

## NOTES ON THE SULU ISLANDS IN CHU-FAN-CHIH

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It is a general consensus that the earliest mention of Sulu in Chinese records is the account of Sulu in Wang Ta-Yuan's *Tao-I-Chih-Lhio* done in 1349. Recently, however, Prof. Rao Chung-Yih (c.1. see Chinese Entries) of the University of Hong Kong reports that Sulu is mentioned in Chen Ta-Chen's *Nan-Hai-Chih* (South Seas Records, c.2) completed in 1304. According to Rao's findings, most of the names of countries in the South Seas as recorded in both of the works, are similar in sound and somewhat different in form. The Chinese characters for the name of Sulu in *Nan-Hai-Chi* is (c.3), while in *Tao-I-Chi-Lhio*, (c.4).<sup>1</sup>

Now, to my understanding, the land and people of Sulu were actually mentioned by Chao-Ju-Kua in the year 1225. This is referent to the account recorded at the end of the chapter on Po-Ni, in Chao's well known work: *Chu-Fan-Chih*. The text, its English translation, and a brief investigation are hereby presented.

### II. THE CHINESE TEXT:

c.5.

#### Chinese Entries

c.1. 饒宗頤 c.2 陳大震: 南海志 c.3 蘇錄  
c.4. 蘇祿 c.5 西龍宮什廟, 胡蘆夢 (一作  
蔓) 頭, 蘇勿里, 馬膽逾, 馬喏 (依馮承鈞  
先生標點), 居海島中, 用小船來往, 服  
色飲食與渤泥同. 出生香, 黃蚋, 璆  
瑁. 商人以白瓷器, 酒, 米, 茶, 鹽, 白  
絹, 貨金易之.

<sup>1</sup> Sin-Teh, "The Earliest History of Sulu in Chinese Records," *The Chinese Weekly*, April 5, 1970, Manila, p. 12.

## III. ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

Sai or Se (1, west)—Ling (2, dragon)—King (3, palace or temple)—Chap (4, miscellaneous) —Biio (5, temple) —Laid (6, sun) —Leh (7, beautiful), —Ho Loh (8-9, gourd), —Bong (10, dream) —Taa0 (11, head, So (12, awake)—Buud (13, don't)—Lih (14, village), Be or Ma (15, horse)—Tna (16, bile)—Luh (17, pass over), Be or Ma (18, horse) — Liok or Jiok (19, yes),<sup>2</sup> are all living in small islands, plying back and forth in small boats. Their costumes and food and drink are similar to those of the people of Po-Ni. It yields: raw aromatics (raw camphor?), lakawood, yellow wax, soft-tortoise shells. In bartering, Chinese traders use: white porcelain, wine, rice, tea, salt, white tafiaeta, and trade gold.

## IV. INVESTIGATION:

A. *The location of the small islands.*

Po-Ni was a Chinese name for North Borneo, according to various Chinese accounts of the Sung (960-1277),<sup>3</sup> Yuan (1277-1368), Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. Its location, according to Chao Ju-Kua's description, is "to the southeast of Chuanchow (or Zaitan, near Amoy, in the Southern Fukien—Wang); to Java, it is 45 days voyage; to San-Fo-Chi (or Sumatra), 40 days voyage; to Cham-City (Cambodia) or to Ma-I (Batangas, Luzon),<sup>4</sup> 30 days voyage, in favorable wind." Etymologically, Po-Ni is obviously identified to Porne the name for Borneo, in the Carta de Ptolomeo de 1552.

The small islands off the sea of North Borneo are possibly the Sulu islands, including or not the islands of Cagayan de Sulu. For (1) geographically, the Sulu Islands are the only islands off the coast of North Borneo. (2) Historically speaking, the costumes and customs of the islands' people are similar to those of the northern Borneans. And (3) the products of these small islands and those of Sulu as recorded in Tao-I-Chih-Lhio (i.e., laka-wood of average quality, yellow wax, soft tortoise shells and pearls)<sup>5</sup> are almost all the same, save the pearls or raw aromatics.

B. *Probable identification of the names mentioned.*

According to the context of the account we have, the names mentioned are of various peoples, and not of places. However, judging with common sense, many of them, or some of them, at least, must be names of islands. A more reasonable interpretation for the nature of the names therefore is

<sup>2</sup> According to the punctuation made by Feng Cheng-Chua; vide Chao *Ju-Kua's Chu-Fan-Chih*, — annotated by Feng Cheng-Chua, Commercial Press, Shanghai, 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Wang Teh-Ming, *Sino-Filipino Historico-Cultural Relations* (Phil. Social Sciences & Humanities Review, Sept.-Dec. 1964), U.P. Press, 1967, pp. 405 & 409.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 405-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

probable that among them, some are names of islands while others are of people. Guided by such a light, we may try our luck as follows:

(I) Sai or Se (1) — Ling (2) — King (3) — Chap (4) — Bilio (5) (or west dragon-palace-miscellaneous-temple), or Sai or Se (1) — Ling (2) — King (3) only, may be a name designated for the whole group of islands. For it, several points can be talked about: (a) To say in the sense of symmetry it was possible that somewhere in the sea to the east of it, there was a place called "East-Dragon Palace." If so, could it be Cagayan de Sulu, or the Cuyo islands? (b) Dragon-Palace is usually connected or thought of with pearls by the Chinese. Hence, the name may mean that under its water there are pearls "guarded by dragons." (c) Dragon was actually another name for crocodile in Chinese. So possibly, the name may imply that the place is swarmed with crocodiles. And, perhaps, because of them, pearls in its water were not easily to be collected. It then, may be served to explain why among its products, there was no pearl yet. (d) Dragon or dragon-king was worshipped by the peoples in China, and especially by the seafarers. Dragon-palace or Dragon-Temples have existed elsewhere along the sea coast of mainland China up to the present time. It, therefore, may mean that a temple for worshipping Dragon-King was built there by Chinese traders; and consequently, the location was known for it.

- (II) Chap (4) — Bilio (5) (or miscellaneous-temple):
- (III) Liid (6) — Leh (7) (or sun-beautiful):
- (IV) Ho (8) — Loh (9) (or gourd); Jolo, probably.
- (V) Bong (10) — Tao (11) (or dream-head): Bongao (?)
- (VI) So (12) — Buud (13) — Lih (14) (or awake-don't-village):
- (VII) Be or Ma (15) — Tna (16) — Luh (17) (or horse-bile-over)
- (VIII) Be or Ma (18) — Liok or Jiok (19) (or horse-yes):  
probably, Badjao, or Simunul: si- is a common prefix for place name of the Sulu Islands.