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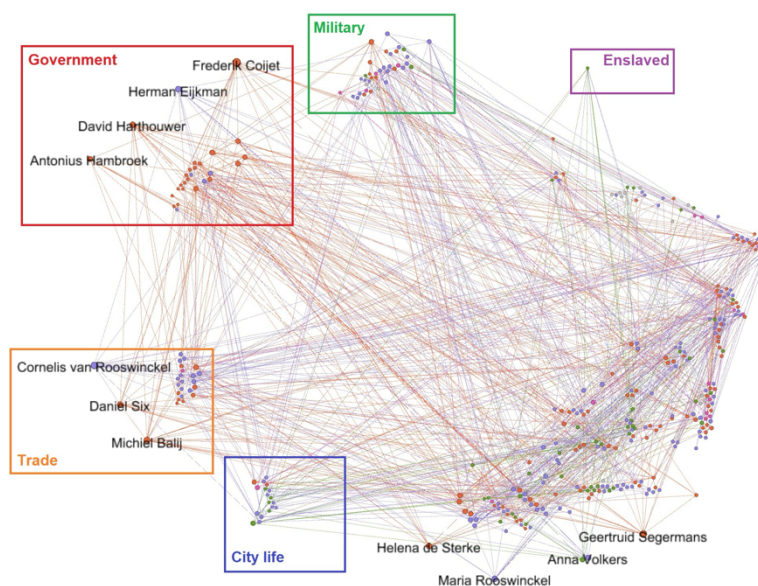
Inclusive institutions? Access to political power in the city of Tainan (Fort Zeelandia) in Dutch Formosa (1655–1662)

Maarten F. Van Dijck [1]

1: Erasmus University Rotterdam

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This paper employs social network analysis to examine how Dutch settlers gained access to political actors within the seventeenth-century Dutch settlement Fort Zeelandia. This city was constructed around Fort Zeelandia on the west coast of Dutch Formosa, situated in present-day Taiwan. Social Network Analysis (SNA) provides a framework for exploring the emergence of informal social relationships in this seventeenth-century colonial context. This paper uses the concept of inclusive institutions as proposed by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, who belong to the New Institutional Economics school of thought. They posit that long-term economic success is determined by the development of political institutions in which ordinary citizens could also exert influence. (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). Hence, this paper investigates whether various social groups in Dutch Formosa had access to political actors. In a preliminary research published in 1985, Oosterhoff presumed that the Dutch presence in Formosa was successful due to merchants having access to local governance. However, his hypothesis has not been empirically tested to date. Social Network Analysis (SNA) presents a valuable opportunity to address this gap in the existing literature. (Oosterhoff 1985).



The remnants of the Dutch Fort Zeelandia persist in the Anping district of present-day Tainan. In 1624, the Dutch established a fort atop a prominent sand dune along the southwest coast of Formosa. Dutch Formosa stood out as one of the few genuinely profitable territories for the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC), facilitated by a flourishing trade relationship with Chinese cities, the cultivation of sugar and rice in the rural areas, and the imposition of taxes. Fort Zeelandia served as the focal point of Dutch presence in Formosa. Adjacent to this fort, a city developed according to the new Dutch model, adhering to the principles of seventeenth-century Dutch urban planning. The city featured straight, paved streets and various public buildings constructed in Dutch fashion, including a weighhouse, a market hall, trade warehouses, and a town hall. Despite the Dutch appearance of the city, it was a multicultural settlement predominantly inhabited by a Chinese population. Around 1650, the town boasted approximately 5,000

residents, with only 100 to 150 Dutch families among them. (Oosterhoff 1985). This paper scrutinizes the networks of these Dutch families, drawing on available sources spanning the period from 1655 to 1662. In the latter year, the city fell under the control of the influential Zheng family, seeking to consolidate their influence in the South China Sea following the expulsion of the Ming dynasty in China by the new Qing dynasty founded by the Manchus (Emmer and Gommans 2012).

Methodologically, the choice is made to employ serial sources for mapping informal networks. To achieve this, we rely on baptismal records, as they serve as a reliable indicator of significant social relationships within and beyond the family in Christian communities. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, families predominantly turned inward to select godparents from within their own kin, but in the seventeenth century, a reliance on broader social networks was more common. Therefore, an analysis of baptismal witnesses provides valuable insights into crucial social relationships (Van Dijk 2015; Alfani and Gourdon 2012). Such sources are available for the period spanning from 1655 to 1661 (Heyns and Cheng 2005). Unfortunately, these documents only provide insights into the Christian community, making it considerably more challenging to delineate connections with the Chinese population. Nevertheless, the baptismal registers are not confined to Dutch individuals, as many settlers married Asian women, resulting in mixed families with heterogeneous social networks. These sources are cross-referenced with the names recorded in the daily registers maintained by the governors of Formosa (Blussé and Everts 2000). In this manner, five distinct social groups can be delineated within the urban settlement: administrators, merchants, military personnel, urban craftsmen, and enslaved individuals.

Through social network analysis, it is possible to determine the extent of interconnections among the various social groups. For instance, the analysis explores whether there existed a political class that remained distinct from merchants and urban craftsmen, or if close ties existed between these groups. Visualizing this Christian network of informal relationships among the inhabitants of Fort Zeelandia can provide interesting new insights. The advantage of social network analysis lies in its ability to illuminate connections between social groups and not restrict the research to describing the various groups. This makes it possible to find out whether certain groups isolated themselves from the broader society or were open to interactions with other segments of the city. Additionally, centrality measures allow an examination of the residents who played pivotal roles in the networks. A first network graph already suggests that influential merchants on the island formed a cohesive community with strong interconnections. This stands in contrast to the local administration, where members had close ties with military personnel and merchants but lacked interconnectedness among themselves. Noteworthy is the significant role of women in these informal networks. Despite not being obligatory as baptismal witnesses, certain women played central roles in the urban network. This aspect, brought to light through the use of social network analysis, is often overlooked in traditional historical research, where the role of women in the early modern period tends to be underemphasized.

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