genre template that constrained information which was necessary to carry out a task: the promotion. This corresponds with what has been observed in modern genre studies: that genres primarily serve to get work done.<sup>89</sup> The promotion document of Keijser was an exception to the rule, which illustrated that flexibility was also present in *resoluties*, that allowed for additional information to be included. This information consisted of the reason why Keijser should be promoted, what his purpose was in Edo and ten articles that served as the Company's instructions for Keijser during his stay in Edo. The promotion is also recorded in the *dagregister*, but the list of articles is only included in the letter to the Governor-General and this *resolutie*.<sup>90</sup> This means that the *opperhoofd* felt he was not limited by genre constraints or Company practices that limited him in his ability to include information in either, the *resoluties* or the formal letter to the Governor-General.

#### 2.4 Generale Missive

The final genre that we explore in this chapter is the *generale missive*. The administration of the *Hoge Regering* evaluated and processed all genres in Batavia, including the *dagregister*, Japanese Demands, *resoluties*, *memories*, and the letter to the Governor-General and Council. The output was the *generale missive*, a genre shift in the information chain, which greatly summarized the contents of those documents, with as goal to offer a concise account of the general state of the Company in Asia to the *Heeren XVII* in the Dutch Republic. During the meetings of the *Heeren XVII* the *generale missive* served as a guideline for policy and decision-making. However, because of the brief summaries and the fact that the Batavian government did not often always understand the local context, they were not a dependable source of information.

Various entries in the *generale missive* have been explored. It appears that the entries regarding Japan were more or less shortened, but direct copies of information from the *dagregister* of Deshima. For instance, the first fragment that makes note of the horses, repeated the content of the *dagregister*, and what goods were included in the *Japansche Eijsch*. No real deviation is identified when we compare the excerpt below to the information in the *dagregister*.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Foscarini, 'A Genre-Based Investigation', 4.

<sup>90</sup> Missive aan de Gouverneur-Generaal en Raad van India, 5 October 1724, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2013, 26.

<sup>91</sup> Dagregister, 24 October 1717 – 13 October 1718, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 128, 342.



[1719] We have met the request of the Shogun: consisting of two cassowary birds, four dogs, a weatherglass, a horse saddle, some decorated weapons, and a few plants, of which pepper trees in which no objection was found, since those plants will not survive the cold climate of Japan, we await Your Lordships reply in regard to the transportation of Dutch horses, which have been requested by the Shogun.<sup>92</sup>

Did the *generale missive* follow a trend of reporting the highlights of the *dagregister*, like the formal letter to the Governor-General did? This is only partially true, as the *generale Missive* does not include any additional references until 1723, despite the additional requests made in the subsequent *dagregisters*. This begs the question, why? Was notifying the *Heeren XVII* once considered sufficient? The primary reason for this appears to be that the distance between Batavia and the Dutch Republic and back prevented the author of the *generale missive* from including new developments until a response was received. This did not happen until 1722, which corresponds with the registered entry in the *generale missive* of 1723 in which a new observation about horses was included.<sup>93</sup>

[1723] One of the mentioned Chinese junks, delivered three horses for the Shogun, notwithstanding that the export of horses from China to Japan has been prohibited for centuries on punishment of death. The court was not pleased with the lack of Dutch horses. However, we can only guess, due to the lack of Japanese cooperation, what type of horses they desire.<sup>94</sup>

The above fragment that was recorded in the *dagregister* was also reproduced in the *generale missive*.<sup>95</sup> Though, it is even more concise than the *dagregister*, which is quite the achievement. In a single line it is communicated that the shogunal court was displeased with the VOC. The observation must be made that it is incredible how little information was included in the *generale missive* when one considers that the *dagregister* covered between 100 and 400 pages of information, but more about this in chapter 3.

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<sup>92</sup> Generale Missiven, 30 November 1719, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 1915, 267-268.

<sup>93</sup> Concept missive, 30 July 1721, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 362, 51.

<sup>94</sup> W.Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII Der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie Deel 7 (1713-1724) ('S Gravenhage 1979) 747.*

<sup>95</sup> Dagregister, 10 October 1723 – 5 November 1724, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2004, 88.

