

Zheng He and his Envoys' Visits to Cairo in 1414 and 1433

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Introduction

Over a century, generation after generation of both western and Chinese historians has been trying in vain to solve this historical puzzle of who the 1433 Chinese ambassador to the papal court of Florence was. Yet it isn't all that clueless as it seemed. Indeed there are clues in some Chinese contemporary source which might indicate the answer. In the seventh voyage of Admiral Zheng He, his deputy Hong Bao was instructed to lead his vast fleet to call at the kingdom of Calicut on November 18, 1432. Hong Bao arrived at the time when the kingdom was about to send its own fleet with an envoy to visit *Tianfang* or Mecca. The Chinese deputy admiral quickly took the opportunity to let seven of his interpreter officials in a trade delegation bearing silks and porcelains, to accompany the Calicut fleet to Mecca. A year later, the Chinese envoys were all reunited in the Jeddah port of the Mecca Kingdom before they returned to Calicut. They brought with them rare diamonds, exotic animals like lions, ostriches and giraffes which they had traded in the various Mediterranean countries. This very special trade delegation to Mecca returned to Calicut one year later. By then, it was already close to the end of 1433 and Zheng He's ships had all but left Calicut in a rush home to China for more than half a year after his death was announced.

This 1433 trade mission was extraordinarily special. Instead of taking any Chinese fleet to Mecca, the Chinese envoys sailed with the Indian ships of the Calicut Kingdom to the holy city and back to Calicut. One major reason for this change of ships and sea routes was the direct sea route aided by the seasonal monsoon winds the Indian fleet took to Mecca which enabled them to arrive there within a month. The Chinese had visited Mecca in 1414 during the third voyage which had taken them three long months via an indirect route from Calicut to Hormuz, and then from there sailing southwest to Mecca. However a direct sea route would only take 22 days for them to sail from Calicut to Aden and then to Mecca. This way, the whole voyage was shortened to only a month in traveling time. In a hurry to catch the wind direction to Hormuz,¹ Zheng He's ships parted company with those of Hong Bao in Calicut on November 18, 1432. Arriving in Hormuz on 16 January 1433, Zheng He's ships however didn't stay long, and soon after, returned to Calicut on 25 March 1433. And they didn't even bother to wait for the Chinese envoys to

Mecca to rejoin them in Calicut. Instead, they left Calicut hurriedly on 9 April 1433 for China shortly after learning from highly dubious reports that Admiral Zheng He had “passed away” in Calicut. They had to report the sad news to the Ming Court.²

But then, why the rush to Mecca, in the first place? Because setting their sights beyond Mecca, they planned to make the rounds, announcing the Ming imperial edict of emperor Xuan De to the *Maijia* Kingdom or Mecca, the *Baigeda* Kingdom or Baghdad, the *Mosili* Kingdom or Cairo, the *Mulanpi* Kingdom or Morocco, and the *Fulin* Kingdom or Florence, that all of them were his subjects. According to *Ming History*, Egypt and Morocco were among foreign countries that had received the Chinese imperial edict and gifts but failed to send any tribute to Ming China. But Florence and Baghdad belonged to the category of foreign countries which had already paid tribute to Ming China during the reign of emperor Yongle (1403-1424). So the 1433 Chinese envoys could well have been getting the so-called tribute of diamonds, lions, ostriches and giraffes by extending their trip from Mecca to Cairo, Baghdad, Tripoli, Florence and Morocco. After arriving in Mecca, each one of the seven Chinese envoys could have led a delegation individually in the extended trip from Mecca to one or a few of the Mediterranean states. The Chinese delegate who visited Florence and had a long conversation with Toscanelli was certainly one of the seven interpreter officials to Mecca. But clearly, his counterpart to the Papal Court of Florence was the primary source of information to the Ming author Yan Chongjian who gave a most detailed and accurate first-hand Chinese account of the *Fulin* Kingdom or the Papal Court of Florence to the Ming Emperor. This detailed account, however, is not found in any of the eyewitness first-hand stories of Zheng He’s voyages by Ma Huan, Fei Xing or Gong Zhen.

The place name or country name of *Tianfang* in Chinese was rather loosely and confusingly used. Ma Huan says the kingdom of *Tianfang* actually referred to the kingdom of Mecca.³ However *Ming Shih* says *Tianfang* was not only called *Tiantang* or heaven, but also known as Mecca.⁴ *Huangyu Tongzhi* [General handbook of the Globe] by Qiu Jun of the Ming says *Tianfang* was also known as *Xiyu* [Western regions or Arabia] in the old days.⁵ Yet in actual fact, it was virtually used in referring to the whole of Egypt’s Mamluk or Mamelude Empire (1250 –1517), which included Cairo and several kingdoms such as Mecca , Aden, Dhufar, *Zhufaeer* (today Oman), *Lasha* (today Yemen) and even as far as the west coast of the Persian Gulf. In other words, *Tianfang* covered the whole of the Mamluk Empire of Egypt then. Clearly, *Ming Shih* was acutely aware of this fact, which is why in its profiling of *Tianfang*, it says, “*Tianfang* is a big power in *Xiyu*, (Arabia)”.⁶

Florence was then arguably the commercial hub in the European world, although some may give that honor to Venice. But there is no doubt that Egypt served as its counterpart in the Arabic-speaking countries. When Chinese envoys visited Egypt in 1433, Florence had already become extremely wealthy by virtue of its booming textile business that imported wool from Northern Europe and dyes from the East to make high quality clothing. Its extensive trade stretching from Egypt to the Baltic generated hefty surpluses, making Florence the center of European Finance. Hence the Florentine Florin came to be used as the *de facto* currency of international trade, leading to Florence's rise as the capital of European banking. But if the gateway to Europe then was Florence, the gateway to Florence was the greater *Tianfang* or Egypt to the Ming Chinese. But during Zheng He's voyages to *Tianfang*, the Mamluk empire was consecutively ruled by al-Mu'ayyad (r.1412-1421) and Barsbay (r. 1422- 1437) where the latter ruler monopolized the sugar trade and imposed heavy taxes on the spice trade from India that passed through Egypt to Europe. He also banned the use of Florin coins in his realm. Such unpopular moves raised a storm of protest from both *Tianfang's* Karimi and European merchants and made them explore other routes.⁷

Act I: *Tianfang* voyages motivated by frankincense trade

In the vast regions of the Mamluk Empire or *Tianfang* , Jeddah and Dhufar were the center of the frankincense trade at that time. Once Zheng He's fleets arrived in what are now Southern Oman and Yemen, " they were greeted by master Arab navigators, who had been travelling to China, especially Quanzhou, for centuries."⁸ In China, these Arab navigators were called *fan huochang* [foreign navigators] and indeed, many of them were employed as the pilots of Zheng He's ships. On arrival, Zheng He recalled that his grand father used to say that money was growing on the frankincense trees, over there. "Frankincense, coveted for religious ceremonies in Rome, Egypt and Jerusalem, was more valuable than gold."⁹ Here, the Chinese traded their silks and porcelains for aloe, which was used as purgatives and tonics and myrrh, the ancient Egyptian preservative the Chinese believed invigorated blood circulation in the body. The Chinese also traded in benzoin, the aromatic gum resin for treating respiratory ailments, storax, an anti-inflammatory drug as well as a herbal medicine they called *mubezi*, which was a paste of momordica seeds used to treat ulcers and wounds. The Mamluk sultanate protected and encouraged this trade which brought some prosperity to Egypt.

Certainly *Tianfang* included two of the most significant seaports of the Mamluk Empire that are now in Sudan today. They were Aihdab (port of Sudan) and a nearby ancient seaport called Swzkin (port of Sawakin), on the west coast of Red Sea. According to a study by Sudanese historian, Gaafar, Ming ceramic remains were found in existence in the historical relics there. He even declares, “the great Muslim Admiral Zheng He had even visited Aihdab (today the port of Sudan) during his third western voyage between December 1413 to July 1415.”¹⁰ Aihdad was then an extremely important port at the Red Sea, so important that Zheng He’s fleets to *Tianfang* couldn’t afford to miss it. From the 13th century well into the 15th century, it was an important commercial as well as a production and distribution center of Chinese ceramics where merchant ships from Afghanistan, Tadjikistan, Shiraz, and India all gathered.

In addition, the Egyptian Karimi merchants had long since the early 12th century been very active in the China trade. A certain Bzzaldeen Kulami Karimi, born in 1149, had been to China five times, amassing great fortunes from Chinese ceramic and silk trade. These Karimi merchants were commonly known as *Dashi* or *Tazi* (Arabia) merchants in China. Zhao Ruqua’s *Zhufanzhi* mentions a wealthy *Tazi* merchant sojourner Shi Nan Wei of South Quanzhou, best known for his generosity in donating money to society who retained many social customs of the Arabs. For instance, he had built an Arab cemetery at the Southeast corner outside the Quanzhou city walls for the burials of Arab merchant sojourners.¹¹ There is also evidence of a certain wealthy Karimi merchant or *Tazi* merchant named Pu Luo Xin who was bestowed with an official title *Chen Xin Lang*[government entrusted official merchant] by the Song Court for importing frankincense to the tune of 300,000 *guan*. According to a study by Bai ShouYi, Karimi or *Tazi* merchants played a leading role in the foreign merchant community, either in terms of numbers or shipping cargo. Most, if not all, foreign moguls belonged to them during the Song era. While sojourning in China, Karimi merchants lived in great luxurious houses, were the big spenders and became the envy of all in the trading port. Eyebrows were raised at their outlandish spending, such that the emperor had even instructed his officials to monitor them closely and watch for any untoward behavior on their part, especially among certain individuals.¹² Back then in the early 14th century, however, Karimi merchants in Egypt helped the sultan and his governors set up *madrasas* (privately founded religious schools), *waqfs* (hospitals)for charitable purposes and patronize poets and scholars, in both Mecca and Cairo.¹³

Ever since the 12th century, Aihdab was hailed as a legendary international trading seaport with China and the Far East, according to many Arabic and Islamic documents.

