

## Large and Broad

*Navigare necesse est*  
(Motto of the city of Rotterdam)

“Till the end of the month I will be off reading the riddle of the sands.” The riddle of the sands? Erskine Childers’ book of 1903, known to those with a penchant for trivial facts as the world’s first spy novel? But why on earth would Leonard, not known to be an *aficionado* of spy novels, take off a whole month to read one? Because, as one modern reviewer put it, “What Childers clearly loves most is sailing.” When, moreover, the sands turn out to be the desolate tidal flats behind the Friesian Islands, the riddle is solved: Leonard in the summer of 2008 was off on his boat the *Mediene*, sailing the Wadden Sea. What he clearly loves most (next to his love for history, of course) is sailing, which is not surprising, considering the motto of his place of birth.

It is a love which he also tries to instill in his students, but with meager results. Of all his foreign students probably only Liu Yong, his TANAP (Towards a New Age of Partnership)-student from China, responded, but he had it in his genes. The others would sit on the boat terrified, trying to remember whether or not they could swim, or seemingly unconcerned, having put all trust in their captain. In either case, it was an objective lesson in history to see and feel the part of Holland from which the VOC (The Dutch East India Company) had sprung, and to experience the incongruousness of the situation: Leonard sailing with a group of Chinese scholars and students into the main locks near Amsterdam, and disappearing below deck, leaving his Chinese “crew” and the Dutch onlookers on the quay staring at one another, in a reverse of the first landing of the Dutch on the Pescadores.

What followed was of course no survival training, but at least the participants would come away from a day of sailing with Uncle Leonard with a new perspective on time and distance, on the influence of the elements, and on the importance of human skill. It was back to basics and restored time and place, the elements and human action to pride of place in history. Theories of the modern world system, nation/traditional state formation, or the Asian mode of production quickly fade when you are struggling not to get stuck on a tidal flat.

In the study of history, back to basics means the ability to read and interpret the primary sources. For Leonard that means first of all the stupendous archives left by the VOC, and whatever local primary sources that could be found. This led to huge projects. On the one hand, there were the projects to make these sources available to a wider public through their publication: for example, the *Dagregisters* of Zeelandia Castle, Taiwan (the annotated transcriptions of the diaries kept by the Dutch government of Formosa, 1629–1662); the Deshima Marginalia project (a multi-volume publication of English summaries of the Dutch diaries kept by the heads of the

Deshima factory, 1641–1800); the Formosan Encounter project (a compilation in four volumes of VOC records on the aboriginal population of Taiwan, with English translation); the saving, preservation, and publication of the Batavian Kong-kuan archive (the records of the Chinese Council of Batavia recording various aspects of daily life of the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century). Then there were the projects to train Asian and South African students, scholars, and archivists on how to actually use these sources: for example, the highly successful TANAP program for young university lecturers or promising graduates with an MA degree, giving them an opportunity to work for a doctorate from Leiden University; and the Encompass project for Asian BA students.

One cannot overestimate the enormous impact this has had and will have, not only on the general field of Asian history, but more specifically on the personal careers of the participants involved: to be able to start off your career with a solid grounding in the sources and their language, then back it up with a published Ph.D. thesis, in the case of the TANAP graduates, two of whom, Ōta Atsushi and Shimada Ryūto, are contributors to this volume.

*Facere docet philosophia, non dicere*, or in the song of the soccer club in Leonard's birthplace Rotterdam: *Geen woorden maar daden* (Not words, but deeds). Even though Leonard's interest in soccer does not go much farther than sporting the socks of the Friesian club Heerenveen, the slogan fits him and even his scholarship, in a way. It is not just the boundless energy with which he sets up projects and conferences on widely divergent topics, such as "The Eighteenth Century as a Category of Asian History," "Bridging the Divide: 400 Years The Netherlands-Japan," "Shifting Communities and Identity Formation in Early Modern Asia," "Rivalry and Conflict, European Traders and Asian Trading Networks in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," "Port Cities: Canton and Nagasaki Compared," and advises students and a host of other researchers. It is also the personal concern he shows for his students, their circumstances and problems. On the morning of his own Ph.D. examination, when most people would not be able to think of anything else, I found Leonard busy trying to find housing for a Chinese student who had shown up unexpectedly.

Leonard's concern for human beings and human actions, his uncannily sharp eye for human weaknesses and human foibles, and his ability to see the humorous, if not tragicomical, side of almost any situation also strongly colors his scholarship. Knowing, if only from his sailing experience, that human actions do make a difference, he almost always manages to put a human perspective on even the most theoretical subject, and his writing really takes off once a person or persons become the subject.

Scholars are usually judged solely by their [written] words. In Leonard's case, that would already be substantial, but it would not even cover half the man. To those who know him, his actions speak even louder than his words. It is the resulting gratitude that brought together the contributors of this volume. After all, books like this

do not come about just because you are a clever, or even great scholar, but because of what you meant and still mean to others as a human being.

Willem REMMELINK  
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