The final fragment outlined here makes notice of the agitation of the *Shōgun* in response to the lack of horses, which had caused some animosity between the Company and Japan:

[1725] The Shogun in Edo has grown annoyed (at least as it is depicted by the Japanese in Nagasaki) with the Company and its trade, due to the fact that the Dutch had not delivered the horses desired by His Majesty. That is why we have sent 5 stallions, upon the request of the court, which requests may be interpreted in terms of threats, due to the arrogance of the Shogun, with said ships, in the expectation that the Company's trade will once more be favored with a great delivery of copper, of which it has seen a great scarcity in Japan recently.<sup>96</sup>

What is interesting in this fragment is that it reports the reason why five horses were finally sent to Japanese: due to the genre of Japanese Demands that we have explored earlier. This is information that was created in Batavia, and did not reach Deshima until a later point. However, in general we must conclude again that no deviations are detected in the style or content of the *generale missive*. This makes the *generale missive* the only genre explored in this chapter that heavily follows the prescribed genre structures of form and content.

## Conclusion

The four genres that have been explored in this chapter illustrated that the structure of a text and the actions it aims to achieve can coexist. That is in line with the observation of genre scholar Catherine Schryver, who observed that the structure and agency of genre 'are not dialectically opposed poles of opposition but rather in a state of constant co-construction.'<sup>97</sup>

The Japanese Demands offered the most dynamic account of genre. While each text attempted to achieve the same action in response to the recurring situation, the method in which it tried to achieve this differed greatly per text. In contrast, *generale missiven* were the least dynamic genre, and as a result, the structure and content of information changed very little in these texts. The letters to the Governor-General and Council shared a consistent structure, although some *opperhoofden* did not shy away from instigating action through their writings; still, this was relatively uncommon. The same can be said for the *resoluties*.

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<sup>96</sup> Generale Missiven, 22 October 1725, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 7550, 55-56.

<sup>97</sup> Catherine F. Schryver, 'Investigating Texts in their Social Contexts: The Promise and Peril of Rhetorical Genre Studies', in: Doreen Starke-Meyerring and Natasha Artemeva eds., *Writing in Knowledge Societies* (2011) 40.

How can we explain the differences in adaptability? It likely that it must be sought in the overall contrast between the three VOC genres and the Japanese letters. Unlike the VOC writings, which were meant to capture and report information, the Japanese Demands were created to carry out orders. This almost certainly affected the author's inclination to alter information in order to accomplish his objective, whereas the VOC authors acted in a more passive manner, as it was not their goal to drive others to action, aside from a few *opperhoofden*.

In addition, we have seen some genre shifts at play in this chapter. The information from the *dagregister* was incorporated into the letter to the Governor-General and Council, the *resoluties* and the *generale missive*. As there is still another chapter left that discusses this material, I will only say here that it fascinating, so far, how the information was copied in literal terms from one genre to the next.

### 3. The Heeren XVII are notified that...

All the genres we have discussed previously were part of genre system. Genre systems are a concept introduced by genre scholar Charles Bazerman, who understands them to be ‘complex webs of interrelated genres, in which actors utilize recognizable genres to instigate action, which may then be followed by a certain range of generic response by others.’<sup>98</sup> To break it down: genres are interrelated because one genre draws on the information of another genre to shape its own text. For example, the *generale missive* drew on the contents and to some extent also the structure of the *dagregister*. These genres were recognizable within the system because actors acknowledged that a specific text was a *dagregister* or *generale missive* going by its features. In turn, these genres instigated actions, as we have seen, which was followed by the response of others. The *dagregister* was a response to the instruction to record daily events of importance and report them to Batavia. In turn, the *generale missive* responded to this genre by drawing on and processing the information. In this final chapter we explore how these interactions changed information, through two important genre mechanics: inclusion and exclusion.