“Merchant goods were carried by land from Fustat eastwards to the Galzam port of Egypt and then to Jeddah and the port of Yemen and the East,” according to Professor Hassen Mounas in his *History of Islamic maps*.¹⁴ Sudanese historical written sources also described Aihdab as a metropolis, a rest place for international Muslim pilgrims and a center of international trade connecting the Far East, Middle East, Europe and Africa. Starting from the 13th century until the era of Zheng He’s voyages, Aihdab had always maintained its close trading ties with the Arabic world, India and China. At this port, various merchant ships from afar came to unload their cargo of treasured goods, including China’s silks and ceramics, such that, throughout the Middle Ages, Aihdab’s prosperity and international fame were considered to rival even Venice.¹⁵ Meanwhile, beginning from the 15th century, claims Gaafar, Swzkin or port of Sawakin re-emerged from the Red Sea’s West Coast as an increasingly thriving international trading center. At Sawakin port, merchants from India, Sri Lanka and China and even Swzkin sailors, who had been to China, all flocked together to buy quality sea tortoise shells, pearls, gold and ivory in large quantities at a low cost.¹⁶ Especially lucrative was Sawakin sea-tortoise shells which were shipped from Sawakin port to China and reportedly sold at prices matching those of gold.

Chinese records, however, left no trace of their visits to Aihdab and Sawakin ports. Only their visits to *Zufar*, *Aden* and *Tianfang* were reported either by the not so widely disseminated travel journals of Ma Huan, Fei Hsin and Kung Chen or other sources in the Ming Dynasty. *Zufar*, *Aden*, and *Tianfang* (Mecca) had all sent their envoys to China paying their tributes, prompting the Ming emperor to instruct the Admiral of the Western Seas, Zheng He to make reciprocal diplomatic visits to these lands. In the exchange of visits the Kingdom of Mecca and *Mojia*, had dispatched tribute-paying delegations on two occasions to China. To reciprocate Zheng He’s first official visit to Mecca in 1414, the sultan himself personally went to China, presenting a lion, *Qilin* and local produce to the Yongle emperor. The second Mecca visit to China in 1433 however had the sultan sending a delegation led by Sha Xiang to join the seven Chinese delegates returning to Calicut by Indian ships and then making their way back to China.¹⁷

However, it must be pointed out that Zheng He’s voyages across the Indian Ocean were guided by an earliest Islamic navigational calendar composed in 1271 by the Rasulid sultan of Yemen, al-Malik al-Ashraf. The popularity of the Islamic calendar among the Indian Ocean voyagers from Arabia, Persia, India and China also suggests that there was a highly synchronized system of regular shipping among Aden, East Africa and Egypt. The calendar includes the dates of departure and arrival of ships from India, Qalhat, Hormuz, al-Shihr, Mogadishu and Egypt. For

example, the entry of the Day 68 (March 16) reads, “End of sailing of Indian ships from India to Aden; no one ventures out after this day.”¹⁸ As historian and Arabist Paul Lunde points out, on day 100 (April 15), the last fleet from India was scheduled to arrive; the arrival of the first ships of the convoy from Egypt, the Karimi merchants, was timed to coincide with this. The last ships from Egypt arrived on Day 220 (August 14). Six days later, ships from Sri Lanka and Coromandel set out on their voyages home. The last sailing out of Aden on the Indian Ocean run during the northeast monsoon was on Day 250 (September 13).¹⁹ Undoubtedly, this calendar was widely known and used by Indian Ocean sailors from the Arabic and Persian speaking world. When making transoceanic navigations across the Indian Ocean, with foreign navigators in charge, Zheng He’s fleets also took advantage of this Islamic navigational calendar and became part of the highly synchronized system of regular shipping among Aden, Africa and Egypt.

Accounts of the diaspora from Siraf (Shiraz), a port of Persian Gulf, came from the primary sources of the calendar, according to Paul Lunde. After the Persian gulf port of Siraf was destroyed by an earthquake in 977, the wealthy merchants, shipowners and navigators of the port emigrated to the South Arabian, Red Sea and East African Coasts. As they took with them their capital, their know-how and their networks of international contacts, this diaspora from Siraf contributed to the growth of ports like Jeddah and Aden. And in East Africa, the diaspora seemed to have laid the foundations of what became the ports of Mogadishu, Kilwa and Malindi.²⁰ In 1414 when Zheng He’s fleets called on *Tianfang*, they made China a very major part of this highly synchronized system of regular shipping among Aden, Africa and Egypt. What they did in fact was nothing new, except to follow the popular Rasulid calendar and the trails blazed by the Persian diaspora from Siraf. The only major difference on their part however was their attempt to create a very important role for Ming China itself by forging or strengthening diplomatic and trading ties with countries in the regions --- an unrivalled world super power in the seas.

Act II : *Mosili* voyages motivated by building diplomatic relationship and ceramic routes

An interesting question that crops up every now and then is, was Cairo at the heart of Zheng He’s core mission to *Tianfang* during his third voyage? Or, did he make it to see Cairo with his own eyes in 1414 and his seven delegates in 1433? The general perception among the Chinese scholars and public, by far, is no. Fan Chun Ke, a Chinese reporter from *Wuhan Evening News* who had retraced Zheng He’s voyages thrice in 3 years since 2000, writes, “Zheng He’s fleets now sail into the vast and expansive waters of the Red Sea and have arrived in Mecca of

what is today Saudi Arabia. Egypt is only at the opposite coast of the Red Sea. Yet the fleets didn't continue to sail forward. Instead, they turn back and got out of the Red Sea and went direct to the East Coast of Africa." With a profound sense of history, she deplores, "Originally, the two great world civilizations each at the extreme end of its Continent for the first time could have a direct face to face exchange in the 15th century. But pitifully they just missed each other within a hair's breadth."²¹

But she couldn't be more wrong. Actually the Ming envoys did really visit Cairo at least twice in the voyages. How could they not, indeed, when they were already at the doorsteps of Cairo? What could have turned the Chinese envoys away was only Egypt's almost constant outbreak of plagues then. In 1405, a severe plague struck Egypt which, along with the famine, added to the kingdom's financial and administrative woes and the economy went into rapid decline. And between 1415 and 1417, Egypt, then ruled by the iron-fisted Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (1412-20), was hit by a new plague. In the second year of the reign of Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, Zheng He was said to have visited Aihdab of Egypt between December 1413 and July 1415 in his third voyage.²² As the Admiral of the world's most powerful navy, he certainly would have an audience with Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh of Egypt. Indeed, Zheng He's visit was a god sent opportunity from heaven to the Egyptian sultan to save his national economy from collapsing. The new sultan Shaykh had just come to power in 1412. Egypt was then in a deep financial and economic crisis due to internal conflicts, excessive flooding from the Nile flood as well as an outbreak of famine followed by the plague in 1405. Consequently from 1401 to 1413, the taxes that should have supplied the revenues of sultan and amirs could not be collected. The people lost faith in its government and thus its currency. The only gold coinage accepted throughout the country was that of Venice.²³ Clearly, there was this urgent necessity for Shaykh to receive and see Zheng He immediately around April 1414. On Zheng He's part, however, there too was a pressing need for him to get to Cairo. Zheng He's third voyage (1412-15) was the first time that his fleets had ever ventured into *Xiyu* or Arabia. *Mosili* or Cairo was then the major super power in Arabia. There can be no doubt that his visit to Cairo was at the heart of the whole mission to *Tianfang* or Arabia. Thus, Anatole Andro hits the nail on the head in saying, "the Middle East, specifically the area about the Arabian Peninsula, was the target of this entire enterprise. One need only look at the high officials gathered for the assignment --- all Arabic speakers and Muslims."²⁴

Zheng He was lucky then. He left Egypt not long before a plague struck the country in 1415-1417. And soon after his return to China, Egypt suffered yet another attack of plague, followed by minor outbreaks every two to three years and major epidemics every ten years or so, regularly reducing the population and drastically decreasing productivity.²⁵ Yet to make matters worse for Egypt, the new ruler, Sultan Barsbay II (r. 1422-1438) established in 1425 state monopolies in sugar, pepper and other spices from India and China. Still, after Sultan Barsbay's successful invasion and subjugation of Cyprus in 1426, no one could doubt that Mamluk Egypt remained the world's preeminent Muslim military power. Yet his royal monopolies proved disastrous in the long run. The impact of this monopolization policy, as R. Stephen Humphreys points out, was that "by the middle of the century the Mamluk sultans were increasingly hard-pressed to find the revenue they needed to run the army and the state administrative machinery in an orderly way."²⁶

But most Chinese historians seem to have only known of Zheng He making a pilgrimage to Mecca in his fourth voyage. Zhao Zhongchen, author of *Ming Chengzhu Zhuan* [Biography of the Ming Emperor Yongle], reckons that beginning from the fourth voyage, Zheng He's fleets sailed from the tip of South India passing through *Liushan* [today Maldives] and made a direct crossing of the Indian Ocean to the entrance of the Red Sea visiting African countries on the east coast of Africa. It was also precisely in the fourth voyage that Zheng He personally visited the Muslim Holy City of Mecca, which was then known as *Tianfang* by China. Certainly, he is right in describing it as a great historical event in the history of close contacts between China and the Arabic world.²⁷ But so far it's yet to dawn on Chinese historians that *Tianfang* wasn't just the Holy City of Mecca but the Mamluk Empire of Egypt. They assume that Zheng He went to Mecca just for the sake of making his Muslim pilgrimage. How could that be? Mecca, however important it was, was indeed only a tributary state of the Mamluk Egypt. His main mission was then to issue the Ming imperial edict of the emperor Yongle to *Tianfang*, the Mamluk Egypt, the major super power in the vast regions of the Arabic world. And in fact his pilgrimage to Mecca at the most should be seen only as an entrée before his main course, which, without a doubt, was a much more enormously important state visit to Cairo.

