



ASJ Introduction to “Historical and Cultural Significance of Admiral Zheng He’s Ocean Voyages”

Those in power control the future by controlling the past, wrote George Orwell. Nowhere is this truth more dead on target than in European historiography, with its hubris—that enduring sense of being better than the rest.

This claim of European superiority, according to Alam (2002), has been put forward with regard to rationality, freedom, individuality, inventiveness, daring, curiosity and tolerance; in turn, these qualities have been translated into superior achievements in technology, wars, management, capitalism, industrialization, and shipping, among others.

A case in point is the European effort to explain, or explain away, Zheng He’s expeditions in the 14th century as a case of irrational decision-making, of an inability to resist the gratification of whims and desires of the voyager’s Chinese masters. By contrast, European expeditions were presented as technological triumphs in an era of rationalism and economic adventure.

Such Eurocentrism takes a variety of forms. In the 1990 BBC television documentary series *Road to Xanadu*, for instance, Zheng He’s maritime exploration, according to Cao (2006), is assailed as “an expendable luxury”—an impractical exercise in the consumption (rather than production) of material wealth. To emphasize the difference, the documentary suggests that when Europe embarked on its profit-seeking overseas colonial undertaking, the aim was “to grasp the riches of trade

with Asia.” Or again, it is common for European historiographers to devalue China’s maritime reach (long after Zheng He’s expeditions), by asking rhetorically (as did Landes, 1998) why European sailing vessels could call at Shanghai or Canton, while no Chinese junks ever anchored in London (Goldstone, 2001).

In a similar vein, they have taken a rather oversimplified line on China’s early decision to confine its shipping to Indian Ocean ports, after a few long-haul voyages: it is proof that China had turned its back on maritime trade, sealing its fate as a backward, closed economy (Landes, 1998). Cao (2006) also stresses that for western thinkers, the short duration of Zheng He’s explorations is evidence that the Chinese were backward looking and ignorant, with no craving for new knowledge and were governed by high-bound bureaucrats. On the other hand, Europe was the wellspring of technology and progress, and had entrepreneurial ascendancy. For the West, “it would be like calling a halt to man’s space exploration on the eve of the first moon landing” (Cao, 2006, p. 13).

To the contrary, China neither pulled back its shipping nor abandoned its maritime sway over Asia. Indeed, sending ships to London was well within China’s technological capabilities, as Goldstone (2001) points out. China stopped sending its ships to Africa, Goldstone argues, for the same reason that the US stopped sending men to the moon: there was nothing to justify the huge costs of those voyages.

The further China sailed, the poorer and more barren the lands that they found. Goods of value came mainly from India and the Middle East, and they had already been pouring into China by established land and sea routes for hundreds of years. Rationally, what should the Chinese have done? The prevailing pattern of monsoon winds in East Asia, which blow south down the China coast and east from India, and then reverse, leads to a highly rational (and inexpensive) sailing pattern in which ships from China, India, and the Arab world converge on Malacca and Aceh in Southeast Asia and exchange their cargoes there, then sail home on favorable winds with the shift in seasons. Quite

reasonably, Chinese maritime merchants therefore aimed to master the seas from Korea and Japan to the Philippines and Southeast Asia, a mastery that they gained early and which provided China with a thriving maritime international trade well into the nineteenth century (Goldstone, 2001, p. 3).

Yet another instance of European aut centrism is symbolically represented by European sailing vessels that were used for commerce and war from the 15th to 18th centuries. They came to be seen as a powerful icon of both technological prowess and trading ventures. In the *Road to Xanadu*, for example, the merchant vessel symbolized European advancement in science and technology (a result of "mathematical discoveries") and were shown as a perfect match to the rise of "innovative" trading consortia which included financiers of expeditions, trading monopolies, political administrators to govern foreign territories and military men to wage wars (Cao, 2006). But as Cao explains, the documentary neutralizes *both* the merchant vessel as a gunboat *and* the charter that granted the "merchants" the privilege of using violence and occupation of foreign lands, by orienting their use toward "trade" (a legitimizing discourse) and avoiding alternative interpretations anchored on European colonialism and imperialism.

A closer scrutiny of the "contact" period (when European presence in Asia started) suggests that it was not Europe, but Asia which showed remarkable advances in both maritime technology and long-haul trading. Indeed, at the time Zheng He and his men were exploring the high seas, world trade was dominated by China and other Asian powers, thus disputing European claims of owning the spirit of enterprise.

For the record, China had a respectable headstart in shipbuilding technology by several centuries. In the 14th century Zheng He commanded the largest ships and greatest fleets the world had ever seen, voyaging as far as the east coast of Africa and deep into the Persian Gulf. According to Goldstone (2001), Chinese junks were larger, more capable and with higher

firepower than European vessels, well into the Qing times (the late 17th and 18th centuries), thus making China the dominant maritime power of the western Pacific for at least eight centuries with huge fleets of warships and trading ships.

In fact, during the period 1450-1750—regarded as the proto-capitalist period of “primitive accumulation—the Chinese Ming/Qing, Turkish Ottoman, Indian Mughal, and Persian Safavid empires formed a series of coherent economies linked together in a fully operational world-economy. China and India were the core regions, particularly of industrial production; West Asia and Southeast Asia also remained economically more significant than Europe. If anything, the world system at that time was under Asian hegemony (Frank, 1994). In reality, China housed enormous capitalist enterprises, from the export-oriented ceramic works of the Ming, to the internal trade in cotton and cotton textiles, to the domestic and foreign trade in processed products (Goldstone, 2001). Indeed, it was only because of the “regional” interconnectedness of Asian economies that the merchant capitalism of Europe was able to lay siege to them (Braudel 1998).

So why is Asian (particularly Chinese) ascendancy in world trade overlooked in most historical accounts? Because all too often, history is presumed to belong to the “winners” (the European colonizers), not to retrospective “losers” (the Asian colonies) (Goldstone, 2001). The winners produced a larger pattern of self-perception: Europe/the West as the engine of technological progress in the form of a de-ethicalized industrialist modernity (Cao, 2006). Through such a lens, Cao argues, other civilizations are excluded from world history in a Hegelian sense because they cannot be straightjacketed into a reductionist discourse of technologism, against which western rationality is measured. In such a context, China functions mostly as a mirror for Europe to see a reinforced self-image.

So pervasive is this posture of self-importance that rather than advance the understanding of the “other”, the representation of the “other” serves more to reproduce the West (Cao, 2006). For instance, as suggested

by Alam (2002), to overcome a lean history, a clever way devised by Eurocentrists is to extend it backwards some five thousand years. That is, Western Europe was simply the final destination of Western civilization, as it moved westward through Egypt, Phoenicia, Israel, Greece and Rome, from its origins in Babylon. This "sequencing" allows Europe, according to Alam, to appropriate the greatest achievements of the ancient Near East. What seems like a plausible flow of events along one particular order is only the result of a European capture of history. It was Blaut (1993), according to Goldstone (2001), who pointed out that Europe has colonized not only territories, but history as well, marking off favored places and "occupying" them with selected facts.

It is in this light that Aurora Roxas-Lim's "Historical and Cultural Significance of Admiral Zheng He's Ocean Voyages" should be seen: as a challenge to the conceptualization of the West as the universal and as an attempt to articulate an alternate world (and not just Asian) history. It is a step in the direction of overcoming the West's privileged position in history, and empowering non-European historiography.