The focus point of this chapter are the *haags verbaal* and the *concept missive*. When the VOC records were sent from Batavia to the Dutch Republic, the *haags besogne* reviewed the correspondence and selected the material that would be used in the annual meeting of the *Heeren XVII*. A list of letters, records, and excerpts from the *generale missive* were selected which simultaneously made up the *haags verbaal*, which was a report of this process. This report was arranged in the same way as the *generale missiven* per establishment.<sup>99</sup> It gives us an overview of the matters that were discussed and deemed important by the *Heeren XVII*. Vriend showed that the information in these reports was not always as reliable as would like to believe.<sup>100</sup> The *besogne* frequently struggled with reading VOC material, because it was poorly structured or badly written. The *concept missive*, in turn, was the outcome of the meeting prepared by the *besogne*. In essence, this document included the final verdicts of the *Heeren XVII* and was sent to the Governor-General and Council in Batavia to guide VOC policy.

As one could imagine, the relative distance between Deshima and The Hague was immense in early modern times. The road that information traveled was furthermore full of

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<sup>98</sup> Charles Bazerman, ‘Systems of genres and the enactment of social intentions’, in: A. Freedman and P. Medway ed., *Genre and the new rhetoric* (London: Taylor & Francis 1994) 97.

<sup>99</sup> Meilink-Roelofs, Inventory of the VOC archive, 11.

<sup>100</sup> Vriend, ‘An unbelievable amount of paper’, 85.

hazards that caused alterations along the way. One of the great dangers that information dealt with was the inclusion and exclusion of information caused by genre (shifts). After all, to instigate action certain information had to be present, while other information was to be absent.<sup>101</sup> The question is how can we study the mechanics of exclusion and inclusion? The VOC information network seems to offer a perfect case study, since we can trace the information from its inception all the way to the end in the archives. In this chapter we compare information in the *dagregister* with information in other genres, including the *haags verbaal* and *concept missive*. The first section primarily looks at examples of information aggregation, while the second section of this chapter deals with information silences. The sub-question of this chapter is: to what extent is information silenced by genre?

### 3.1 Aggregation

To examine the process of information aggregation, several fragments in the *haags verbaal* and *concept missive* were picked at random and traced back to their original *dagregister* entries. The first fragment of relevance in the *haags verbaal* consists of the following:

[1721] The following was requested by the Shogun, met by the Governor-General and Council, consisting of two cassowary birds, four dogs, a weatherglass, the saddle of a horse and some decorated weapons, together with some pepper trees, in which no objection was found, due to the fact that the plant cannot grow or survive in the cold climate of Japan, and a request of the Governor-General and Council to know the decision whether or not Dutch horses for the Shogun will be sent over.<sup>102</sup>

As more or less expected, the fragment corresponds exactly to what was written previously in the *generale missive* and before that in the *dagregister*. Only two new lines of information are included. The first line relates to the Governor-General and Council's compliance with the Shogun's demands. And the second line to the Governor-General's request for information on whether Dutch horses would be sent to Japan via Batavia. In addition, the *haags verbaal* mentioned that the letter of the *opperhoofd* to Governor-General and Council

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<sup>101</sup> Chalice Randazzo, 'Hearing Silence: Toward a Mixed-Method Approach for Studying Genres' Exclusionary Potential', *Composition Forum* 31 (2015) 2-4.

<sup>102</sup> Haags Verbaal, 13 May 1721, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 4467, 441.

was read.<sup>103</sup> This means that they came across the references of the *opperhoofd* to the *dagregister* entries which discussed the request for horses in more detail, but any additional reference is left out.<sup>104</sup> The information that is missing here is that *opperhoofd* Van Vrijberge noted multiple times in 1718 that he had been asked questions about horses, and that he had likewise replied multiple times that it was impossible to transport horses from the Holland to Japan, due to the distance. However, even without being aware of this information, it was recorded in the concept missive that no horses would be send by the *Heeren XVII*.

[1721] Regarding the requested Dutch horses by the Shogun, of which Your Lordships have requested to know our decision in the Missive of 30 November 1719, we are of the opinion that it would lead to a bad effect to send them, hence you are ordered to divert the attention of the Shogun in a decent matter.<sup>105</sup>

The date of this decision, 30 July 1721, gives some perspective on the time it took for information to travel from Deshima to the Dutch Republic and back, as the request for horses to be delivered was originally communicated in October 1718 by Van Vrijberge. In addition, it is interesting to note that the *Heeren XVII* ordered the Governor-General and Council to divert the attention of the shogun on the matter, but no attempt was ever made. Overall, none of these genres give any hints that information aggregation was at play. To make matters worse, it seems we are already dealing with a case of information filtering, since the *experiences* of Van Vrijberge never seemed to have reached the ears of the *Heeren XVII*.