And visit Cairo, Zheng He certainly did. In fact, there is a clear evidence of Zheng He's visit to Cairo in *Ming Shih Waiguo Zhuan* [Profiles of foreign countries in Ming History] compiled by You Tong of the Qing dynasty. It briefly mentions *Mosili* (Cairo) as one of the few remote foreign countries officially called upon by the Chinese envoys including Zheng He but

failed to reciprocate.²⁸ The fact is *Mosilii* was referring to Misr (Fustat) of the Mamluk Egypt. Chinese scholar Li Anshan, *Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren Shi* [A History of Chinese overseas in Africa] identifies the *Mosili* kingdom as Egypt, the *Jiegentou* kingdom as the port of Alexandria.²⁹ Li Anshan is in fact taking his cue from the identification of *Mosili* as Egypt by the pioneering research of Zhang Xinglang and Han Zhenghua. Zhang XingLang identifies *Mosili* as Egypt because the original Arabic pronunciation of *Mosili* was *Misr*, the term, which Arabs used to refer to the nation of Egypt. And he locates *Jiegentou* at Alexandria port because it was the Chinese transliteration of the Arabic term *Zu'lkarnain*, which was used by the Arabs to refer to Alexander the Great.³⁰ But although Han Zhenghua follows Zhang's identification, he remains very confused as to why *Misr*, a term generally used by the Arabs to refer to the empire of *Dashi* as well as its capital, is here referring to *Mosili*.³¹

In fact, Han need not be so confused as Zhang XingLang is perfectly right in his identification of *Mosili* as Egypt. During the Yuan dynasty era, Egypt was already widely known to China as *Mi Si Er* [ears of puzzling thoughts] in the Chinese transliteration of the 1331 Yuan map entitled, *Yuan Jingshi Dadian Dili Tu* [The Amalgamated Map of the Yuan Dynasty], which, according to K. Unno, most probably was largely a translation from Islamic maps drawn with longitudes and latitudes.³² Elsewhere, however, in Chinese official history such as *Yuan Shi* [Yuan History], Misr or Egypt was transliterated in Chinese as *Mi Xi Er* [ears of the great intensity and past]. Bai Shou Yi says, "In the Ming, almost all the countries west of China were already converted to Islam. *Hami* and *Tulufan* (today Xinjiang) on the western border of China, and further west, Samarkand, Tashkand, Burhara, and further more west, *Tianfang* (Mecca) *Modena*, (Medina), *Mi xi er* [today Egypt], had all regularly sent their merchants and envoys to China and China sometimes would send its envoys or merchants to these countries."³³ More recently, however, Chinese scholars, Yao Nan, Chen Jiarong, Qiu Jin, also identify the *Mosili* kingdom mentioned in *Lingwai Daitao* by Zhou Qufei of the Song dynasty era as the Chinese transliteration of Misr referring to the areas of Cairo, the capital of Egypt. In the same book, they also apply the name *Mosili* in *Zhufanzhi* to today's Cairo.³⁴ Liao Da Ke also points out that during the Yuan dynasty era, Mamluk Egypt became prosperous through linking commercial sea routes to India and China in the East and Europe in the West. It was a bridge of trade between the East and the West. The Yuan merchant ships frequently sailed to *Mosili* or Egypt to trade. On the other hand, there was also a large number of *Mosili* merchants who came to trade and even resided in Yuan China. And Quanzhou of Fujian was then a major seaport of voyage to *Mosili*.³⁵ But by the time of the Yuan and Ming dynasty eras, Egypt was much better known in China as *Misier* or

Mixier than its outdated Song Chinese transliteration as *Mosili*. In the Yuan dynasty era, Egyptian swords, bows and armors were used by Egyptians as the tribute gifts from their Egypt, and thus appeared a Yuan poem which says, “In the Tang, the best swords were from Tazi, and now from Mi Xi [Rice Breathe]”.³⁶

Additionally, there was also the imperative of the spice trade then to make Zheng He and the Chinese envoy visits to Cairo inevitable. Just as Janet L. Abud-lughod says, “By the second decade of the fifteenth century virtually the only access from China to the West was the sea route through the Red Sea. This was, however, still an insecure passage not yet firmly under Egyptian control. The ruler of Aden had imposed a “virtual reign of terror,” causing Karimi merchants to flee northward to Jeddah. The Chinese emperor lodged vigorous protests against his interference with trade. ...With Yemen no longer an important rival in the spice trade, traffic flowed into the restored and improved ports of Jeddah, Tor, and Qulzum (Suez), where it came under the government monopoly established by Barsbay.”³⁷ So from April to September in 1414, Zheng He’s visit to the port of Aihdab amounted to throwing a potential lifesaver to the Egyptian economy in crisis. But it also helped China to get around the “virtual reign of terror” of Aden’s ruler as well. However, in 1433 things were radically changed in Mamluk Egypt or *Mosilii*. The Karimi merchants were now reduced to middlemen for sultan Barsbay. And the southern trade route from Aden to the port of Aihdab to Qus and from thence, by boat to the old port of Misr was abandoned. The old trade route was replaced by a more northerly course from Qulzum (Suez) across the eastern desert to Cairo.³⁸ Still, Mamluk-China trade was somehow maintained throughout the Ming dynasty era. Not surprisingly, as many as 1,656 items of Ming blue and white porcelains were found at the historical relics of Egypt’s Fustat, according to a 1965 archaeological survey of Koyama Fujio.³⁹

However, elsewhere, *Ming Shi* says, “*Mi Xi Er*, or *Mi Si Er* (Cairo) sent its envoys to pay tribute to the Court in the reign of the Yongle emperor. After giving a state banquet in honor of the visiting Egyptian envoys, the Court also instructed the officials concerned to provide them a banquet with fruits and wines every five days. Before going home, wherever they passed through in China, they were entertained with banquets.” This profusion of the Chinese hospitality was undoubtedly a reciprocation of the Egyptian hospitality to Zheng He’s 1414 visit to Cairo. In this case, *Mingshi Waiguo Zhuan* could be wrong about *Mosili*, after all. The fact is *Mosili* or Cairo did pay a reciprocal state visit to the Ming Court during the reign of Yongle.⁴⁰ Moreover, the seven Chinese envoys’ visit to Cairo in 1433 was also reciprocated by the Egyptian envoys’ visit

to the Ming Court in 1441. *Ming Shi* confirms this in a report saying, “on the tenth moon of the sixth year, or 15th October 1441, the envoy of Mi-his-erh(Misr, Egypt), Su-wu-Pa-tu-erh (Suwu Bahadur?) said the ruler of *Tienfang* (Arabia, Mamluk Egypt) had sent his son Sai-I-te A-li (Sayid Ali) with the ambassador Sai-I-te Ha-san (Sayid Hasan) to bring products of his region and present them as tribute. When they reached the country of Ha-la (Karkhojo) they were attacked by robbers; Sai-I-te Ha-san was killed and Sai-I-te Ali was injured in one hand, and the tribute, clothing and baggage were stolen. The Ming Emperor ordered the Minister of Ceremonies and War to draw up an inventory of the stolen property and to report to him.” Yet elsewhere in another entry, *Ming Shi* reports a slightly different version of the same story, “Sixth year, ninth moon, Keng –shen (12th October 1441), the ruler of Mi-his-erh (Misr) and other territories, Sulut’an A-shih-la-fy (Sultan al-Sharaf Barsbay) and others dispatched as envoys Sai-I-ta-li (Sayyid Ali) and others, also the chih-hui (commander) of the chieftainship of Fu-yu, A-li-t’ai and others --- all came to the court with tribute of mules, horses, and various products of their localities. A banquet was proffered to them together with gifts of silk stuffs and garments, each according to their different status.” They left China in the same year in the second month on 10th November 1441. ⁴¹ But then Egyptian Sultan Barsbay passed away in 1438, this Sayyid Ali’s claim in 1441 as the envoy sent by Sultan al-Sharaf Barsbay was clearly dubious, to say the least.

Interestingly, Egyptian historical sources claim Sultan Barsbay of Mamluk Egypt sending an expedition of a number of Syrian merchants as his diplomats to China in 1441. But as a matter of fact, this allegedly Sultan Barsbay’s delegation to China was all but a number of Karimi merchants. The Egyptian sources even claim that “gifts” were often exchanged between the emperors of China and sultans of Egypt.”⁴² This *Ming Shi* contradicts. It even claims it was no less than the Sultan Barsbay himself who made a second visit and tribute to the Ming Court in 1441. Says *Ming Shi*, “In the sixth year of the reign of Zheng Tong (1441), The King Shuo-lu-tan (Sultan) Ah-shi-la-fu (al-Asharaf Barsbay, 1422-38), came again to pay tribute. The Minister of Ceremonies said that no precedent of how many gifts conferring to them had been made before as the country was extremely far away from China. In the past, the Ming Court had given far too much to Samarkand when it first came. Now it should give a little less to Misr. The gifts for the Egyptian king were ten rolls of brocades, three rolls of satin, white silken cloth and white cotton cloth five rolls each, washable white cloth twenty rolls. The gifts for the wife of the Egyptian sultan and his envoys were reduced in value accordingly. The emperor accepted what the Minister of Ceremonies had suggested. Since then, they never returned.”⁴³ Meanwhile, the Ming Court knew sultan al-Asharf Barsbay as *Shu-lu-tan Ah-shi-la-fu* and the supreme ruler of Misr (Cairo) and other territories (Mecca or *Tianfang*, Medina or *Modena*). Thus *Ming Shi* reports

the 1441 visit of Sultan al-Asharaf Barsbay's delegation to Beijing in both *Misr* and *Tianfang* entries. Although in the *Tianfang* entry, it was only the envoys sent by Sultan al-Asharaf Barsbay who came to Beijing whereas in the *Misr* entry it was the Sultan al-Asharaf Barsbay himself that visited Beijing. Yet the Egyptian sources seem to have even downgraded the official status of the Egyptian envoys to only Karimi merchants.