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Historical and Cultural Significance of Admiral Zheng He's Ocean Voyages

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Background of Admiral Zheng He

Admiral Zheng He (Cheng Ho) was born as Ma He circa 1371 in Kunyang country, Yunnan province of a Muslim family of Mongol-Arab extraction. He died at sea circa 1433. Both his grandfather and father were traders and seafarers and had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He was steeped with the maritime spirit of his forefathers—love of travel, trade and adventure that involved willingness to take risks. The expanding Ming army led by one of the most trusted military commanders of Emperor Zhu Yuangzhang—General Fu Youde—found the ten-year old Ma He. He imprisoned the boy and brought him back to Nanjing. Ma He was placed in the household of Zhu Di, Prince of Yan who was General Fu's aide-de-camp during previous military campaigns in the North. Ma He was made a eunuch and through the years proved to be an intelligent, loyal and useful servant.

During Zhu Di's military operations against rebels and remnants of the Yuan forces in the north, Ma He proved to be a courageous and effective fighter, a loyal companion and confidante, and an efficient administrator. Ma He was promptly made chief eunuch when Zhu Di became Emperor after seizing the throne from the 21 year old Zhu Yunwen. The latter escaped whose whereabouts remained a mystery until the end of Zhu Di's reign. When Zhu Di (reign name of Yong Lo) decided to embark on a

naval expedition to the west, he appointed Zheng He admiral of the vast Chinese fleet. Apart from his proven military skills, his connection with the Arab world was one of the important considerations in his appointment as admiral.¹ Zheng He also possessed personal qualities that made him such a skillful and wise merchant–diplomat for the empire. Since he belonged to the Muslim minority population that served the Mongols from Yunnan and was a former captive forced into servitude to the Han prince Zhu Di, these predisposed him to be tolerant and understanding in dealing with foreigners and winning allies for China.

Motivations of the Ocean Voyages

The expeditions were motivated by several considerations. The Emperor was reportedly anxious to capture his nephew Zhu Yunwen from whom he wrested the throne in 1403. Zhu Yunwen, who escaped with court treasures together with the support of his followers, was Zhu Di's most dangerous rival for the throne. The search preoccupied Zhu Di until he died in 1424.

Emperor Zhu Di also wanted to suppress Mongol, Turkic and other related tribes in the north and northwest as well as remaining Yuan forces who could attack from the northern borders and from the sea. The various Mongol and Turkic related tribes were consolidating their control of the overland silk route all the way to Central Asia and Persia. The Uriyangqad Mongols conducted sporadic raids north of Beijing, while the Jurchen threatened southern Manchuria—Heilungjang and Liaoning (Grousset 1948). Hence the search for an alternative route via the seas was all the more urgent.

- Restore Peace and Order and Control Piracy

Quite apart from dynastic rivalry was the desire of the Ming government to announce its legitimacy to the rest of the world and revive the tributary trade system with foreign countries. The tributary system, the

approved system of foreign commercial relations, was neglected due to political turmoil and wars within China and in Southeast Asia. Former tributary states like Champa in southern Vietnam, Srivijaya in Sumatra, Songkla and Malay kingdoms on the Malay Peninsula were no longer coming to the Chinese court and much-needed products from the region were in short supply.² Dai Viet was encroaching into Champa; Burmese, Thai and Khmer rulers were fighting over territories and people; Sukhothai was capturing territories in Laos and Malay kingdoms on the peninsula. China's long-time trading ally Srivijaya, a major entrepot in the east-west trade in Sumatra, was on the decline. Its territories, trade and naval operations were taken over by pirates led by a Chen Zhu-i, a native of Guangzhou. It took Zheng He months of fierce fighting to capture the pirate and bring him back to China where he was executed (Levathes 1994).

Expansionist wars and piracy made the sea passage dangerous to trade. None of the states in the region were able to control pirates. Srivijaya lost control of the coastal areas along the Straits of Malacca that posed continuing danger to shipping and trade. The Chinese had to rescue Paramesvara, last remaining prince of Srivijaya, who was beleaguered by Javanese Majapahit and brought him to China. Chinese assistance in keeping the Thais at bay on the Malay Peninsula enabled Paramesvara to found Malacca that replaced the former entrepot in Palembang, Sumatra (Wolters 1970). When rulers friendly to China were in danger at home, they often sought and found refuge in the Middle Kingdom. Extending "political asylum" to besieged allies was one of the effective means of ensuring friendly ties with foreign rulers, a practice that continued to modern times. For instance, Ho Chi Minh was given refuge in the 1930's-40's and so was Prince Norodom Sihanouk when he was deposed by US-backed General Long Nol during the turbulent civil wars in the 1970's.

Particularly notorious were the Wako whose base of operation in the Ryukyu Islands brought together a mixed band of Koreans, Taiwanese, Japanese and Malays who preyed on ships and merchants with impunity.

Champa, long-time “tributary state” of China was too weak to ward off advancing Dai Viet. Like Srivijaya, Champa’s former naval force deteriorated into marauding band of pirates.

- Strengthen Government Control of Overseas Trade and Commerce

Moreover, Chinese private merchants who had established themselves abroad were drawing trade and profits to themselves which was a great loss of government revenue. For centuries, traders, merchants and seafarers along the eastern and southeastern seaboard had been going out to sea to Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Okinawa-Ryukyu islands, down to Southeast Asia. These merchants whose beginnings started in the Southern Song, Yuan and early Ming periods became very rich and powerful by the Zheng Hua period (1465-1487). Merchant shipping companies from Fujian and Guangdong became even wealthier and powerful that they built as many as fifty ocean-going fleets. Undoubtedly, these merchant corporations benefited from the diplomatic-trading missions of Admiral Zheng He. Ultimately, the Zheng He expeditions were undertaken to renew and expand diplomatic ties, activate China’s trade and commerce with Southeast Asia, India, West Asia and Africa, keep peace to ensure safety of ocean travel, promote China’s growing economic and industrial production, and exert more government control over foreign trade.³

The motives of the Zheng He expeditions were officially summarized in two stone inscriptions erected in December 1431-January 1432 in Changle, Fujian before embarking on the seventh and last voyage. The inscriptions began with expressions of gratitude to the goddess of seafarers Tienfei. The inscription “recorded the years and months of the voyages to the barbarian countries, in order to leave the memory forever.” He enumerated the major ports of call in all the six voyages, “altogether more than thirty countries large and small, were visited that served to unify seas and continents.” And finally, the expeditions were undertaken “to manifest the transforming power of imperial virtue and to treat distant people with kindness.”⁴