The fragment below offers another case in which the *haags verbaal* perfectly replicated the information of the *generale missive* and thus omitted the same information as well:

[1726] In the month of January 1724 three horses were delivered from China as a gift to the Shogun, notwithstanding the fact that the export of horses from the Chinese Empire to Japan had been strictly prohibited for centuries on punishment of death, but whether these horses were to the liking of His Majesty is unknown.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Haags Verbaal, 13 May 1721, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 4467, 440.

<sup>104</sup> Missive aan de Gouverneur-Generaal en Raad van India, 12 October 1718, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 1911, 9.

<sup>105</sup> Concept missive, 30 July 1721, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 326, 336.

<sup>106</sup> Haags Verbaal, 4 April 1726, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 4468, 1053.

In contrast, the *concept missive* offers several hints that most information on this event had reached the *Heeren XVII* anyway. As response the following reply was written to the Governor-General and Council:

[20 July 1726] About the trade of Japan, while the newly received letters after examination do not produce any new or interesting news, we will form a reply either way, only to respond that we have seen in the letter of the *opperhoofden* from 5 November 1724 that the Chinese have found a way to export three horses from China to Japan, despite the fact that the export of horses from China to Japan is strictly prohibited on punishment of death, which shows that the Chinese are still very much dedicated to the Japanese trade, so much that they try to make themselves visible at the court of Edo, through which they could possibly receive too great privileges for their trade, therefore we are approve of Your Lordship, that you have ordered horses that correspond to the wishes of the Shogun to be bought and send to Japan, that we may hope that they may arrive safely by ship, and are judged to be of better quality than the Chinese, as our servants write that they were still in doubt whether the Shogun approved of the Chinese horses.<sup>107</sup>

Of interest here is that the *Heeren XVII* made note that they had read the letter of the *opperhoofden* to the Governor-General and Council from 5 November 1724. This is the letter previously discussed on page 28 of this paper, in which the *opperhoofd* suggested several benefits in exchange for delivering horses. However, this is not the focus of the *concept missive*. The *Heeren XVII* were especially concerned with the Chinese operations and how they attempted to gain an advantage over the VOC at the shogunal court. What we are observing here is a form of information aggregation, however, it did not take place on paper. The *generale missive* and the letter to the Governor-General and Council were again listed in the *Haags Verbaal*, and orally discussed during the meeting.<sup>108</sup>

In general, it seems that information aggregation rarely took place in the same way that mapmakers used ships' logs to create new maps. The information that was created in *Deshima* through *dagregisters*, *resoluties* and such, became more or less a stable component in the VOC

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<sup>107</sup> Concept Missive, 20 July 1726, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 327, 28.

<sup>108</sup> Haags Verbaal, 4 April 1726, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 4468, 1052.

information network. The information that was held important to the genre was included from the start. When it was transmitted to other texts, the component was directly copied, with only a few small adjustments made along the way. The components were not combined again until they reached the *besogne* in the Dutch Republic. In regards to our historical event, the *besogne* limited itself primarily to what was written in the *generale missive* and the letter to the Governor-General. The information aggregation which subsequently took place was only discussed orally, and we are left with the concept missive to reconstruct the exact information that reached the *Heeren XVII*. This gives the impression that very little information actually reached the *Heeren XVII*, which corresponds with the observation of Femme Gaastra that the VOC aimed to guide its business with basic information.<sup>109</sup>

### 3.2 Silence

To test occurrences of information exclusion in the VOC information network, we take a look at several fragments starting from Deshima all the way to the Hague relating to the historical event. Some additional context proves useful here. In 1725 the first shipment of horses was accepted by the *Shōgun*. In the following year, the groom Hans Jurgen Keijser accompanied the *opperhoofd* and the horses to Edo. They were then rewarded for their services in Edo, where the *opperhoofd* received 50 gowns and 50 bars of silver and Keijser received 30 bars of silver.<sup>110</sup> Normally, the *opperhoofd* only received 30 gowns, and no silver. This was therefore taken as a sign by both the Company and the interpreters that the horses greatly pleased the *Shōgun*. In the following years, several shipments of horses were delivered by the VOC. These shipments eventually included the highly desired Persian mares from Gamron.<sup>111</sup> However, signs of improvement for trade remained out. Due to this, the *opperhoofden* grew impatient and devised a plan in 1729. In this section we trace the information regarding this plan back to patria.