In fact, a Chinese scholar Chen Gong Yuan is perceptive enough to see the mistake of *Ming Shi*. He points out that since Sultan al-Asharaf Barsbay was already dead in 1438, *Ming Shi* must be wrong to say Misr Sultan al-Asharaf came to China again in 1441.⁴⁴ Still, *Ming Shi*'s mistake or not, we can be certain that Karimi merchants were no strangers to Zheng He. They must have met one another much earlier than 1414. Because as early as in the Yuan, the Mamluk-China trade, though quite extensive, was indirect; Egyptian and Yemen merchants traveled to the West Coast of India, and there their goods were exchanged for Chinese merchandise brought through the South China Sea and the Malacca Straits.⁴⁵ A century earlier, Wang Da Yuan of the Yuan dynasty era also witnessed between 1328 and 1339 Karimi merchants from Egypt running a flourishing entrepot trade between India and the Mediterranean countries. Karimi merchants had long since entrenched themselves in Calicut. Thus they must have met Zheng He in Calicut during his first voyage to the Western Ocean between 1405 and 1407. However, both Gong Zhen's *Xiyang Fanguozhi* [Reports on Foreign countries at the Western Ocean] and Huang Sheng Zeng's *Xiyang Zhaogong Dianlu* [Records on tributes made by foreign countries from the Western Ocean] written in 1520, drop a hint that Karimi merchants were leading the way of the seven Chinese envoys to visit Jeddah. Contrary to the accounts of *Ming Shi* and Ma Huan that said the seven Chinese envoys were taking the Calicut ships to Jidda, according to Gong Zhen and Huang Sheng Zeng, they followed the delegates from the kingdom of Medina and took their ships to Jeddah instead.⁴⁶ At this time, these Medina delegates from Jeddah were most likely Karimi merchants. And their ships from Jeddah were most definitely Egyptian ships and not Calicut ships. This was especially likely because by then the Karimi merchants were already reduced to agents and employees of the government since Sultan Barsbay imposed a state monopoly in 1428 on the spices trade and collected one-tenth of the value of all merchandise passing through Jeddah.⁴⁷ Despite the Chinese contemporary sources contradicting one another, it is absolutely clear that both Calicut merchants and Karimi merchants were on board with the seven Chinese envoys to Jeddah. What remains unclear, however, is only whether the Chinese envoys were taking the Indian ships or the Egyptian ships for the cross-Indian Ocean journeys.

Act III : Misr voyages motivated by exchange of culture and ideas

But renewing trade and diplomatic ties with Misr wasn't the whole story. There are more to the visits of Zheng He and the seven Chinese envoys to Cairo than just what had met the eye. Their trips to *Tianfang* and Mamluk Egypt were essentially a cultural pilgrimage for Zheng He and the seven Chinese official interpreters, the great admirers of the magnificent Egyptian cultural and scientific achievements. China had long been importing Egyptian astronomy and technology before Zheng He's time. According to a study by Chinese scholars, Egypt was a great source of Chinese astronomical and medical knowledge. The celebrated work of Ptolemy, the ancient Egyptian astronomer of Greece, *Al-majist* was introduced into China during the Song-Yuan period. Yet another major Egyptian astronomer Ibn Yunus (950? –1009)' *Hakimi Zji* [handbook of astronomical tables dedicated to al-Hakim] was also introduced into China during the Yuan dynasty period. This handbook of astronomical tables contained very accurate observations, many of which may have been obtained with very large astronomical instruments. The tables were used by Guo Shuo Jing as his references in compiling the epoch making *Shou Shi Li* [Time Keeping Calendar].⁴⁸ The Yuan dynasty period's reverence for Islamic astronomy and the establishment of the Imperial Bureau of Islamic Astronomy side by side with the Chinese Bureau of Astronomy in 1275 are pretty much a story well covered. But the story of the early Ming dynasty period's reverence for Islamic astronomy seemed to have become one of the faintest memories fading over time in the Chinese history after Zheng He's voyages.

There are two Ming accounts that could revive the fading historical memory. One is Yan Congjian; *Zhuyu Zhouzi Lu* [Compiled information about the most remote foreign countries] written in 1583. After saying Islam was first introduced into China in the Shui Dynasty, Yan points out, "in the first year of the reign of the emperor Hongwu of the Ming dynasty, (1368) the emperor converted the Bureau of History into the Bureau of Astronomy. He also established the Bureau of the Chinese Islamic Astronomy." "In the second year (1369), the Hongwu emperor summoned eleven Chinese Muslims including Zheng Ah Li, the Chinese Muslim astronomical officer to the capital Nanjing on a mission to improve on the Islamic calendars and to observe the astronomical phenomena. They were each conferred upon with gifts and official titles accordingly." Commenting on this, Yan says in a footnote to this Medina entry, "The Chinese Muslims were inherited with a long tradition of Islamic astronomy. We don't know what they practiced in China. But they must have some incredibly simple and profound ways in studying astronomy not yet known to China. That's why the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty

especially set up an Office to take charge of these Islamic astronomical studies and recruited Zheng Ah Li and others to practice Islamic astronomy. Until now, in the Imperial Bureau of the Islamic Astronomy there are still inherited Chinese Muslim officers practicing Islamic astronomy.”⁴⁹ The other is Mao Ruizhen, *Huang Ming Xiangxu Lu*, published in 1629 which also says the same thing but adds with such high praises as “Medina is particularly good at astronomy and making accurate calendars. It also makes good medicine and music. They are good at the art of weaving and craving. Their handicrafts are thus particularly masterful and artful.”⁵⁰

Indeed, from the very beginning the Ming dynasty period, astronomy spelled continuity. Shortly after the founding of the Ming dynasty in 1367, between 1368 and 1369, ten Chinese and fifteen Muslim astronomers from the former Yuan Observatory were summoned to serve in the Bureau of Astronomy of the dynasty in Nanjing. They continued to work separately in two independent Bureaus of Astronomy until 1398 when the two bureaus were again combined into a single unit. The two bureaus were sited miles apart, the Chinese one on the summit of *Zijinshan* [Purple Golden Mountain] and Muslim one at *Yuhuatai* [Pavilion of Flower Rains], to “isolate astronomers of the two Bureaus and prevent them from mutual communication”.(Tan Xisi 1619, j. 7. p. 6b.)⁵¹ According to *Ming huidian* (Xu Pu 1502, j. 176, p. 2a), “those Muslim officers and apprentices [of astronomy] were also subordinate to the Bureau of Astronomy. Their progenies inherit their techniques as well as positions. They use the dust-board computus of their original country in the [astronomical] calculations’. The *Mingshi* [Zheng Tingyu et al. 1730, j. 37. p. 2a] also explains that Muslim astronomers from the Ming dynasty Bureau of Astronomy still “use the dust-board calculating method and original books of their original country”. Yan Cong Jian is perfectly right in commenting that there must be certain great edges in Islamic calendars and astronomy that decided Ming Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang to set up the Bureau of Islamic Astronomy. In fact, *Ming Shi.Lizhi* 7 [on calendars] says, “Taizu (Zhu Yuanzhang) said *Xiyu*[the regions west of China,] is best able to predict celestial phenomena. Also, the Chinese astronomy is lacking the latitudes of the five stars in the Islamic astronomy. This greatly concerns our ability of getting to know the potential changes in human destinies and heaven’s mandates. We must translate their books in order to constantly and regularly make timely reference to them.”⁵²

Thus, in 1382, he summoned the Islamic Observatory official Hai Da Er (Hada) from the Bureau of Astronomy and a great master of Islam in China named Ma Sa Yi Hei and others to pick and translate those which concerned astronomy and astrology from a few hundred volumes of *Xiyu Shu*[books from the Western Regions] left from the Yuan Court in Beijing. The next year,

they completed a Chinese translation of a book entitled, *Tianwen Shu* [Works of Astronomy].⁵³ This book, according to one of the Ming dynasty translators Ma Ha Ma, was authored by Abu Hasan Koshiya (971-1029 AD).⁵⁴ It is understood that Abu Hasan Koshiya was a Persian mathematician who wrote his works in Arabic. He played a dominant role in the development of trigonometry. His main subject was the elaboration and explanation of the tangent. Ma Ha Ma praised Koshiya as “one of the greatest scholars of all times who authors the book to explain the ultimate theories of astronomy in all its greatest profundity and simplicity.”⁵⁵ This early Ming Chinese translation entitled, *Tian Wen Shu* [Works of Astronomy] clearly explains the Islamic geographical concepts of longitude and latitude to the Chinese who don’t read Arabic,

“But where there are human settlements and wildlife habitats in the earth, the globe is also to be divided into four parts. One division is a drawing from the middle line in latitude going north up until the line of 66 degrees in latitude and 180 degrees in longitude from one end of the Eastern Ocean to another end of the Western Ocean. Then, take the middle part of the globe in longitude and latitude, 33 degrees in latitude, 90 degrees in longitude, and divide it into east, west, south and north, four divisions. But where it is below 33 degrees in latitude and 90 degrees in longitude, this belongs to the southeast division. And where it is below 33 degrees in latitude and above 90 degrees in longitude, this belongs to the southwest division of the globe. If it is above 33 degrees in latitude and below 90 degrees in longitude, this belongs to the northeast division of the globe. Then if it is above 33 degrees in latitude and above 90 degrees in longitude, this belongs to the northwest division of the globe.”⁵⁶

From this the late Yang Zhijiu concluded that the Yuan Islamic geography had already used the Arabic concept of longitude and latitude as a conceptual tool to define and locate, somewhat accurately, the known world of Europe, Asia and Africa above the tropics.⁵⁷ It is now clear that the Chinese concept of longitude and latitude can be traced back to the early Ming translation of the Yuan Islamic geography books. The Chinese concept of Europa, South Pole and North Pole had to wait until Ricci introduced it to China after 1582. Its origin is also derived from the Yuan Islamic astronomy. During the reign of Kangxi, Hui Hui scholar Liu Zhi had access to more than a dozen Yuan books on Islamic geography and astronomy to write his works, *Tianfang Xingli* [Philosophy of Arabia], *Tianfang Dianli* [Rites of Arabia], *Tianfang Zhisheng shilu* [Veritable records of the greatest saints of Arabia]. In this lastly mentioned book, Liu Zhi repeatedly quotes the Islamic geography book entitled, *Tianfang Yudi Jing* [The classics of

Arabic geography] to introduce the Islamic geographical concepts of longitude, latitude, South and North Poles,