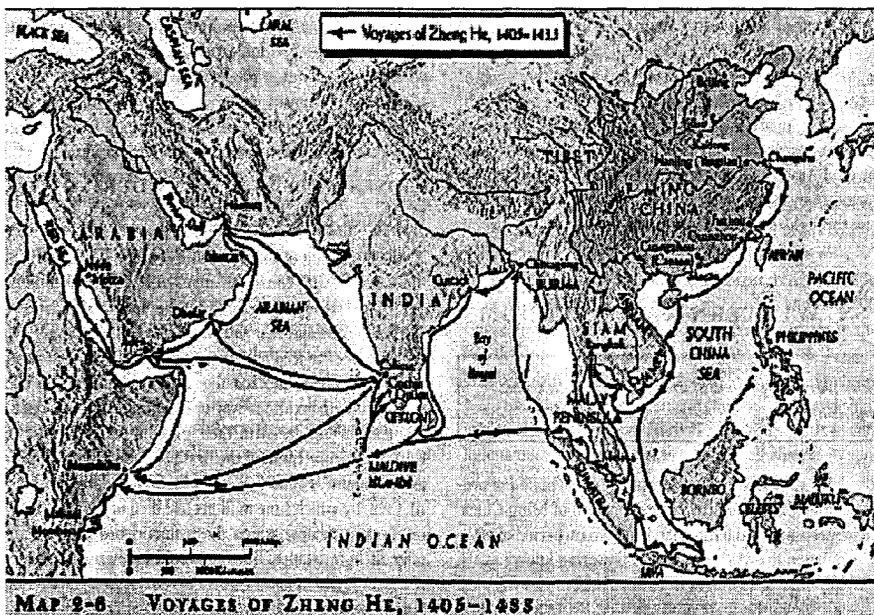
Seven Voyages from 1405 to 1433

The first three expeditions (1405-1411) started from Nanjing and were composed of 317 ships and 27,870 men. The fleet was well armed and carried huge amounts of trade goods—mostly porcelains and silk. They traveled along the Chinese southeastern coast to Qui Nhon, Champa (Vietnam). Before crossing the South China Sea, the fleet split into three squadrons, one part coasted along southern Vietnam and Cambodia moving northwest to Ayuthaya, Thailand. The main fleet went to Surabaya, northern harbor of Majapahit Kingdom (1227-1447), thence to Palembang, Sumatra where Admiral Zheng He rescued Prince Paramesvara. From Palembang the fleet went through the Straits of Malacca passing by Samudera-Pasai and Banda Aceh on the west and northern tip of Sumatra respectively. The main fleet proceeded across the Indian Ocean to Baruwela (Ceylon or Sri Lanka). Zheng He became embroiled with local conflicts in Ceylon, a story dealt with later in this essay. Another part of the fleet went up north via the Nicobar and Andaman Islands (India) to Chittagong (Bangladesh). It crossed the Bay of Bengal to Cochin (southeastern tip of India), eventually joining the main fleet in Galle (near Colombo), and together they traveled to the Malabar Coast of southwestern India. The first three expeditions successfully ascertained safety of the sea routes and revived old as well as forged new trade and commercial alliances. Foreign ambassadors from Sumatra, Java and India were brought to China who expressed “fealty” to the Ming court. In all the ports the fleet visited, besides conducting brisk trade with the local population, they also met and had deals with other foreign merchants. Indians, Persians and Arabs who were formerly lumped together as *ta shih* were more clearly distinguished from each other, although still identified by their religion and language.

The 4th, 5th and 6th expeditions (1413-1422) retraced the route of the earlier expeditions to the Malabar Coast, in the western seaboard of India, where they probably gathered more information for a later journey to the Persian Gulf and Africa. Admiral Zheng He learned how the entrepot

of Calicut, besides exporting pepper, served as the major east-west transshipment center for trade goods such as frankincense and myrrh from Hadramaut (southern Arabian peninsula), glassware from Syria, corals and pearls from the Persian Gulf, and ivory from Africa. Again more foreign trade missions took passage on the return trip to China. By this time, China was assured regular supply of spices, medicinals, agricultural, forest and marine products, and manufactured goods from south and west Asia.

FIGURE 1: Routes of Zheng He's Great Voyages, 1405-1433



Source: <http://www.wwnorton.com/worlds/ch2/maps.htm>

The fourth voyage (1413-1415) succeeded in crossing the Indian Ocean to the Arabian Sea and reached Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. While in Hormuz, the Chinese traded with the merchants of neighboring countries exchanging Chinese porcelains, silk and other goods for indigo, barley, wheat, sugar, gold, silver, copper, cinnabar, pearls, corals, myrrh,

and other aromatics. Most importantly, they contracted friendly relations with the Ilkhan Timur, the ruling dynasty in Persia. This was an important achievement to ensure that China would have a friendly buffer state against the expanding might of the Mongol armies on China's northwest frontier. Ilkhan Timur was on his way to China when he died in 1405.⁵

The fifth expedition (1414-1419) extended the sea route to the southern Arabian coast to Hadramaut—Oman, Yemen, Dhofar and Aden. The main fleet proceeded west to the African coast to Mogadishu, Barawe, thence to Malindi (Kenya). In Malindi, the Chinese won the friendship of the Sultans who presented exotic animals to the Ming court—giraffes, zebras, lions and ostriches. African ambassadors took passage on the Chinese ships on the return trip to China. It should be noted that Zheng He visited Brunei. Part of the fleet may have gone to Sulu—since emissaries from Sulu and Kumalang (Basilan) paid tribute to China in 1417 and 1420 respectively.⁶

The sixth voyage (1421-1422) traversed similar routes of the previous ones, the outward journey ferried foreign ambassadors back to their home countries and brought more ambassadors and merchants to China. Undoubtedly, within 17 years, Zheng He's fleet must have distributed huge quantities of Chinese goods. The most durable proof is hundreds of thousands of Chinese porcelains along the Zheng He route that were traded inland by local people.

The seventh and last voyage (1431-1433) followed the previous sea routes all the way to the horn of Africa, where a section of the fleet went on into the Red Sea to Jeddah. From there, the fleet's historian Ma Huan traveled across land to Mecca where he witnessed the rituals performed for the Haj at the *kaaba*. Apparently, Zheng He himself was unable to join the main fleet to the Red Sea and may have stayed behind in Hormuz or in the Malabar Coast of India, perhaps due to illness. He probably died and was buried at sea.

Zheng He's expeditions were peaceful diplomatic and trade initiatives unprecedented in the history of China and the rest of the world.

They were astounding in their vast scale, use of advanced navigational and shipbuilding technology that overcame most hazards of ocean travel. Of immense value were logistical organization, the great distances traveled, exploration of new and mapping of sea routes, and gathering of geographical knowledge and social, political and economic conditions of more than 30 countries.

Unlike Kublai Khan of the Yuan in the 13th century, and western expansion in the 15th-16th century, the Zheng He expeditions did not result in conquest of territories and expropriation of resources. Most significantly, not a single slave was taken. The Admiral only intervened in local politics in order to win over allies, restrain aggressors, and keep peace along the trade routes.

Chinese involvement in Singhalese internal politics demonstrated Chinese astute and patient diplomacy and sensitivity to cultural and religious values of the countries encountered. They knew that the native Singhalese were devout Buddhists and custodians of Theravada Buddhist texts and relics that were venerated in Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. They were also aware that Ceylon, being located at the crossroads of cultural inter-actions between Hindu India and Muslim West Asia was a battleground of conflicting political and economic rivalries. The Chinese needed to allay hostilities among the three conflicting forces on the island: Tamil settlers from Southern India (whose rulers descended from the Pandyan kingdom), Muslims from India, and native Singhalese rulers who were themselves divided into hostile factions. A stone inscription set up in Ceylon was written in Chinese, Tamil and Persian extolled all three religions. The stone inscription was carved in China but took several years to install (1405-1409), requiring Zheng He's intervention to quell the anti-Chinese Tamil and Muslim factions. Chinese helped Parakrama Bahu VI, the native Singhalese son of the murdered King Bhuvaneka Bahu V to recover the throne.⁷

In Semudera (Aceh), Zheng He encountered conflicts among claimants to the throne. The trouble started when mountain tribes murdered

the king, leaving a widow and a young son. Helpless to capture the murderers of her husband, she promised and eventually married the man who avenged her murdered husband. When the young son grew up to manhood, he contested the authority of his stepfather and killed him. However, his stepfather had a brother named Sukendar who organized a rebellion so the young king appealed to Zheng He for help. The admiral decided to intervene in favor of the young king when Sukendar fought him. The Admiral captured Sukendar and brought him to China where he was executed (Levathes 1994).