According to the 1729 *dagregister*, the *Shōgun* desired that Keijser would be elevated from corporal to sergeant.<sup>112</sup> It was furthermore noted that Keijser was ordered to visit Edo once more to ride horses, instruct on horsemanship and build a horse track and stable in the European style. After that followed the *dagregister* entry that outlined the plan.

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<sup>109</sup> Femme S. Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company. Expansion and decline* (Zutphen 2003), 155-159.

<sup>110</sup> Dagregister, 25 October 1725 – 15 October 1726, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 2040, 76-80.

<sup>111</sup> Haags Verbaal, 21 May 1731, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 4469, 1145.

<sup>112</sup> Dagregister, 22 October 1728 – 12 October 1729, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 139, 377-379.



[1729] That way the interpreters will not prevent the Company in making their rightful complaints at court about the malevolent practices of the Nagasaki Governor in regards to the extortion of our goods during the trading season, which had not been demonstrated two years earlier because the interpreter at the time, Kizits, was afraid to translate my complaints, with that in mind, if Hans Jurgen Keijser learns Japanese when he is isolated for the next 7 months in Edo, he will grow competent in the language [...] so that when the occasion arises, he will speak with the princes of this nation, either the Shogun, or his minion and the secret council or Cano Totomi no Cammi Samma, who have appeared in favor to the Company, or other courtiers.<sup>113</sup>

The plan of *opperhoofd* Boockesteijn appeared to be that Keijser would learn Japanese during his stay in Edo. That way, the Company gained control of someone who could speak Japanese and tell the truth about the Nagasaki governor's activities. The letter to the Governor-General and Council on page 28 of this paper includes the same information, with references to the entries in the *dagregister*. This information also corresponds with what we have encountered in the *resolutie* that relates to the promotion of Keijser on page 29. The information that these two records added was the list of 10 articles with instructions for Keijser in Edo. Which is a rare example of information aggregation.

When we take these records and compare them to what is written in the *generale missive*, we are offered with a brief account:

[1730] The request of the *opperhoofd* taken into consideration we hope that Hans Jurgen Keyser, who has been summoned by court, will be able to clear up through either Matasemon or other courtiers how scandalous the Company is treated in Nagasaki. In particular he has been instructed to show that the Nagasaki governor extorts the Company's trade, among others by forcing the Company to pay 136 maas, while the golden coubang in general is not worth more than 58 maas.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Dagregister, 22 October 1728 – 12 October 1729, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 139, 377-379.

<sup>114</sup> W.Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII Der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie Deel 9* ('s Gravenhage 1988) 76-77

The request in this fragment refers to the promotion of Keijser and the extension of his contract under the Company. Only one of the ten articles supplied to Keijser is mentioned in the *generale missive*, namely that it is expected that he will reveal the Company's scandalous treatment by the Nagasaki governor. The duration of Keijser's stay in Edo, as well as the Japanese rationale for summoning him, are also omitted. And finally, the plan of *opperhoofd* Boockesteijn is missing: it is left unmentioned that Keijser will learn Japanese in Edo so that he can expose the business practices of the Nagasaki governor and become an ambassador for the Company, much in the same way that *opperhoofd* Jan Elserak had done in 1643.<sup>115</sup> In that regard, the *generale missive* has filtered a vast amount of information.