“The earth is round in body like a bead. It is made up of a combination of water and earth. The earth that has surfaced above waters and become a great mass of land is only a quarter of the globe. On the surface, the globe is divided into three great continents from the east to the west. The vast land in the east is called eastern continent. The great land of the west is called western continent. And that which is in the middle between the east and the west is called central continent. And from the east to the west, drawing one straight line across between *Nanbei Liangji* or the North Pole and South Pole it is called *Dijing Zhongxian* or longitude. And from the North Pole to the South Pole, drawing a line across between the eastern and western coasts it is called *Diwei Zhongxian* or latitude.”⁵⁸

The Chinese Islamic astronomy and the Arabic Islamic astronomy were inseparably linked during the Yuan dynasty period which was why Chinese astronomy was the most advanced anywhere in the world then. And in the early Ming dynasty period, the establishment of the Bureau of Chinese Islamic Astronomy in 1369 spelled continuity with the Yuan model of walking with two legs, one Chinese and one Islamic Bureau of Astronomy. In 1368 and 1370, the Hongwu emperor summoned Hei De Er (Hada), Ah Du La (Abdulah), Die Li Mi Shi, Zheng Ali and others from the Yuan Bureau of the Islamic Astronomy for consultation in making the new calendar for the Ming Dynasty. In 1382, he summoned Hada from the Bureau of Islamic Astronomy and the great master of Islam Ma Sa Yi Hei and the Grand Scholar Wu Bo Cong translated *Hui Hui Li Jin* [Muslim Calendar], *Jing Wei Tu* [Longitude and latitude], *Tianwen*[Astronomy] into Chinese. Again, in 1383, he also summoned a Hui Hui astronomer Po Po from Lingpo to work in Nanjing.⁵⁹ Among them, there was also the *Xiyu* ancestor of Wang Daiyu (1573-1658), who came to Nanjing to pay tribute but became employed by the Ming Court as an Islamic astronomer in the Bureau of Islamic Astronomy during the reign of Hongwu (1368-1398). All this clearly indicates that Hongwu highly valued Islamic astronomy and its continued development within Ming China. Yet for Chinese Islamic astronomy to survive in Chinese soil, let alone to further develop, Yuan China’s nearly century old ties with *Xiyu* [the Western Regions] must be renewed. The deep roots and original sources of the Chinese Islamic astronomy were in *Xiyu* [the Western Regions], notably *Tianfang* [Arabia].

On the surface, *Ming Shi* seems to have *mistakenly* attributed the authorship of the *Hui Hui Lifa* [the Islamic calendar] to the Ma Ha Ma, the sultan of Medina. But much of its attribution of Islamic cultural achievements to Medina actually belongs to Cairo, the cultural Mecca of the Islamic world of that time instead. Despite Hongwu's strict inhibition on any private overseas trade and voyages at the pain of death, the old ties between *Xiyu* and Ming China seemed to have somehow been maintained. An outstanding example is Li Nu from Fujian's Quanzhou who in the eighth year of Hongwu's reign (1376) was summoned by the Ming Court to make a voyage to the Western Ocean. According to his family history, *Lin Li Cong Pu* [family history of the Lin and Li clans], during this voyage however, at the age of 30, Li got married with a purple eyed woman servant from *Xiyu* and brought her home to Quanzhou. He was then converted to her faith all his life."⁶⁰ So in the light of this context, Zheng He's visit to Cairo in 1414 and his seven envoys in 1433 can be read as the early Ming efforts at renewing the vibrant cultural ties and interactions for centuries between Arabia and China. And evidently in this light, there was no less a pressing necessity for the Ming Chinese especially the Chinese Muslim astronomers to visit Cairo than that of reviving tributary international trade and international diplomacy. Some of the 1433 Chinese envoys to *Tianfang* or Arabia could well have been Hui Hui astronomers. For example, among them, the erudition of the Chinese envoy to Florence in 1433 deeply impressed Toscanelli as one of China's learned men, philosophers, and expert astronomers.⁶¹

By the 14th century Egypt was already known as the center of Islamic learning and culture for the whole of the Islamic world. Translation, Cairo had since then become a cultural Mecca. According to the account of Ibn Battuta, there were countless *madrassa* schools mushrooming in Egypt.⁶² All these *madrassa* schools were affiliated with one mosque or another. Conventional religious teaching apart, they also taught Arabic language, philosophy, logic and experimental science, chemistry, medicine and astronomy. Each *madrassa* provided a library for the use of their students and teachers. They all modeled on the Al-Azhar Mosque, roughly founded the same year as the city of Cairo, in 969 AD, offering a robust secular curriculum in philosophy, experimental sciences, chemistry, medicine and astronomy in addition to Islamic religious instruction.⁶³ The mosque at Al-Azhar was then a leading Islamic university renowned in the Islamic world, considered as the seat of Sunni Islamic study. And under the Mamluks, Cairo emerged as the cultural capital of the Islamic Near East, and attracted to it scholars and others to seek their intellectual resources and professional opportunities. Moreover, the Ayyubids imported scholars from Syria, Iraq, and Iran to staff the *madrassa* schools they established. And under the later Mamluk sultans, jurists and mystics from Anatolia, the Caucasus

and Iran occupied a prominent place in Egyptian academic and religious life. Then, there were refugees and pilgrims from the Islamic west passing through Egypt en route to the holy cities of Hijaz, many staying put and remaining in Egypt. The number of Maghribi scholars at the al-Azhar mosques was particularly large.⁶⁴

China of that era could only boast of five Muslim mosques of fame founded in Nanjing, Hangzhou, Jinjiang, Guangzhou, and Xi'an. By tradition, all were founded and run by foreign Muslim sojourners at least until the end of the 15th century. Jinjiang's *Qing Jing Shi* [Temple of Purity] was a Persian founded mosque, and beginning from 1313, it was run for nearly 60 years by a Persian founder named Bu Lu Han Din from Kazerun, a city to the south of Shiraz in Persia. When Ibn Battuta visited Jinjiang in 1347, he had met with the local *Hadi* [*Cadi, Kadi* in Arabic]. In Yuan China, he was both an Islamic judge on civil and commercial matters and a local religious leader at the Mosque], Da Wu Din from Ardabil, a city in present day northwestern Iran. But Hangzhou's *Zhen Jiao Shi* [The Temple of Truth] was an Arabic based mosque. A renowned *Hui Hui Dasi* [great master of Islam] from Egypt named *Ah Lao Din* around 1310s is said to have been the founder. Ibn Battuta, had visited Hangzhou in 1346. In his travel accounts, he praised the cleanliness of the streets in its Muslim neighborhood where there was a mosque with an Islamic prayer chanter. Athman bin Affan, an Egyptian, according to Ibn Battuta, "built a magnificent school building for a *madrassa* here, donating money to support scholars studying at the *madrassa*. He also built the big mosque in the neighborhood and donated a large sum of money to the mosque as its property."⁶⁵ But the Egyptian, Athman bin Affan, who put up Ibn Battuta at his own house, was a Sufi, according to a study by Yang Zhijiu. Yang quotes Ibn Battuta who said the host family founded a luxurious Sufi convent for the residence of the Sufis as proof that by the end of the Yuan dynasty era, Sufis were already emerging there.⁶⁶ Elsewhere in Chinese accounts, however the Hongzhou's mosque founder Ah Lao Din was a widely acclaimed Islamic Master. Thus, Bai Shou Yi reckons that Athman bin Affan in Ibn Battuta's account and the *Hui Hui Hadi Dasi* [The Yuan Court also respectfully called a *Hadi* as *Da Si* (great master) due to their prestigious religious and social status], Ah Lao Din, in a Chinese account could well have been one and the same person.⁶⁷

And Nanjing's *Jin Jue Shi* [The Temple of Awakening] and Xi'an's *Qing Xiu Shi* [The Temple of peaceful Cultivation], were founded in the 25th year of Hongwu's reign, 1392. The Nanjing mosque, since 1392 to 1492, was run by an Istanbul sojourner in Nanjing, Ke Ma Lu Din, and his descendants. It's noteworthy that during the reign of Yongle (1403-1424), a

delegation from Istanbul or *Lu Mi* had visited the Ming Court to pay tribute to the emperor.⁶⁸ One thing led to another. The Istanbul delegation went on to visit Nanjing's Mosque and met Ke Ma Lu Din, the founder and keeper of the mosque from Istanbul at that time. In the early Ming dynasty era, there was a steep rise in Nanjing's Hui Hui population in Nanjing where in Jiang Ning County alone, the Hui Hui people numbered as many as 100,000 during Hongwu's reign, according to a recent study by Mi Shou Jiang and You Jia.⁶⁹ One big contributing factor for this increase was that many Hui Hui soldiers from the Mongolian army who surrendered, settled down in Nanjing following the end of the war which overthrew the Mongols. According to a 1492 stone tablet, in 1388, Hongwu decreed the construction of the Temple of Awakening to provide a place of worship for the surrendered Muslim generals and their soldiers. Meanwhile, Hongwu also decreed that they should not participate in politics but only practice Islam and making Islamic prayers.⁷⁰ Also from 1368 till the end of 1420, for more than half a century Nanjing's position as the national capital of Ming China, attracted Hui Hui artisans, merchants, warriors, and all sorts of Muslim professionals from all over the country to stay there. According to the family histories of Nanjing's Zheng clan, Wu clan and Ma clan, their Hui Hui ancestors Zheng He, Wu Ru and Ma Sa Yi Hei had all migrated to Nanjing from outer provinces in the early Ming dynasty era.⁷¹ As for Zheng He, he was more than a donor to the mosque. In 1430, he sought permission from the Xuande emperor to use human labour and money from the voyages in rebuilding the Nanjing mosque that had been burnt down in a fire. He himself personally supervised the whole reconstruction work and also requested permission for his kith and kin to take care of the mosque from generation to generation.⁷²

No less important was Hangzhou's Egyptian based Mosque of Truth. At that time, it is possible that the visiting Mecca and Medina sultans' envoys could perform their prayers at the Istanbul based Mosque in Nanjing. But as Egyptians, out of cultural affinity and diplomatic considerations, they would most likely make a short trip to Hangzhou's Mosque of Truth to meet the settled Karimi merchant sojourner in China, named Athman bin Affan or Ah Lao Din, who founded and administered the mosque, or his successor. In particular, during the first visit to China between 1416-1424, the Mamluk Egyptian envoys from Cairo would have visited Hangzhou and the Egyptian founded and run Mosque of Truth. Even though in their second tributary visit to China in 1441 the Egyptian envoys were put up in Beijing, they would, in all likelihood, also visit or even made a donation on behalf of their sultan to Hangzhou's Egyptian run Mosque as part of their diplomatic mission activities. On the other hand, among Zheng He's Arabic interpreters, both Guo Cong Li and Ma Huan were very likely members of the

Hangzhou's mosque congregation as Guo was a Hui Hui from Hangzhou and Ma Huan a Hui Hui from Shaoxing, a neighboring city very close to Hangzhou. And both were also commonly considered as those among the Ming official interpreters who had really visited *Tianfang* [Arabia] and *Modena* [Medina].

