For the sake of convenience and perhaps largely owing to a lack of sources, the acknowledged networking in the VOC has often simply been equated with kinship ties and has been traced solely through family trees. Without wishing to deny the important family element in networking, in this book I shall concentrate on another conspicuous aspect. Networking will be treated as a system for the redistribution of wealth and power, one which had an inherent tendency to reproduce itself.\(^1\) Social reproduction is often defined as the processes which sustain or perpetuate characteristics of a given social structure or tradition over a period of time. The family element can also be ascribed to the servants’ desire to reproduce the prevailing system so as to ensure the preservation and perpetuation of privileged positions within a particular social group. This ambition ties in with the way the Company servants thought of a post as their personal possession, from which as much personal benefit as possible should be squeezed. Since income and social position were irrevocably linked to hierarchy, servants were not too fastidious to shun the use of nepotism to ensure the prosperity of their offspring. As more possibilities opened up to make a fortune, even though this pursuit had become an increasingly risky enterprise, the process must inevitably have had an impact on the existing system of patronage. The tactics chosen to beat a path to affluence needed to be adapted if a Company servant did not have any family in Asia. In this case they were probably less preoccupied with social reproduction in the East and more with earning money which would ensure acquiring a social position at home.\(^2\)

*The supremacy of the Republic*

The supreme power over all promotions lay not in Asia but with the Gentlemen Seventeen in the Republic. The Directors decided on the appointments to the highest posts and determined who would sit in the High Government. With this power in their grasp, they influenced all promotions. Competition in a race for a seat in the High Government was fierce, as once gained such a position spelled power, fortune and an increased opportunity to indulge in the lucrative pursuit of patronage. Newcomers to the Council were first appointed extraordinary councillors,
a position which allowed them less power than that wielded by ordinary members. The Directors naturally also appointed the second-in-charge of the High Government, the Director-General, who could normally expect to be promoted the next Governor-General when the present incumbent had either retired or passed away. Through their power to appoint the members of the High Government, the Gentlemen Seventeen in the Republic could also influence the allocation of all other posts in Asia. Since it was they who decided on the appointments to the top posts in Asia, they had direct access to potential patrons in the High Government and used their influence to find posts in Asia for protégés coming out from the Republic. The powerbrokers in Asia could ignore such a summons only at their peril because their own further advancement also depended on the Directors at home. Assured by the amount of power they wielded, the Gentlemen Seventeen probably profited from their positions in just the same manner as their servants in Asia did, but the margins of what was considered acceptable personal profit seem to have been smaller in the Republic.

The entire progress of Van Eck’s career reveals that the influence of the Directors in the promotion process was dispersed because it was divided between institutions and powerful patrons in Asia. In the Republic itself, the organization of the VOC power of appointment was arranged to conform to the six participant Chambers, each of which had its commensurate share of a say in every decision tailored to the number of members it could delegate to the Gentlemen Seventeen. Amsterdam was by far the largest Chamber, but the opinion of the other Chambers, certainly that of the Chamber of Zeeland, could not be ignored. When a position on the High Government was at stake, the most crucial step was to canvas sufficient support in all the Chambers, as even Amsterdam did not hold more than eight seats on the central board of the Gentlemen Seventeen. These regional and family loyalties played a significant role in the final choice. Politics in the Republic was also brought to bear on the eventual decision. Through the intercession of his relations in the province of Zeeland, Van Eck won the support of the representative of the Principal Nobleman of Zeeland. In Van Eck’s time, this Principal Nobleman was the Prince of Orange, who was represented by Jonker Jan van Borselle van der Hooghe (1746–1806). Both Van Eck and Van Borselle were related to the most powerful family in the province of Gelderland, the Van Lynden clan. Sustained by Van Borselle’s hearty endorsement, Van Eck could count on strong support in Zeeland where he obtained the help of various highly placed officials, who as reciprocation asked him to help Adriaan Moens of Middelburg. As long as Moens’ good behaviour merited his position, Van Eck intimated to them that in return for their help he would have his steady support. Van Eck assigned Moens...