The *besogne* mentioned that an extract was read from the *resolutie* that promoted Keijser from corporal to sergeant.<sup>116</sup> This document is titled 'instruction for Keijser' in the *haags verbaal* which hints that they have only read the ten articles.<sup>117</sup> In addition, they had read the *generale missive*, and the letter to the Governor-General and Council. No reference is made to the *dagregister*. The *verbaal* noted the following:

[1731] The opperhoofden have told the Governor-General and Council in their letter of 12 October 1729 that the Corporal and groom Hans Jurgen Keijser on expense of the Shogun, was summoned to build a Dutch stable, and had handed him an instruction consisting of 10 articles, to see whether he would not be able to advance the Company's business in Edo.<sup>118</sup>

This extract differs from the *generale missive*, as it did mention the purpose why Hans Jurgen Keijser was summoned, but still left out the other details, previously already omitted by the *generale missive*. However, as listed above, these were covered in the additional works that have been read and prepared by the *besogne*.

The response in the *concept missive* was rather unexpected:

[1731] From the papers of this trading post it appears that Your Lordship has used whatever means necessary to prevent the Japanese in their wickedness, especially is our attention drawn to the instruction which your Lordship has

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<sup>115</sup> Dagregister, 22 October 1728 – 12 October 1729, NL-HaNA, NFJ, 1.04.21, inv. nr. 139, 377.

<sup>116</sup> Haags Verbaal 21 May 1731, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 4469, 1141.

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>118</sup> Haags Verbaal 21 May 1731, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 4469, 1145.

given the Corporal Hans Jurgen Keijser, in which he has been summoned to build a Dutch stable for the Shogun, under the pretext that this could offer an advantage to the Company, of which we approve, since we may then learn of mechanical and musical instruments as well as forms of art that could appease the court to our advantage, but if you may learn that in contrast no sign of improvement is possible, then you have our permission to completely withdraw and abandon trade in Japan.<sup>119</sup>

Boockesteijn evidently had no intention of executing his plan to learn about mechanical and musical devices that would please the lords and ladies of court. Keijser was supposed to learn Japanese so that he could bypass the interpreters and reveal the extortion practices of the Nagasaki governor. Surely this was also in the interest of the *Heeren XVII*, therefore I find their reply difficult to interpret. It is possible that they thought another object, in the same manner as horses, would pique the interest of the *Shōgun*. However, this would not have solved the issues that the Company was currently dealing with in Deshima. We could argue that the local context was missing, but the *besogne* had prepared both, the letter to the Governor-General and the *resolutie* in which Keijser was promoted, which together offered a very expansive account of the situation. Perhaps the final line explains it all, as it seems to imply, they were not too worried about losing Deshima, most likely due to the deteriorating trade results over time.

In any case, it is interesting to note that no instance of permanent information exclusion was detected during the transmission of this event. In general, we can outline a pattern in the information network. Each year several texts were produced in Deshima which produced knowledge. This knowledge was then exported to Batavia, but remained very definitive in its nature. There was no real aggregation at play. All that happened was that fragments were literally copied and incorporated into other texts. The outcome was the *generale missive*, in which we read the same fragment that we already saw in the *dagregister*. Together all these texts traveled to the Dutch Republic, where the *Besogne* then discarded the *dagregister* in favor of reading the letter to the Governor-General, which provided a much better summary than the *generale missive*, and included references to the *dagregister* if they had to be studied. In addition, they selected several other letters, which together made up the correspondence of Deshima that was discussed in the meeting of the *Heeren XVII*. Each potential exclusion of information was more or less corrected by the *Besogne* in the instance of this specific event.

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<sup>119</sup> Concept Missive, 14 September 1731, NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nr. 328, 24.

## Conclusion

To what extent did genre silence information? In this chapter we have witnessed several genre shifts in which information was copied from one text to another text. What is rather striking about this process is that the information consisting of *dagregister* fragments that were copied, were barely affected by the genre of a new document. The information in the short and concise *dagregister* entry-style returned in more or less the same shape and form in the letter to the Governor-General, the *generale missive*, the *haags verbaal*.