In his 1583 book, Yan Cong Jian mentions about Chinese Muslims and Mosques of his time as well, "The Chinese who followed this Islamic faith, strictly observed the custom of Islam and passed on the religion from one generation to another. Over centuries, no one generation dares to change their Islamic way of life." "Even today, there was a *fan da* [foreign pagoda, the Light Tower] at the front of the Huaisheng Mosque [also known as Light Tower Mosque, named in memory of the Islamic prophet Mohamad] in Guangzhou. This Tang pagoda was built with a spiral staircase curving upward 165 feet. Muslim worshippers come here to worship their prophet Mohamad." In the same entry of Medina, Yan continues, "There is also a Muslim mosque in Hangzhou of Zhejiang province. The mosque looks towering above the earth and well designed. It's also a famous place of worship for Muslims in China. The mosque's religious leaders at that time had made their trips to Beijing, the capital, to raise funds in its construction. On their way home, the Chinese Muslims also gave money for the construction of mosques in different places based on their capability to donate, as if they were paying tax to the government." But most surprisingly, however, his remark in the same entry also attests to some deep influence of the Chinese Confucianized Islam over the Arabic Islam in Medina and Cairo in the Ming dynasty era. Says Yan, "Despite its geographical vicinity to India, the social customs were completely different. The people here don't worship Buddha, or gods, or ghosts. What they worship, however, is only *Tian* [the supreme ruler of Heaven]. Beyond *Tian*, they only respect the Chinese ancient sage Confucius".⁷³ This Islamic holy place of Arabia was noted for the influence of Confucianism so much so that Medina had this common saying, "Buddhism says Buddhas are living in a world of boundless happiness in the Western Heaven. Taoism says the ancient Chinese legendary land of paradise *Feng Lai* is in the East Sea. But only Confucianism is down to earth dealing with every thing real and matters in our life. There isn't a day passed in our life that we aren't basked in the breezy teaching of Confucianism." That, of course, sounds like music to his ears. Yan Cong Jian thus approvingly remarks, "This Medina's common saying is quite right indeed."⁷⁴

However, as a historical source, Yan Cong Jian is quite consistent with all other Ming sources including Fei Xing, in saying that the people in Medina here worship *Tian* [the supreme

ruler of Heaven]. For example, in the entry of *Tianfang*, Fei Xing remarks, “Ever since the ancient times, Houses of worship were built here. At the emergence of a new moon, the king and the people here all kneel down to worship *Tian* [the supreme ruler of the Heaven], singing and chanting prayers aloud in praise of the Heavenly ruler as their rites of worship.”⁷⁵ Mao Rui Zhen also wrote about this in 1629, “Their religion puts serving *Tian* [the supreme ruler of the Heaven] first. The supreme ruler of the Heaven has no image. Whenever the sun sets, they kneel and pray towards the direction of the West.”⁷⁶ As a Hui Hui from the Qunshan country of Jiangsu province versed in Arabic, Fei Xing certainly knew about Islam and why he used the word *Tian* [the supreme ruler of the Heaven] in referring to the True God in Islam.⁷⁷ In fact, the Chinese sufi Islam that emerged during Fei Xing’s time just as that which emerged during the late Ming and early Qing ranging from Wang Dai Yu (1584-1670) to Liu Zhi (1655-1745) all equated *Allah*, the Islamic True God as *Shangdi* [the supreme ruler of the Heaven] in Chinese ancient texts. The late Ming Chinese sufi Islam writers referred their *Zhen Zu* [True God] Allah as *Shangdi* [the supreme ruler of the Heaven] in Chinese ancient classics. Other than Mohamad, the saints or prophets sent by the True God to this earth include Confucius, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Lao Tse.⁷⁸ In this light, when Yan Cong Jian and Fei Xing say the rulers and people in *Tianfang* and *Medina* believe in *Tian*, what they really mean is *Shangdi* [the supreme ruler of the Heaven] in Chinese and *Allah* in Arabic instead.

Yan Cong Jian notes the influence of Confucianism in Medina. He emphatically says apart from the God in Heaven the land worshiped only Confucius. That may sound wildly unbelievable today. But during then, Sufism flourished everywhere in all Islamic worlds, including Mamluk Egypt and China. It was in the nature of the universally inclusive and tolerant Sufism then to have absorbed influences from neo-Platonism, Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism, since it was essentially the pantheistic essence of Islamic religion and philosophy, after all. In fact, in the early Islam, particularly Sufism showed signs of Buddhist influences. Ibrahim Ibn Adham, one of the earliest Sufis, for example, was born in about 730 AD in Balkh, one of the most famous centers of Buddhist learning in Central Asia. He later became an important Islamic mystic, “but of an ascetic leaning more typical of Buddhism than of Islam at this time.”⁷⁹ Further Buddhist influence like the concept of Nirvana on Sufism is also found in the concepts of unity of being and unity with God in the Naqshabandi order of Sufis founded by Naqshabandi (1317-1398) in Bukhara.⁸⁰ What was significantly new in the Chinese brand of Sufism now is that it canonized Confucius, Lao Tse, Buddha and Jesus all as equals to the prophet of the True God, Mohammed.

The influences of Chinese Sufism, however, following the waves of Zheng He's voyages spread far and wide, even sending resounding echoes back to China from the distant lands of Mamluk Egypt. And now, news from Yan Cong Jian was that Medina (Mamluk Egypt, in other words) was falling madly in love with the ancient Chinese civilization and philosophy as represented by Confucianism in every realm of life after Zheng He's visit to Cairo in 1414 and his envoys in 1433. Certainly this amazing common saying from Medina came as a love child from the frequent and fertile trade and cultural intercourse between the two great ancient civilizations, China and Egypt, ever since 1414 either in the soil of China or that of Egypt.⁸¹

Conclusion: Trying to rival the glory of Yuan China

In conclusion, the evidence shows that Zheng He was warmly received at the residence of the sultan in Cairo's Citadel and rubbed shoulders with the ruling elite of Mamluk Egypt in 1414. The same was true of his envoys in 1433. But all these historic significant events of Zheng He's voyages were simply reported by Ma Huan, Gong Zheng and Fei Xing in their travel journals as their visits to *Tianfang* (Arabia, including the whole of Mamluk Egypt and Mecca, Medina and even Aden). Indeed, Mecca (*Tianfang*) and Medina (*Modena*) were only the first stops to their real destination, *Mosili* or *Misr* -- Cairo. For Cairo was then the largest Arab City in the world. With a population estimated at between 150,000 and 200,000 in the early 15th century, even after 40% of its population was wiped out by the rage of the plague in the mid-14th century, it remained three or four times larger than London or Paris. This conservatively estimated figure, however, doesn't include the outlying areas such as Fustat (Old Cairo). As a whole, Egypt's population was estimated at 3 million. For the entire period of the late Middle Ages, "Cairo was the political capital of empires which embraced the whole of Egypt, and usually Syria and the Jijaz as well."⁸² And under the Mamluks, Cairo emerged as the cultural capital of the Islamic Near East, attracting Muslim scholars and others from Anatolia, the Caucasus and Iran, even China, India and Indonesia to make cultural pilgrimages to it.⁸³ There was therefore every reason for Zheng He or his envoys to extend their visits of Mecca to Cairo respectively in 1414 and 1433, unless there was any serious outbreak of plague in Cairo then to stop them.⁸⁴

Evidence suggests that Zheng He and his envoys did visit Cairo. As a result of their visits to Egypt (Misr), there are two interesting entries about Misr in the Great Encyclopaedia of Yongle or *Yongle Dadian*. One says, "The wheat of Misr grew in the land of Misr which was visited by the envoys of the early Ming. It is said that there is a

great river called “Clear Water River”. Along the riverbanks, however, the people of ancient times grew wheat. Now however, the people only grow a mixture of fruit trees. The seeds of the wheat left from the old times were as large as soya beans. Often, they burst into life by themselves.” The other is about the Watergates of the Nile River. It says, “In the lands of Misr, there is a clear water river named as Rud Nil (the Persian name of the River Nile). At the riverhead, there is a river dam called the Watergate of Garden waters. And there was light above. Gates hung in the air on the four sides. Every year in the beginning of the spring, the Watergates opened by themselves. The water came out from the middle of the Eastern Gate. And it continued to flow out for 40 days before the gate was closed. Even then, often the water remained flowing out like a small stream from the threshold of the gate. “. Based on these two entries, Professor Liu Yingsheng of Nanjing University concludes that until the early Ming dynasty era when the Chinese envoys paying official visits to Egypt discovered that the interpreters they relied on were those Persian language interpreters instead of the Arabic language interpreters.⁸⁵ Although belatedly, *Ming Shi Waiguo Chuan* compiled in the Qing, confirms Zheng He and his envoys’ visits to *Mosili* or Cairo, yet it somehow mistook *Mosili* as one of those remote foreign countries which failed to return Zheng He’s gift bearing official visit by making a trip to Ming China to pay the customary tribute to the emperor. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that during the Yuan dynasty period, the two great ancient civilizations, Egypt and China were actually in constant contact and intercourse. The transmission of knowledge from Egypt to China then is well acknowledged by Chinese historians. Deng Xin-yu thus appreciatively writes, “ Many outstanding Egyptian astronomical and geographical works were imported into China to enrich the Chinese science and technology. For example, Egyptian astronomer, Ibn Yunus (950?-1009)’s astronomical tables made at Cairo’s observatory was introduced into China during the period between the Song and Yuan dynasties. It was found to be a constantly helpful reference used by the Yuan scientist Guo Shou Jing in his astronomical calculation for compiling the Yuan calendar. During the Yuan dynasty period, the Egyptian sojourners in Fujian taught the local Chinese how to refine white sugar, according to the journals of Marco Polo. By the time of the Ming dynasty period, it had

become widespread across China and advanced the development of the Chinese sugar refining technology in no small measure.”⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Yuan China also made its powerful presence endearingly felt by sending its envoys to Cairo meeting the Mamluk Egyptian sultan in his Citadel with gifts of 700 rolls of brocades bearing the sultan’s name.⁸⁷ As the Yongle emperor was well known for trying to rival the glory of Yuan China, to reconnect with *Mosili* or Cairo surely would have become a top priority of Zheng He’s agenda list to the Red Sea and East Africa in this context.