While Zheng He's intervention in Ceylon and Semudera were successful, events in Champa and Annam (north Vietnam) caused much frustration to the Chinese. The Chinese central government considered Annam its vassal state since it was incorporated under the Han to the Tang Dynasty. The Chinese apparently underestimated the fiercely independent-minded Annamese who overthrew the Tang and established their government. During dynastic strife in Annam, the beleaguered King Tran Dequi (1407-1413) appealed to the Chinese for help. The Chinese sent troops to Hanoi, deposed the usurper and restored King Tran only to confront chieftain Le Loi who rose against Chinese suzerainty and was seeking to establish an independent state. Moreover, the Chinese wanted to halt Annamese advance south to Champa, a longtime ally of China, and a vital port of call for supplies and trade for products of the South seas. China decided to invade Annam in 1408 only to experience a protracted guerilla war led by Le Loi that extended for twenty years. China could not sustain its efforts to aid Champa against northern Annamese forces and finally allowed Annam independence and incorporated Champa in 1428 (Hall 1996).

Social and Technological Foundations of the Zheng He Voyages

The expeditions were not born full-blown in 1405, for long before the enterprise was undertaken, China had had long experience in shipping

and navigation. China's economic and industrial production surpassed all other countries of the world by the 15th century. Except for the remote border regions in Mongolia and Central Asia, peace was restored, and the building and repair of infrastructure—highways, canals, ports and harbors, were under way. Agriculture and manufacturing were advanced, and practical handbooks for production were published and circulated.⁸ One of the most useful and practical handbooks was the *Tian Gong Kaiwu* by Song Yingxing that contained detailed illustrated instructions in manufacturing and crafts based on centuries of experience. A compilation of “all known knowledge of the time” was contained in the encyclopedia, the *Yonglo Da Dien* (1403-1408). Confucian scholars engaged in academic endeavors and governance. At the same time technological innovations, with practical applications in industry and manufacturing, were vigorously carried out. Systematic and organized production that evolved through centuries was the prevailing intellectual climate of the period. “Doing everything in the correct way and in the proper sequence” was the motto of master shipwrights in Longjiang shipyards. No wonder then 15th century China was the world's foremost producer of consumer goods—foodstuffs, textiles, ceramics, metals especially iron tools, utensils and weapons, paper and lacquer were some of the most coveted trade goods of the world. It stands to reason why China was the dominant world power at the time attracting thousands of foreign diplomats, traders, merchants, religious leaders and scholars. Its large population was also a voracious market for commodities from foreign countries especially from Southeast Asia.

Confucian Isolationist versus Cosmopolitan Internationalist Views; Neglect of Sea-faring Tradition

However astonishing were the accomplishments of Zheng He, the expeditions were denounced by subsequent rulers. When Emperor Xuan-De died in 1435, the simmering controversy over the high cost of overseas expeditions and hosting foreign ambassadors surfaced. The Confucian

bureaucracy saw only the heavy economic and labor expenditures involved in the expeditions. The mammoth ocean expeditions had long-term detrimental consequences on the people and on the environment. The construction of hundreds of huge ships, shipyards and harbors—including equipping them, providing them with trade goods and supplies, and mobilizing thousands of laborers, artisans and specialists—exacted tremendous toll on natural and human resources. Bear in mind also that in the age when ships were propelled by sail and oars, it was absolutely necessary to obtain large numbers of laborers. Able-bodied male peasants were lured by the promise of material rewards but more often prisoners and innocent men were forcibly conscripted to man the ships. Alongside massive shipbuilding and flourishing overseas trade, slave taking intensified and became more ruthless.⁹ The opening up of forests and putting more land under cultivation to raise large amounts of export commercial crops increased the need to obtain labor.

Forests in Jiangsu, Guagdong, Fujian, Sichuan and Annam were decimated to obtain timber and fuel to produce millions of ceramics and metal implements. People not only suffered due to conscription as sailors and shipwrights; onerous quotas on the delivery of materials and products were imposed on them. The system was prone to corruption for eunuchs and local officials in-charge of procurement misappropriated large portions of labor and supplies. Moreover, open and free trade released human proclivity to greed as thousands of eunuchs, officers and sailors took advantage of extracting personal profits from trade and exchanges and avoided remitting taxes and goods to the government.

The Confucian bureaucracy also considered foreign imports as mere “trifling amusements for the court” such as giraffes, zebras, peacocks, scented woods and perfumes. The fact that the expeditions were led by a eunuch of Mongol-Arab descent and a Muslim was an insult to the scholars who came to office by diligent study and examinations. Fierce rivalry between Confucian bureaucrats and court eunuchs came to a head as the latter gained increasing favor and influence on the affairs of the state. Moreover,

Confucian scholars viewed Chinese traders overseas and foreign merchants, especially eunuchs, as promoters of political intrigues and economic saboteurs who diverted people's efforts away from the most fundamental economic endeavor that ensured stability of the empire—that of agriculture.¹⁰

Less than ten years when the expeditions were launched, the Emperor Zhu Gaozhi prohibited overseas travel and trade, halted building and repair of ocean going vessels, and severely punished those who disobeyed. The policy of isolation resulted in tragic consequences. In relinquishing Chinese naval achievements, the government failed to safeguard and defend its coastal borders leaving them easy prey to the predatory brigands and pirates (mostly Japanese) who plundered and devastated entire villages. By the latter period of the Ming, worsening conditions of the people living on the coast forced many to either flee inland or venture overseas. China's isolationist foreign policy combined with neglect of naval military defense and retreat from international overseas trade coincided with the expansion of Europe in the last decades of the 15th century. Divided among loosely organized states, China was vulnerable and defenseless to the superior military power of the West.

This negative evaluation of Admiral Zheng He's ocean voyages has been rightfully corrected by China's decision to celebrate, in 2005, the 600th anniversary of the voyages by holding international conferences and mounting a very informative exhibition that made the rounds of different countries including the Philippines. The last part of the paper discusses the long-lasting outcome of the voyages. On balance, most of the outcome is beneficial. The expeditions extended and consolidated the maritime silk route, at the time when the land route was troubled, by expanding Mongol forces. They increased trade, commerce and deepened inter-cultural relations between China and Southeast Asia, as well as the rest of the world.

Cultural Interaction between China, Africa and the Rest of Asia

Yin-yai Sheng-lan is one of the most valuable accounts of Admiral Zheng He's ocean voyages of 1405-1433. It was one of the rare accounts that escaped the systematic destruction of navigational, shipping and commercial accounts written during the Yung-lo reign. The destruction of these records was ordered by officials of the successor Ming ruler who took a narrower, insular policy which reversed the outward-looking diplomacy of Emperor Zhu-Di (reign name Yung lo 1403-1424) (Ma Huan 1970).

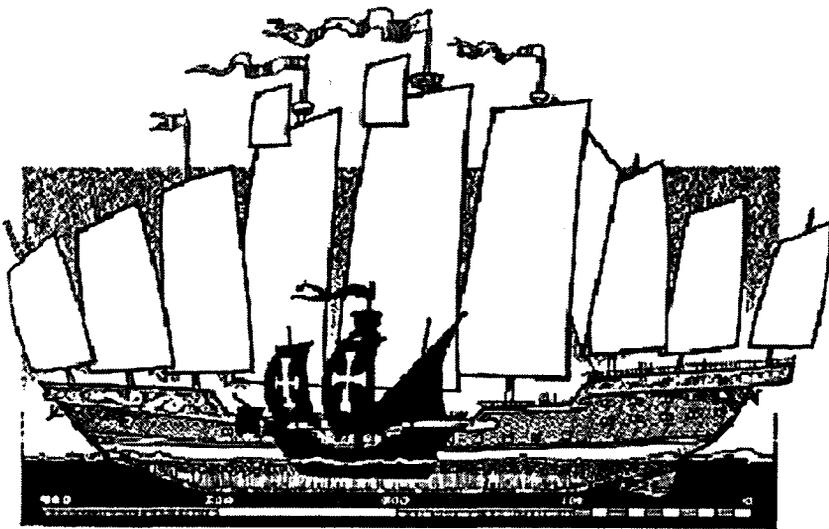
The author, Ma Huan was the chief official historian of Admiral Zheng He's ocean voyages. The other writers were Fei Xin and Gong Zhen whose works provide additional information on other Asian and African countries.¹¹ Like Zheng He, Ma Huan was a Muslim with wide and long experience in navigation and knowledgeable about trade and commerce in many Asian countries notably in Southeast Asia. His book, written in 1433, contains a wealth of information about navigation, shipping in the oceans they traversed, the South China Sea, the Straits of Malacca, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. He provided social, political and economic conditions of the region based on first hand experience. He drew as well from information supplied by his contacts in the various trading ports of the region. Although Admiral Zheng He did not personally visit all of the ports and countries mentioned in Ma Huan's book, it is apparent that some of the other ships of the expedition separated from the main fleet and journeyed to other smaller ports. Moreover, other trading ships of different countries joined the main fleet at various stages of the east-west voyages to take advantage of safety in numbers under cover of the well-armed and well-organized Zheng He fleet. Foreign emissaries and merchants who joined the Chinese fleet on the return trip to China, as well as sailors who sailed along with the fleet, may have supplied Ma Huan more information.