How can this be explained? For an answer, we must briefly return to what was written in the context of the VOC network as a genre system at the beginning of this chapter. It was argued by Bazerman that genres interact, resulting not only in the transmission of content, but also the style that shaped the information. In other words, the style of the original genre had already constrained the information in such a way, that no further exclusion or inclusion was necessary when it was processed into a new genre document. There were some minor differences in information alteration, but in general the information produced by the VOC on the historical event was stable and neither excluded or included too much information beyond the original product. We may perhaps identify this type of information as portable knowledge: that is, information that changes little when it was processed.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of the paper, I introduced a passage that instructed the Company servants to gather perfect knowledge. However, considering the hazards that information encountered along the way and the varying local contexts in which the VOC servants operated, this was easier said than done. I began to wonder what the *Heeren XVII* meant by perfect knowledge. Was it expansive or concise knowledge? Useful or interesting knowledge? Ultimately, I would argue that it was none of these categories, but rather portable knowledge that was considered perfect. During this study it dawned on me that the VOC information network, at least in the case of Deshima, kept its reports as simple and concise as possible. By simply stating the day, time and content of the event in a short entry in a *dagregister*, a rather mobile component was created that was quickly extracted, copied and transferred as necessary, with little risk that the information would be altered greatly along the way.

It was through genre that portable knowledge was created. In the first chapter we saw how the overarching genre of *dagregisters* was a response to the recurring situation of producing knowledge and transferring knowledge. It was in this context that our historical event was shaped not only through the characteristics of the *dagregister*, but also in response to another recurring situation in its own right. The historical event became a sub-genre or genre within a genre that repeatedly responded to the Japanese request. In this context a reference frame or precedent was created, that would predetermine the response of the *dagregister* for the next seven years or so. The historical event was thus constrained by its own recurring situation which constrained the content and the *dagregister's* recurring situation, which constrained the form of the information.

In the second chapter, we looked at four different genres to evaluate how adaptable they were in terms of allowing acts that deviated from the genre's general theme. The conclusion was that they all more or less differed in adaptability, but no VOC genre came near to the dynamism conveyed by the Japanese Demands. The difference in levels of adaptability must be sought in the general difference between the three VOC genres and the Japanese letters. Whereas all the VOC texts were genres created in response to the necessity to document and report information, the Japanese Demands were created to carry out orders (or threats as some *opperhoofden* would claim). This more than likely influenced the author's willingness to change information to achieve his goal, and subsequently explains the dynamic nature of the Japanese Demands, whereas the VOC texts remained rather passive, aside from a few outliers.

When information is made portable, this implies that it changes very little or not at all when it moves due to its transferability. This is more or less what happened in the third chapter where genre mechanics of inclusion or exclusion were examined on the presumption that they altered information. The VOC network, was no doubt a genre system in which information was transferred from one genre into the next. Consequently, not only content, but also the style in which this content was originally recorded was partly processed. The information in the short and concise *dagregister* entry returned in more or less the same shape and form in the letter to the Governor-General, the *generale missive*, the *haags verbaal* and more genres that were omitted in this study. Therefore, we cannot speak of any cases of real cases of information aggregation or silencing.

Now the stage is set to answer the main question of this research. Which I shall repeat once more: to what extent did information change when a genre shift occurred in the early eighteenth-century VOC records? Based on the records that we have studied in this paper; the information changed surprisingly little. There was little to change when a *dagregister* entry consisted of three to five sentences at most. In addition, all these VOC genres aimed to record and report information as the response to the recurring situation, therefore changing information was not something they specialized in. In general, it is remarkable to see how little knowledge the *Heeren XVII* based their decisions on to steer the Company. Perhaps they really did figure that portable knowledge was in their best interest to be kept up to date in era when information was not instantaneously available everywhere.

Another question I feel I am compelled to address is where to situate genre as social action in the context of archives. The traditional concept of genre labels information so that we may instantly recognize its form and content. This is useful when you want to rapidly look up a document that corresponds with certain information. However, it gives the impression that archives and records are passive in nature, when no text is created without a purpose. Genre as social action does not consider records passive carriers of information, but active texts that aim to instigate some form of action in response to a recurring situation. What does this mean for archives as the primary locations that store these records? Are human archives a form of genre as social action? After all, there are national archives, community archives, corporate archives, online archives, and so on. What communication do convey and how do they instigate action? Genre as social action seems to be widely applicable and gives a refreshing perspective not only when studying texts but during examination of any type of communication. Therefore, I would like to propose that historians, archivists, and information specialists all work together to investigate texts more often using the framework of genre as social action.

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