Mamluk Egypt also figured prominently in Yuan China’s efforts at building diplomatic ties with Morocco of West Africa and Ethiopia of East Africa. According to a study by Chou Yue Liang, it was through Mamluk Egypt that Yuan China had established state-to-state diplomatic relationships with these two countries. In particular, Chou considers the diplomatic exchange between China and Ethiopia then as a historic event that marked the interaction between the Confucian cultural circle and the Christian cultural circle.⁸⁸ But all these diplomatic relations were also motivated by bilateral and international trade. And there is no doubt about Egypt’s role as a fulcrum of international trade between Europe and the Near East during the Yuan and Ming dynasty eras until the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517. Cairo was, above all, a city of commerce. Al-Maqrizi claimed it had 12,000 shops located on the central thoroughfare. “Markets specializing in one product or another were scattered across the city, as were caravansaries in which both foreign and native businessmen housed their goods and conducted their affairs,” as portrayed by Jonathan B Berkey. “At the top, affluent merchants dominated international trade. The most prominent of them were the mysterious group known as the Karimiyya, who conveyed Indian pepper and other spices up the Red Sea to the ports of ‘Aydhab’ or ‘Qusyr, and thence overland to Qus and ultimately to Fustat and Cairo.”⁸⁹ Thus, Karimiyya acted as the intermediaries between the Chinese and Egyptians all the way during Zheng He and his envoys’ visits to *Tianfang* (Arabia) in 1414 and 1433. And needless to say, in this context, reestablishing direct diplomatic relations with *Fulin* or the Roman Catholic Church in Italy, the center of gravity in Christian Europe, and *Mulanpi* or Morocco, the western end of the Islamic world, was certainly part of their efforts to rival Yuan China’s glory. And paying visits to both Florence and Morocco, they certainly did. As a result, a delegation from *Fulin* was received by the emperor Yongle (1403-1414), reports Yan Cong Jian.⁹⁰

Imperial grandeur or not, the Chinese visits to Cairo, indeed, were the coolest story in cultural intercourse between the two great ancient civilizations, Egypt and China. As a result, a common saying emerged from Arabia to indicate deep Confucian influences in Arabs. Also in China there, however, a distinctive cultural borrowing from Egyptian institutions of Sufism seemed to have arisen from the Chinese Sufism. The remarkably long tradition of Chinese women mosques and *Ahong* traces back to the late Ming's *Jingdang Jiaoyu* [private Islamic schooling] in the period of Jiajin (1522-1566) and that of Wanli (1573-1620). But this was not purely and uniquely a Chinese phenomenon either. In the later Middle Ages, Egyptian Sufism that was inclusive of all walks of life, genders and nationalities, already set a good example of a number of women to become a "respected transmitter of *hadith* in the world of learning." "Women, too, participated in Sufi rituals, sometimes in leading roles," says Jonathan P. Berkey. "The chronicles and biographical dictionaries record instances, in which women were appointed "*shaykhas* of hospices reserved for women, as well as several in which a woman succeeded her father or husband as director of a Sufi institution serving, presumably, male adepts."⁹¹ All these early 16th century examples of Egyptian Sufism perhaps held the distant and foreign origin of today increasingly widespread Chinese women mosques and growing number of women *Ahong*. And this was simply the consequence of the Chinese sufis falling madly in love with Egyptian Sufi institutions after Zheng He and his envoys' visits to Cairo. So, after that, the chemistry of love between the two great ancient civilizations, Egypt and China, clearly and really worked both ways.

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Notes:

¹ Between 1300 and 1507, Hormuz controlled many of the towns lying on the Arabian coast, including Qalhat, Qutiyat, Muscat and Sohar. The most important of these towns was Qalhat, 25 kilometers north-west of Sur. Every year many ships sailed from Hormu and Qalhat to India with cargoes of horses, dates, pearls and salt. They returned from India with cloth, metalwork, spices and rice, which were then used in trade with people in Persia and other parts of Arabia. Some spices were also transported to Europe. Hormuz and Qalhat became very rich through trading.

² According to an early article written in 1457 entitled, “Feihuan An Xianghuo Shenxiang Ji” [Records of the Idolatry Images in the Temple of No illusion] appended to *The Romances Sanbao Grand Eunuch’s Western Ocean Journeys*, Zheng He died 1433 in Calicut. see Yao nan, Chen Jiarong, Chiu Jin, *Qihai Yangfan* [Setting sails in the Seven Seas] (Hong Kong, Zhonghua Bookstore 1990), p.190,191 Research by Zheng Yijun (2005) also finds evidence that Zheng He died in 1433 in *Guli* (now Calicut) in India. When the Xuan Emperor ordered Zheng He to make his seventh voyage to the west, Zheng He felt that it would be his last trip, and he engraved his navigation history on two stone steles before he took off. One of the steles was set up at the Liujia Harbor in Jiangsu province and the other was at the Wuhu Gate in Fujian province. Zheng Yijun argues that in April 1433, when Zheng He’s fleet traveled from East Africa to *Guli*, India where he died from chronic illness at the age of 62. *Guli* became his last destination. When Zheng He “passed away” in *Guli*, the weather was scorching hot, and the trip back to China would take 3 months. Zheng He might thus be “buried” in either Calicut or in Semarang in Indonesia. But in fact, there is not a shred of evidence to support either claim. Until now we still can’t find any of Zheng He’s burial place or tomb in either Calicut or Semarang. And the tomb of this multi-religious Zheng He in Nanjing is even a mockery in the face of his highly dubiously claimed “death” -- empty with none of his remains inside -- one of the great mysteries in Zheng He’s history that have remained unresolved even today. Zheng He’s tomb in China may be a very real memory of his epoch making seven voyages to the Western Oceans. But it is absolutely not any evidence to support the highly dubious claim of Zheng He’s “death” in Calicut in 1433.

³ Zheng Hesheng, Zheng Yijun, ed, “Zheng He Xia Xiyang Ziliao Huipian” [Sources on Zheng He’s voyages], vol. 2, p. 233.

⁴ Ibid, p. 232.

⁵ Ibid, p. 233.

⁶ Ibid, p. 232.

⁷ See Michael Haag, *The Rough Guide History of Egypt*, (Rough Guides Ltd, London, 2003), p. 242.

⁸ Irena Knehtl, “The fleet of the dragon in the Yemeni waters,” p. 3, <http://www.yementimes.com>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Gaafar, Qu Wenjun tr.; “Dan Zhi Yuanmo Sudan Yu Zhongguo De Guanxi” [The relation between Sudan and China between Tang and the end of Yuan]. *Yuanshi Luncong* [Essays on Yuan History] , vol. 7, pp. 200-206.

¹¹ Han Zhenhua, *Zhu Fan Zhi Zhu Pu*, [Annotated Zhao Ruquo; “Profiles of Foreign Barbarian Countries”], (Hong Kong University’s Center of Asian Studies, 2000), p. 175.

¹² Yao Nan, Chen Jiarong, Qiu Jin, *Qihai Yangfan* [Setting sails in the seven seas], (Zhonghua bookstores, (HK), 1990), p. 123. Also see Bai Shou Yi, *Bai Shou Yi Minzhu Zhongjiao Lunji* [Bai Shou Yi’s Essays on the National Minority and Religions], (Beijing Teacher Training University, 1992), p. 367, 368.

¹³ Ibid. p. 200, 202. See also Sanderson Beck, “Africa and the Middle East 1300-1615,” p. 2. <http://www.san.beck.org/AC4-MidEastAfrica.html>.

¹⁴ Gaafar, p. 203.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gong Chen, “*Xiyang fanguo Zhi. Tianfanguo*” [*Tianfang Country Profile in Foreign Countries of Western Seas*].

¹⁸ Paul Lunde, “The Navigator Ahmad Ibn Majid,” see <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200504/the.navigator.ahmad.ibn.m>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Fan Chunke, *Bei Yuwang De Hangxing Zhuixun Zhenghe Xia Xiyang* [Forgotten Journey, Retracing Zheng He’s voyages], (Eastern Publishing Center, Shanghai, 2005), p.148.

²² Jean-Claude Gargin, “The regime of the Circassian Mamluks,” in Carl F. Petry ed, *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Volume One, Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), p. 292.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Anatole Andro (a pen name for Chao C. Chien) self-published book, *The 1421 Heresy, An Investigation into the Ming Chinese Maritime Survey of the world.*(Pasadena, CA, USA, 2005), p. 32. The officials he mentions include Wang Jing Hong, a eunuch, second in command.

²⁵ Michael Haag, *The Rough Guide History of Egypt*,(Rough Guides Online, London, 2003), p. 240, 241.

²⁶ R. Stephen Humpherys, “Egypt in the world system of the later Middle Ages” in Carl F, Petry ed. , *The Cambridge History of Egypt, volume One Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1998), p. 459.

²⁷ Zhao Zhongchen, *Ming Chengzhu Zhuan* [Biography of the Ming Emperor Yongle], (People Publisher, Beijing, 1995), p. 330.