Shipping and navigational technology are indispensable in carrying out trade, commerce and international relations. Chinese shipping and navigational technology was the most advanced in its time. It evolved through centuries of experimentation since the Han Dynasty. A wealth of information and navigational skills reached a high point such as determination of location and distances in the open sea through astronomical data and the use of the compass. Measuring ocean depth, weather and climatic conditions, ocean currents, identification of landmarks, and cartography were already systematized. The production of large ocean-going vessels may have reached its peak during the Song and Yuan Dynasties.¹² Such ships allowed travel over long distances, are able to withstand inclement weather and can carry huge volume of goods and passengers. Trade in Asia since the early A.D. era was not confined to “petty trade” like small volumes of rare and precious things as alleged by Van Leur (1955). Bulk and essential goods were already being shipped and traded across the oceans and a network of harbor towns were already in place by at least the 10th Century. No doubt, the combined efforts of Southeast Asians, Indians, West Asians, and the Chinese made this possible. Among the most active traders were the Chinese who persevered in commercial activities, production and manufacturing. Plus, their sheer numbers contributed in establishing “Kota Cina”—China towns along the trade routes.

The ship in Quanzhou harbor (excavated in 1974) sunk after it returned from Southeast Asia carrying cargo from the region. Among its cargo were spices and medicinals, pepper, coconuts, scented wood and hardwoods, lianas, bees wax, and quantities of areca nut, a component of betel chew much-favored in Southeast Asia.¹³ One can surmise that the ship crew included Malays or Southeast Asians. Among the finds were cookware and clay stoves typical of Southeast Asia pottery and many sampaloc seeds (*tamarindus indica*), an indispensable ingredient of *sinigang* (Wen Wu 1975).

The boat is a prototype of Chinese cargo vessels that sailed in Asian waters up to modern times.¹⁴ The excavated ship, measuring approximately 34.5 by 9.15 meters, is now housed in the Kaiyuan Temple in Quanzhou City, Fujian Province. Another excavated boat was recovered in Sha Tsui in 1973 with similar structural features. Archaeological excavations in the southeastern coastal regions from Jiangsu, Fujian and Guangdong provinces have unearthed huge iron anchors with four grapplers characteristic of Chinese-made types. Also excavated were huge rudders; on the basis of their dimensions, one can estimate the size of the ships. Prior to the discovery of the excavated boats, anchors and rudders, many experts on shipbuilding technology could not believe the Chinese texts. They considered the enormous sizes of ancient Chinese ships as hyperbolic and outlandish claims. Today, shipping and navigational experts concede that the Zheng He's treasure ships actually reached 122 meters long and 52 meters wide.

FIGURE 2: Zheng He's treasure ship vs. Columbus' *Sta Maria*



Source: <http://www.chinapage.com/zhenghe.html>

The main characteristics of large, ocean-going Chinese ships are well analyzed by Joseph Needham. The hull was made up of longitudinal wales reaching fore and aft and bound together by perpendicularly aligned strakes and frames fastened with iron nails or clamps. The hull was divided into watertight compartments or bulkheads. It was propelled by as much as three to five sails and by oars and equipped with single axial rudder. The structure was similar to southern type found in most of Southeast Asia for it had a V-shaped hull but without a keel. Southeast Asian boats usually have generally symmetrical and pointed stems and sterns, unlike the Chinese ships that have squared or blunt stern and joints have nails and clamps. In Southeast Asian boats, strakes and frame are joined exclusively with wooden dowels, devoid of any corrosive metals. There are no bulkheads with waterways; they are equipped with double or quarter rudders. Evidence came from 7 excavated boats—3 in Sattahip, Pattaya and Rang Kwien, one in Pulau Bintan, Indonesia (Bukit Jakas), one in the western coast of Korea in Sinan, and the last two referred to earlier were from Quanzhou, Fujian Province. The excavated boats, according to Manguin, prove that there were no clear distinctions between Chinese northern and southern construction. The boats were actually hybrid and drew from technical advantages provided by both traditions. He argues that the Chinese adapted many of the features from Southeast Asian construction—the use of keel and double sheathed hull, use of wooden dowels of mortise and tennon in attaching longitudinal planks and strakes, tightly sewn joints, and pointed symmetrical stem and stern for maneuverability, and double rudder. Although sails and rigging cannot be determined due to the deterioration of the sunken boats, ethnographic field reports showed that Chinese and Southeast Asian sails and rigging had many similarities (Roxas-Lim 2001).

Ibn Batuta (1304-1377 or 1378) described Quanzhou (Ch'uan-chou) and Guangzhou (Canton) vessels that indicated that Chinese shipbuilding reached its height at least a century before Zheng He's ocean voyages. According to Batuta, the vessels were strongly built, steady and traveled

the speed of 6¼ miles per hour in open water and comfortable quarters were provided for the ship officers (Ibn Batuta 1929). According to Ku Ch'i-yuan (1565-1628)¹⁵, Zheng He's ships were even stronger and larger. The first voyage consisted of 200 ships of five major types. The largest one, 63 in all, was 444 feet long (in Chinese measure) and 180 feet wide. The middle-sized ships were 370 feet long and 150 feet wide. The seventh expedition had 200 large ships and carried as many as 27,870 men.

The different categories of ships with specific functions show how well logistics was organized to ensure safety and avoid natural and man-made disasters. Logistical operation ensured smooth, efficient and effective communication and coordinated action of the entire fleet. The first types were medium and large cargo or "treasure ships" (*baochuan*) capable of carrying thousands of passengers and large amount of cargo. The largest measured 444 feet long and 150 feet wide and was equipped with as many as nine masts. The second type, smaller and faster transport ships (*machuan*—horse ships), were used as communication vessels that moved among the fleet and sailed closer to land. The supply ships (*langchuan*) carried cargo and other supplies with larger hulls and bulkheads. The fourth type was smaller ships for the officers and staff (*zuochuan*) and the fifth and last type (*zhancuan*) was guard ships that carried weapons and soldiers to protect the fleet. (However, it is not certain whether they were equipped with fighting platforms like the kora-kora of Southeast Asia.) There were also smaller vessels that carried and distributed potable water and other supplies. They were the ones that landed on shore to obtain water. The vast scale of the fleet carrying huge cargo of trade goods must have amazed the countries visited and aided in further activating trade and exchanges. The expedition re-established and regularized Asian trade networks upon which western powers latched on in the latter part of the 15th century.

Ma Huan provided a rich trove of information on conditions in Southeast Asia, India, the Persian Gulf countries and Africa in the early 15th century long before the Western colonial expansion. Portuguese Vasco

da Gama did not reach the southern tip of Africa at the Cape of Good Hope until 1498. Ma Huan's account dealt not only with official trade, commercial and diplomatic relations but more significantly on the lives of common people, their livelihood and ways of life. His accounts showed probing inquisitiveness and cultural sensitivity. He gave us a glimpse of inter-cultural relations and prevailing values and attitudes of the Chinese and peoples they encountered. Indigenous sources and reports of other Chinese and Asian writers as well as westerners in the early 15th–17th century corroborated what he related. Ma Huan was certainly an astute observer of what products, merchandise and services could be exchanged between China and Asia as well as the rest of the world. The Chinese were fully aware and understood the commercial opportunities offered by cultural, religious and social activities and were quick to respond to these opportunities. The People's Republic of China, by celebrating the 600 years of the ocean voyages of Admiral Zheng in 2005, is renewing the Ming Emperor's world vision. Emperor Yung-le formulated a cosmopolitan trade and cultural foreign policy; Admiral Zheng He served as the brilliant military-naval commander, organizer and consummate diplomat; and Ma Huan was the cultural historian. They embodied China's global vision of peaceful and mutually beneficial inter-action with the peoples of the world.

China's contribution in the domestication, cultivation, production, preparation and preservation of foodstuffs contributed immensely to improved diet and general wellbeing of the people. This was already happening since the early AD era but the Zheng He expedition intensified China's role in bringing this about. Everywhere in the region there was evidence of Chinese foodstuffs and cuisine, vessels and utensils. Rice production was greatly improved by the introduction of harnessed carabao and iron plow that allowed deeper cultivation of the soil in flooded fields. High-fired, glazed ceramics aided in improving food consumption and health—not to speak of the artistic value of Chinese ceramics highly prized by art collectors around the world.¹⁶

The Southeast Asian diet impressed Ma Huan by the abundance of fish and because meat was scarce and rarely eaten except in feasts and banquets. He also noted that “there were no goats in the Philippines.” (sic!) Furthermore he complained of the limited variety of vegetables, meaning those species available in China. Chinese vegetables and fruits (fresh and preserved) were part of the cargo of Chinese trading ships. Presumably the Zheng He fleet also traded Chinese fruits and vegetables (lintels and soybeans) with the countries they visited and purchased or brought home plants and manufactured products of foreign lands.

Tropical, humid conditions prior to refrigeration necessitated the preservation of fish and other foodstuffs by drying, salting and pickling. Chinese food processing and cooking methods, (baking, sautéing and steaming) made the use of ceramic vessels and cooking utensils—important items in the daily life of the people today. The Chinese supplied, besides cooking vessels for daily use, ceremonial containers and ritual paraphernalia, many of them customized to the cultural taste of buyers. Thousands of ceramic tableware were produced and tailored for the Muslim market that featured Koranic verses and *wayang* heroes. In the Philippines, for example, Chinese export ceramics included those shaped like *balimbing* (*averrhoa pentandra* Blanco), mango, mangosteen, and pineapple.

Apparently, Ma Huan followed Muslim food prohibitions more faithfully than the Javanese. He described the diet of Javanese Muslims “as dirty and bad” for they ate “snakes, ants, worms and all kinds of insects.” He was surprised that Southeast Asians drank water directly unlike the Chinese who drank only boiled tea that ensured hygiene and prevented diarrhea. Tea became one of the chief export commodities of China throughout the world—it improved health and changed social life immensely to the point that tea drinking marked junctures of social activities such as tea or coffee break.

The Southeast Asian practice of chewing betel nut was no surprise to Ma Huan for he referred to it as *pin lan*, a word borrowed from the Malay *pinang* and recorded as early as the 13th century by Chau Ju-kua (1970). Unlike Spanish accounts that rebuked it as a “foul practice,” Ma Huan described the practice as a matter of course: “men and women take areca nut and betel leaf and mix them with lime made of clam shells. Their mouths are never without this mixture and guests are entertained with betel chew, not tea.” Thus, one of the major Chinese export items was paraphernalia for the betel nut chew composed of iron scissors, boxes for pulverized lime, tiny trays for areca nut and leaves of piper betel all arranged in an ensemble on a beautiful tray. Wealthy households and courtly families vied with each other in collecting beautiful samples of ceramic betel nut containers made in China.

Regarding architecture and structures, Ma Huan reported that houses were invariably built up on high posts and singled out large houses in Mindanao that were as high as 6 meters while those in Sumatra were 12 meters above ground (p. 123). The fragile and flammable materials used for construction in most of Southeast Asia presented another opportunity for the Chinese to sell their enormous quantities of durable construction materials in the form of roof and wall tiles, pipes, and furniture. As for storage of goods and valuables, he described how Javanese families made storehouses of bricks 3-4 Chinese inches in height (93-124 cm) upon which “they live, sit, and sleep.”

Brick-making for construction was probably learned from Indian and Chinese workers who lived in the region in the early A.D. era. Mosques were to be found in many cities and he remarked that those with walled enclosures in Demak and Japara may have been built with the aid of Muslim Chinese. Local legends attribute the building of many Chinese temples (*klenteng*) in Palembang, Medan in Sumatra, in Banten, Semarang, Cirebon, Tuban and Surabaya in Java, and Malacca to Zheng He’s visit who was called San Bao (three treasures). Zheng He enjoyed such great prestige in the region that people in Sulu and Magindanao claimed that

the Admiral visited their port. Go Bon Juan found no evidence, however, that Zheng He visited any part of the Philippine archipelago. In any event, Zheng He did come to Borneo and a fraction of the main fleet may have gone to Sulu, Zamboanga and Basilan.¹⁷ It was the practice for smaller segments of the fleet to visit places outside the main route and some of the sailors probably stayed on or picked up passengers on the onward journey.¹⁸

The Chinese were and still are the preeminent producers of silk. Chinese silk fibers and cloth with intricate and complex designs revolutionized weaving technology and set standards of fashion around the world. In exchange for silk, the Chinese imported cotton fibers and cloth from India, West and Southeast Asia, including the Philippines until the 17th century when Indian cotton cloth dominated the market. Large exports of Chinese silk from the early A.D. to the latter half of the 15th century could not satisfy the great demand for this fiber. Hence many countries took great pains to grow the silkworms and cultivate the mulberry tree. Silk production in Southeast Asia was limited and confined to small areas in North Sumatra (perhaps Pasai) where a kind of rough and yellow silk was produced. Western observers in the early 17th century commented that production was "crude and haphazard." By contrast, the Chinese meticulously organized the stages of caring for the silkworms, from planting the mulberry plants, and proper coordinated timing within the 50-60 days lifetime of silkworms (Ma Huan, p. 119). Silkworms and its food leaves of mulberry tree are indigenous and grow wild in Southeast Asia. The silkworm is the poly-voltine type that can reproduce at any time of the year. In contrast to the mono-voltine Chinese variety which is the result of deliberate breeding to produce high quality, durable and long fibers that can be washed to produce white and unblemished threads. Up till the 17th century, Pasai and South Sulawesi Bugis kingdom of Wajo exported silk to Malacca (Reid, 1993). However, silk production declined when silkworm and mulberry fields were converted to the cultivation of rice and pepper for export. This resulted in still greater demand for Chinese silk (and

porcelains), thus intensifying cultivation of agricultural products for exports and extraction of marine and forest products.