²⁸ *Ming Shi Waiguo zhuan* [Profiles of foreign countries in the *Ming History*]

²⁹ Li Anshan, *Feizhou Huqiaohuaren shi* [A History of Chinese Overseas in Africa] (Chinese Overseas Publishing House, Beijing, 2000), p. 71.

³⁰ Zhang Xinglang ed., *Zhongxi Jiaotong Shiliao Huibian* [Collected Historical Sources of the History of Contacts between China and the West], vol. 2, p. 34, 36.

³¹ Han Zhenghua, *Zhufangzhi Zhubu* (footnotes for *profiles of foreign countries*) (Center of Asian studies at the University of Hong Kong, 2000), p. 238.

³² K. Unno, *Ditu De Wenhua Shi* [A Cultural History of Maps and Charts], (Hong Kong's Zhonghua Bookshops, 2002), p. 51.

³³ Bai Souyi, *Bai Shou Yi Minzhu Zhongjiao Lunji* [Bai Shou Yi on Chinese religions and national minorities], (Beijing, 1992), p. 377, 378.

³⁴ Yao Nan, Chen Jiarong, Qiu Jin, *Qihai Yangfan* [Setting sails in the Seven Seas] (Zhonghua bookstores, Hong Kong, 1990), p.135, 138. According to Janet L. Abu-Lughod, the name "Misr" as Egypt came only after the Arab conquest. At first Misr was used to refer to the country of Egypt. But gradually the term "Misr" evolved into a popular substitute for the term "Fustat", which evidently was falling out of use although still mentioned. All later writers after Masudi in 941 used the term to describe the community of Fustat. Then beginning from Salah al-Din's rule, the name Misr began to apply to al-Qahira, today Cairo. See the extraordinary detailed footnotes on Misr in Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo 1001 years of The City Victorious*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1971), pp. 1- 30.

³⁵ Liao Dake, *Fujian Haiwai Jiaotong Shi*, [A history of Fujian's overseas contacts], (Fujian People's Publisher, 2002), p. 123.

³⁶ See Shang Yanbing, "Yuan Dai Poshang yu Haiwai Jiatong" [Yuan marine merchants and overseas voyages] in *Minzu Shi Yanjiu* [Study of the history of the Chinese nationalities], vol. 3, (The Nationalities Publisher, Beijing, 2002), p. 190.

³⁷ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, p. 41.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Li Anshan, p. 72. One of the major missions of Zheng He's voyages was to export mass produced Ming blue and white porcelains. Hence, their voyages were called porcelain journeys. They left a trail of Ming blue and white porcelain remains as their footsteps wherever they went to and traded. China then was the world factory of porcelains for a global Muslim market, particularly Persia and Egypt. Hundreds of thousands of Ming blue and white porcelains were customized for the Muslim users with Islamic favorite geometry designs. Some even with ancient Egyptian ideogram word meaning the key to life. Quite a few of the items even imitated the utensils often seen in the mosques of Syria and Egypt. Clearly, they were aiming at the market of Mamluk Egypt or *Tianfang*. For greater details, see Wang Jian Hua ed., *Gugong can Yong Xuan Qing Hua ci* [Yongle Xuande blue and white porcelains in the Forbidden City], (Beijing, Forbidden City Publisher, 2002).

⁴⁰ See Teobaldo Filesi, tr. by David L. Morison, *China and Africa In The Middle Ages*, (Fran Cass And Company Ltd, London, 1972), p. 89, 70.

⁴¹ *Ming Shih*, j. 32, *Xiyu Chuan*.

⁴² See "Merchants as Diplomatic Relations" in <http://eternalegypt.org/EternalEgyptiWebsiteWeb>

⁴³ Ming Shi, j.332, *Xiyu Chuan*, see Misr entry and Tianfang entry.

⁴⁴ Chen Gongyuan, “Zheng He xia xiyang yu zhongfei youyi,” [Zheng He voyages and Sino-Africa friendship] in *haijiaoshi Yanjiu* [Maritime History Studies], 1981-1, p.32.

⁴⁵ See R. Stephen Humphreys, “Egypt in the world system of the late Middle Ages” in Carl F. Petry ed; *The Cambridge History of Egypt, vol. One Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 455.

⁴⁶ See Gong Zhen, Xiyang Fanguo Zhi, Tianfang Guo entry, also Huang Sheng Zeng, Xiyang Zhaogong Dianlu, quan xia, Tianfang Guo entry.

⁴⁷ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, p. 41.

⁴⁸ See He Fanzhuan, Ling Sao ed., *Feizhou Tongshi, Gudai Qaun*, [A General History of Africa, Ancient History](East China Higher Education Teacher Training University Publisher, 1995), p. 492.

⁴⁹ Yan Congjian, *Zhuyu Zhouzi Lu*, [Compiled information about remotest foreign countries], *Quan* 11, “Mo De Na” entry.

⁵⁰ Mao Ruizheng, *Huang Ming Xiang Xu Lu*, *quan* 7, “Mo De Na” entry.

⁵¹ See Yunli Shi, “The Korean Adaption of the Chinese Islamic Astronomical Tables”, p.35., *Arch.Hist.Sci.57* (2003) 25-60@Springer-Verlag 2003 Digital Object Identifier(DOI) 10.1007/s00407-002-0060-z

⁵² See Yang Zhijiu, *Yuandai Huizu Shigao* [A draft for the history of the Yuan Chinese Muslims], (Nankai University Publisher of Nanjin, 2003), p. 299.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 301.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 309.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 312.

⁵⁸ See Bai Shouyi, *Bai Shou Yi Minzu Congjiao Lunji* [Bai Shou Yi’s essays on Religions and Nationalities](Beijing Higher Education Teacher University Publisher, 1992), p. 164.

⁵⁹ Ming Shi, Lizhi 7.

⁶⁰ Bai Shouyi, p.172.

The life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus, by his son Don Fernando Colon, Translated and annotated by Benjamin Keen (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1959), p. 20.

⁶¹

Qin Huibing ed., *Yisilang Wenming* [Islamic Civilization] (Chinese Social Science Publisher, Beijing, 1999), p. 84.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Jonathan P. Berkey, "Culture and Society during the late Middle Age, " in Carl. F. Petry ed., *The Cambridge History of Egypt, volume one Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 381.

⁶⁴ Bai Shouyi, p. 400.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Yang Zhijiu, p. 344.

⁶⁷ Bai Shouyi, Ibid. see Mi Shoujiang, You Jia, *Zhonguo Yisilan Jiao*, [Chinese Islam] (Beijing, 2004), pp. 17-19.

⁶⁸ *Ming Shi Wai Guo Zhuan* [Profiles of foreign countries in the Ming History], j. 5, p. 57.

⁶⁹ Mi Shoujiang and You Jia, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 23, 24.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 26.

⁷² Wang Zihua, "Zheng He Sixiang Chu Tan" [Exploring Zheng He's Thought] in Yunnan Hui Nationality Studies Committee ed., *Huizu Xuekan* [Yunan Academic Journal] No.1. (Yunnan University, 2001), p. 170.

⁷³ *Zhu Yu Zhouci Lu* [A comprehensive collection of information about foreign countries], j. 11, Mo De Na entry.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Fei Xing, *Xingcha shenglan* [Overall Survey of the starry Raft], continued edition, entry of *Tianfang* kingdom.

⁷⁶ Mao Ruizhen, *Huang Ming Xingxu lu*, A recent study shows that Fei Xing was a Hui Hui from the Qunshan County of Jiangsu province. See Shang Bing Qian Nian, *Zheng He Xia Xiyang* [Zheng He's voyages to the Western Ocean], (Taipei, 2005), p. 81.

⁷⁷ Qin Huibing ed, *Zhonguo Yisilan Jiao Jichu Zhishi* [Fundamental knowledge about Chinese Islam], (Beijing, 2001), p. 127.

⁷⁸ Warwick Ball, "Trace of Buddhism in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East" in *Tibet Foundation Newsletter*, no, 34, January 2002, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Although *Ming Shi* says after 1441, Misr's delegation no longer came to China. But under the entry of *Tianfang*, *Ming Shi* reports that mostly traveling by overland with Istanbul and Samarkand Timur's delegation, Egypt continued to send tribute delegations to China for trade during the reigns of Cheng Hua, Hong Zhi, Jia Jing (1522-1566) and Wan Li (1573-1620). See *Ming Shi* j. 332. *Xiyu Chuan*, *Tianfang* entry.

⁸¹ See Johnathan F. Berkey, “Culture and society during the late Middle Ages” in Carl F. Petry ed., *The Cambridge History of Egypt, volume one, Islamic Egypt, 649-1517*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1998), p. 385.

⁸² Ibid, p. 380.

⁸³ It is estimated in the sixty years from 1340 to 1400, the population of Africa declined from 80 million to 68 million inhabitants, and Asia from 238 million to 201 million as a result of plagues. Thus if there were any news of the outbreak of plague in Cairo it would have certainly stopped him from going visit there.

⁸⁴ See Liu Yingsheng, “Youguan Yuandai Huihiren Yuyanwenti” [On the issue of the Hui Hui’s language during the Yuan] in Li Zhian ed, *Yuan Shi Luncong* [A compendium of the Yuan history] vol.10.China Radio & Television Publishing House, Beijing, 2005;p.30

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See Zheng Xinyu, “what was the situation of cultural exchange between ancient China and Africa like?” in Shanghai ancient texts publisher ed., *Zhongguo Wenhushi Sanbia Ti* [300 questions in China’s cultural history] (Shanghai Ancient Texts Publisher, 1987), p. 848.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Chou Yuelang, *Zhongguo Gudai Wenhua Chuanbo Shi* [History of the spread of Chinese ancient culture], (Beijing Broadcast Academy Publisher, 2000), p. 226.

⁸⁹ Jonathan F. Berkey, p. 406.

⁹⁰ See Zhang Xinglang, *Zhongxi Jiaotong Shiliao Huibian*, [Collected historical sources of the history of contacts between China and the West].Vol. 1, Chapter 6, p. 315.

⁹¹ Jonathan F. Berkey, p. 406.