Paper was part of the supplies carried by the fleet and probably also as trade goods. Besides blank paper, the Yong Lo emperor also sent hundreds of Chinese calendars to Southeast Asia together with books and other publications. Ma Huan certainly understood the growing demand for paper. He observed the performance of *wayang beber*, where the story was illustrated on a continuous scroll and unrolled as the *dalang* recited the narrative. The paper was rough, uneven and thick, unlike Chinese-made paper that was white, with evenly smooth surface texture conducive to fine drawings and writing. Chinese-made paper was on great demand especially in the courts and madrasahs where the use of Arabic script required the even, smooth surface to allow the writing with ease of intricate cursive script with many dots, squiggles curves and curlicues.

It can be surmised that the provision of inexpensive Chinese writing implements—paper, ink, and writing instruments—contributed to literacy. This observation is borne out by the fact that the biggest consumers of paper were Muslims. The word for paper in Malay—*kertas*—is derived from Arabic *kradaat*. A kind of synergy operated between Muslim tenets that required Muslims to study the Koran by heart. That meant acquiring reading and writing skills which necessitated the use of paper and writing implements. Native writing implements included *lontar* leaves and bamboo strips. The use of sharp, pointed knife or stylus to carve out the characters was a laborious process and took considerable time and effort that retarded writing. The Chinese invention of paper together with printing induced a revolutionary social process with enormous consequences in history—the spread of literacy.

After the reign of Emperor Xuan De (1426-1435), government policy that reversed the trade and diplomatic policy of the Yong Lo (1403-1424) period became even more rigid. However, commercial relations did not cease entirely. Admiral Zheng He's expeditions had served the purpose of forging trade and diplomatic alliances that benefited harbor

towns and cities along the maritime silk route. The rise of Malacca as an international emporium was made possible by the combined efforts of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Persian merchants and was only eclipsed by Portuguese invasion in 1511. The Manila Galleon trade (1565–1815) could not have been possible were it not for the previous commercial and trade networks that put global trade into motion. The Spanish contribution was to extend the trade across the Pacific to their colonies in the Americas.

Chinese commercial procedures and transactions contributed to the flow of trade and cultural exchanges in the region and around the world. To facilitate transactions, Chinese coins, currency, weights and measures, Chinese vessels and containers contributed to the standardized system of reckoning exchanges. Also noteworthy was the practice of consignment wherein traders entrusted goods to ship captains and agents with the promise of sharing profit and losses. Letters of credit that assured shipment of goods and future payment were convenient instruments of long distance trade even among merchants who did not personally knew each other. Before the institution of international banking developed, merchant houses and guilds provided the much-needed credit to ensure the production, distribution and exchange of commodities and services. Within Chinese merchant houses and guilds, the Muslim merchants in Quanzhou who were also ship owners were notable.¹⁹ They exemplified the trading networks and alliances built up through centuries of friendly and beneficial exchanges from east to west, wherein trustworthiness was, and still is, of vital importance. The Chinese for instance were the first foreigners to inform spice islanders of the great demand and market value of their spices, information that was consistently concealed by other traders (Groeneveldt, 1960).

China's productive capacity and highly advanced political system and technology contributed immensely in hastening the social-economic processes in the region. The Rajahs of Butuan, the Samalan chieftains, and the Sulu Sultans, like many of their contemporaries in the region, raised their political legitimacy and wealth by going on trade missions to

China. Bestowed with insignias of authority and gifts by the Emperor, they claimed and enjoyed higher status vis-à-vis their rivals at home. The concept of centralized political system and administration emissaries experienced in China probably contributed to state formation in the region. Furthermore, the Chinese Emperor was sincere in forging friendly ties with “tributary states” as shown by his act of providing honorable burial places for those who died in his realm. The remains of the Sultans of Brunei and Sulu (1417 & 1421) were buried in special parks and their descendants given the means to mourn them in appropriate rites.

Concluding Remarks

Undoubtedly, Zheng He’s ocean voyages demonstrated that China was the world’s most powerful and wealthy country whose products and civilization had greatly enriched the countries visited. China too benefited from her relations with Southeast Asia and the rest of the world. Southeast Asia provided the haven for Chinese population expansion from the Han Dynasty and succeeding turbulent periods. Chinese needed medicinal herbs and spices, as well as numerous agricultural, forest and marine products. Chinese cuisine could not have developed into its high point of sophistication without pepper, chili, turmeric, nutmeg, cinnamon, mace, anise, among others. Chinese Buddhist rituals and ceremonies for ancestor worship required aromatic woods and resins from abroad. Chinese shipping prospered with the use of hardwoods, abaca (*musa textilis*) for rigging and Manila copal for caulking. There was continuous two-way cultural transmission that benefited both sides. For example, Ming underglaze blue porcelains were greatly admired and valued around the world. Its brilliant blue glaze was made with the use of cobalt—the best quality was imported from Persia.²⁰ Obviously, Chinese potters learned many new techniques and designs from their foreign counterparts and buyers.

The voyages showed too that political, social and cultural differences should be appreciated for they provided innumerable opportunities for

trade and commerce. Cultural differences fostered curiosity, adventure, excitement and trade. For apart from material commodities, temples, mosques, churches, tombs of important personages, sacred sites and learned institutions attracted pilgrims, scholars, traders that engendered cultural exchanges and commercial interactions.

Zheng He's mammoth fleet was equipped with weapons and staffed by well-trained soldiers, and yet he refrained from using force indiscriminately. If ever he intervened in local conflicts, his interventions displayed great restraint and wisdom. He dealt with foreign countries, large or small with understanding, tolerance, and respect. He had none of the fanaticism and racial superiority that fired western colonial expansion. The stone stele set up in Ceylon as well as his readiness to honor the Buddha demonstrated his ecumenical outlook. Finally, the expeditions proved that Asia was able in the past, and has the potentials today, to undertake global diplomacy, trade, commercial and cultural cooperation peacefully and for the benefit of the people.

Notes

- 1 *Envoy of Peace from China*, Catalogue of the Exhibition in Commemoration of the 600th Anniversary of Zheng He's Great Voyages (1405-1433). See also: Lo Jung-pang, "The Emergence of China as a Sea Power during the Late Sung and Early Yuan Periods," *Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. XIV, no. 4, 1955:149-168. Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas, the Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne: 1405-1433*, Oxford University Press, New York and London, 1994. J. V. Mills, "Arab and Chinese Navigators in Malaysian Waters around 1500," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. XLVII, part 2, 1974:1-82. "Notes on the Early Chinese Voyages," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1951. "Zheng He, Global Traveler," *Beijing Review*, July 12, 2005, 20-25. In celebration of 600 years of Zheng He's expeditions, July 11 has been declared as Navigation Day and World Maritime Day in China.
- 2 For early China tributary trade relations with Southeast Asia and products exported to China, see: Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese*, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1980. "Geographical Notes on Some Commodities involved in Sung Maritime Trade," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 32, part 2, No. 186, 1961. See also: Wang Gung-wu, *The Nanhai Trade, JMBRAS*, 1959. Oliver W.

- Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce*, Ithaca, NY, 1967. Among the most valuable products were medicinals like chaulmoogra oil for curing leprosy and various species of gum benjamin or benzoin.
- 3 For detailed historical account of the Ming Period, see: Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett, editors, *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, *The Ming Dynasty, (1368-1644)*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988.
 - 4 J.J.L. Duyvendak, "The True Dates of the Chinese Maritime Expeditions in the Early Fifteenth Century," *Toung Pao*, XXXIV 1938:341-412; and 1939, 2, 349. Levathes, 169. Paul Pelliot, "Les Grands Voyages Maritimes Chinois au debut du XV^e Siecle," *Toung Pao*, XXX, 1933:237-452. Grandiloquent language of the inscriptions is typical style of the period. Similar stone inscriptions erected in Malacca and Ceylon stressed the benefits of trade and cultural relations with China.
 - 5 Carrington Goodrich, *A Short History of the Chinese People*, Harper & Brothers, NY, 1951 171-181. See also: Paul Pelliot, "Notes Additionel sur Tcheng Ho et sur ses voyages," *T'oung Pao*, XXXI, 1935:293. D.L. Wilber, *Iran: Past and Present*, Princeton Univ., New Jersey, 1951.
 - 6 Sei Wada, "The Philippines as Known to the Chinese before the Ming Period," *Memoirs of the Research Department of Toyo Bunko*, No. 4, 1929, 121-166. Sei Wada summarizes Chinese texts that refer to the Philippine archipelago including toponyms of the islands, as well as missions to China. Sulu missions continued sporadically after the Ming period. Qing Dynasty texts mention embassies that arrived in China in 1723-1735. Undoubtedly, trade with China and the rest of Southeast Asia was disrupted by Spanish attacks on Sulu and Mindanao beginning 1573. See also, *Compilation of Chinese References on the Philippines in Ancient Chinese Texts*, Beijing, 1980.
 - 7 Sinhalese versions of the same events provide more details regarding Chinese intervention. Accordingly, Zheng He came to Ceylon on 1405-1407 and was met by King Bhuvaneka Bahu V who was too weak and was under pressure by his political rival Vira Alakesvara who was hostile to and resisted Chinese offers of diplomacy and trade. Zheng He left but returned in 1411 at which time the Chinese forces defeated Vira Alakesvara, took him and his men captives to China, including the venerated tooth relic of the Buddha that was the insignia of political sovereignty of Sinhalese rulers. The prisoners were later released but only after Zheng He installed the native Sinhalese ruler Parakrama Bahu VI who rose to become the most powerful king of Ceylon until Portuguese forces invaded his country in 1505.
S. Arasaratnam, *Ceylon*, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1964: 90-93.
 - 8 Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 3 discussed other Chinese texts on shipping, navigation, cartography, as well so their social implications; Vol. IV, part 3, 1971, 580-583. . See also: J.V. Mills, "Arab and Chinese Navigators in Malaysian Waters around 1500," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 226 (Vol. XLVII, part 2, 1974: 1-82.

- 9 For an account of slave-taking in the 18th to 19th century see: James Earl Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898: the Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of the Southeast Asian Maritime State*, New Day Publishers, Quezon City, 1985.
- 10 Lo Jung-pang, "The Decline of the Early Ming Navy," *Oriens Extremis*, 5, 149. Confucian officials had reasons to oppose overseas trade. In 758, the foreign merchants rioted in Canton (Guangzhou) against what they claimed were unfair treatment by government officials. The foreign merchants destroyed structures and took off to sea with large amounts of goods. The event demonstrated how the rich foreigners could seize power and intervene in China's affairs. But in 879 during a local rebellion, rebels attributed economic difficulties to the foreign merchants who were massacred by the thousands. Chau Ju-kua in Rockhill and Hirth.
- 11 Fei Xin, *The Chinese Travelers of the Ming Period*, 1436, translated by Gabriele Foccardi, Wiesbaden, Harrosowitz, 1986. See also: Gong Zhen, *Record of Foreign Countries in the Western Ocean, 1434*, Beijing, Zhonghua Shuju, 1961.
- 12 Lo, Jung-pang, "The Emergence of China as a Sea Power during the Late Sung and Yuan Periods," *Journal of Far Eastern Studies*, 1956. See also: Joseph Needham *et al*, *The Shorter Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, Vol. 3.
- 13 Oliver O. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce*, Ithaca, NY, 1967. Among the Southeast Asian products Chinese sought were medicinals, forest and marine products. Philippine products vital for ship building were abaca (*musa textilis*) for rigging, resins for caulking and water-proofing, rattan and other lianas and hardwoods (dipterocarps) that were valued for planks and rudders that could withstand the pounding of the waves and more resistant to wood worms.
- 14 Pierre Yves Manguin, "Relationship and Cross-Influence Between Southeast Asian and Chinese Shipbuilding Tradition," SPAFA Consultative Workshop on Research on Maritime Shipping and Trade Networks in Southeast Asia, Nov. 20-27, 1984. Similar boat-building construction continues today. These boats provide the much-needed means of transport in the inland seas of Southeast Asia. See: Aurora Roxas-Lim, "Report of Traditional Boatbuilding in Sulu and Tawi-tawi," "Research Paper submitted to the Center for Integrative and Development Studies, U.P. Diliman, 1998. See: Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Vols. III, IV, & V,
- 15 Report on Zheng Ho's fleet, translated by J.J.L. Duyvendak, *T'oung Pao*, 34:357, 1939. See also series of articles by Paul Pelliot "Les grandes voyages maritimes chinois debut 15e siecle," in *T'oung Pao*, 1933, 1935, & 1936.
- 16 For the role of Chinese ceramics in Philippine culture and history see: Aurora Roxas-Lim, "The Role of Chinese Pottery in Philippine Proto-History," in Alfonso Felix, *The Chinese in the Philippines*, Historical Conservation Society, Manila, 1967, vol. 1 of 2 vols. The study of Chinese ceramics is a major discipline in its self and there are hundreds of large and excellent collections of Chinese ceramics around the world.

- 17 Go Bon Juan, "Did Zheng He Visit the Philippines?" *Tulay*, November 15, 2005, 8-10. See also: Teresita Ang See, "Medieval Explorer Zheng He Sees War and Peace."
- 18 There are several texts more or less contemporaneous to Zheng He's expeditions that indicate contacts with parts of the Philippine archipelago. The Mao K'un Map of 1421 reproduced in *Wu Pei Chih* by Mao Yuan-I, 1628; the *Hsi Yang Chao-kung Tien-lu*, Records for Military Preparations, by Huang Sheng Tseng, 1520; Records of Tributary Countries of the West Ocean; *Shun Feng Hsiang Sung*, Fair Winds for Escort, 1430, which also served as guide for pilots. See: Needham & J.V. Mills. .
- 19 Quanzhou merchant clan guilds are still active to this day and are the most prosperous communities in China. Besides running flourishing industries and businesses, they maintain their own museum, mosques and tombs of their ancestors dating to the Song period. Unlike most Chinese, they were spared the violent conflicts during the Cultural Revolution. In fact, they continued their trading and manufacturing activities with Muslim countries unmolested. Interviews were held with clan leaders during the UNESCO International Conference on the Maritime Silk Route in 1998.
- 20 Brilliant "royal blue" was highly prized since antiquity. The invention of the dye was attributed to the Phoenicians. They extracted the dye from the murex shell by boiling the animal. Royal blue dye was very expensive and rare and for centuries was the exclusive color of royalty. Cobalt blue is a metal from Persia that was used to glaze ceramics. The Chinese potters imported cobalt and developed beautifully designed porcelains for export.

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Appendix

Chinese toponyms of places in the Philippines mentioned in Chinese texts:

- Ma Huan, *Yin-yai Sheng-lan*, 1433, translated by J. V. G. Mills, *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores*, Cambridge, Hakluyt Society, 1970.
- *Shen Feng Hsiang Sung* circa 1430 – 1571, translated by Joseph Needham, Vol. IV, part 3: 570-581.

Chao-I = Zamboanga
 Fen-Chi = Tapul Island, Sulu
 Lo-Po-Shan = Balabac
 Lu-Sung = Luzon
 Lu-Peng = Lubang
 Solo = Labuan
 Ma-Li-Lu = Mindoro
 Meng-Ye-Shan = Busuanga, Northern Palawan
 Nan-Tou = Pata Island In Sulu
 Sulu = Sulu
 San-Ya-Ch'i-Feng = Tawi-Tawi
 Pa-Lao-Yuan = Palawan