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Roderich Ptak

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RÉFÉRENCE

Zhou YUNZHONG 周运中: *Zheng He xia Xiyang xin kao* 郑和下西洋新考. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2013. Series “Xiamen daxue Renwen xueyuan qingnian xueshu wenku” 厦门大学人文学院青年学术文库. 6 + 2 + 431 pages, illustrations. ISBN 978-7-5161-3392-7 (paperbound).

- 1 Chinese scholarly works on the history of the early Ming voyages led by Zheng He 郑和 and other court eunuchs abound and many books on this subject merely repeat what is already known. The present work, in short characters, is very different. Its author, Zhou Yunzhong, a young scholar now with Xiamen University in Fujian, has published a large number of excellent articles which often deviate from the standard repertory of maritime history because they investigate new topics and explore hitherto poorly known sources. The same may be said in regard to the finely printed book which is under review here. It is on Zheng He and his times, but it deals with various neglected aspects and offers fresh ideas.
- 2 The first section discusses the possible motives behind Zheng He's voyages. Zhou refutes many of the well-known arguments one can easily find in past research, concluding that a mixture of political and economic factors such as the court's desire to reactivate the tribute system should best explain the early Ming expeditions. He also tries to relate the deeper meaning of the term Yongle 永乐—the reign title of the emperor under whom Zheng He began his first “round trip”—to important events in the early fifteenth century. Paradoxically, this period was not characterized by “eternal happiness,” as the combination “Yongle” might suggest; rather, these were years of war and rigorous “dictatorship.”

- 3 One remarkable feature of the early Ming expeditions was the installation of the so-called *guanchang* 官厂, or government warehouses / stations, that served to store trade goods and perhaps also to coordinate the logistics of major voyages. This is briefly discussed as well. Functionally, the early Ming *guanchang* certainly differed from the colonial posts of the Europeans. Another theme is the end of the maritime programme in the 1430s. There are different explanations in the literature and these explanations are reviewed one by one. But the more exciting part is the section on the various shipyards involved in constructing the early Ming fleets. Four such locations were in the area of modern Nanjing. Here readers may also be referred to the standard monograph by Hans Lothar Scheuring, *Die Drachenfluß-Werft von Nanking. Das Lung-chiang ch'uan-ch'ang chih, eine Ming-zeitliche Quelle zur Geschichte des chinesischen Schiffbaus* (Frankfurt a.M. 1987). The part on the ship building programme concludes the discussion of the general setting of Zheng He's voyages. What comes next is a detailed appreciation of the so-called Mao Kun 茅坤 map or *Zheng He hanghai tu* 郑和航海图, which in fact forms the major theme of Zhou's book.
- 4 The Mao Kun map, widely known to European scholars through the studies by J. V. G. Mills, is available in several very similar editions. The version in *Wu bei zhi* 武备志 is most common and has formed the basis of many works on Chinese nautical knowledge, but one ought to compare it with the map in *Nan shu zhi* 南枢志, which bears a number of different readings. Zhou Yunzhong provides a systematic comparison between these prints (including the modern edition called *Xinbian Zheng He hanghai tuji* 新编郑和航海图集, Beijing 1988), listing dozens of variant terms and orthographs some of which are important for a better understanding of certain toponyms and the interpretation of regional contexts.
- 5 This is followed by a detailed investigation of all segments of the map. The analysis comprises more than three hundred pages in all and, until today, is perhaps the most thorough work of its kind. It clearly surpasses past research by Xu Yuhu 徐玉虎, Xiang Da 向达, Zhang Jian 张箭 and many others, who have dealt with the same subject. One recurrent feature of Zhou's study is that it offers new views on "unusual" place names, occasionally rejecting, for example, the suggestions found in Chen Jiarong 陈佳荣 et al., *Gudai Nanhai diming huishi* 古代南海地名汇释 (Beijing 1986). Furthermore, Zhou also juxtaposes the nautical instructions and toponyms found on the Mao Kun map to the data included in *Shunfeng xiangsong* 顺风相送. This makes his study a very valuable compendium with important comments on geographical issues related to Zheng He and his times. Put differently, scholars writing on the early Ming voyages should definitely take Zhou's book into consideration because it does have many things to say.
- 6 Some examples pertaining to individual parts of the map may show why Zhou's study is so unique. One complex case is the coast of eastern Guangdong, the Pearl River estuary, the area now called Hong Kong and the western section of Guangdong with Hainan. To identify the relevant place names and to understand why certain sites are depicted in particular ways, Zhou has consulted various earlier chronicles and also some later texts, including local gazetteers such as the ones related to Xiangshan 香山 county (the area around modern Macau). This enables him to draw a full panorama of the complicated island world near Hong Kong. Indeed, Zhou's analysis is perhaps the first full-scale exploration of the Hong Kong region on the Mao Kun map. Readers interested in these "micro issues" will be able to compare the results with the brief descriptions provided by such modern encyclopedias such as *Guangdong sheng haiyu diming zhi* 广东

省海域地名志 (Guangzhou 1989) and *Guangdong sheng jingu diming cidian* 广东省今古地名词典 (Shanghai 1991).

- 7 Other details investigated by Zhou Yunzhong pertain to the Southeast Asian sections of the Mao Kun map. Here again, the author makes use of various “parallel” sources as, for example, in the case of the coasts of Hainan and Vietnam, where he quotes the *Haiguo wenjian lu* 海国见闻录 (Qing period) in which one finds a curious observation related to one of the birds under the *Dicruridae* family (*D. paradiseus* or, possibly as well, *D. macrocercus*). This avian creature occurs in the context of the so-called Qizhouyang 七洲洋 (p. 146), i.e., a stretch of water mainly near Hainan. Hainan chronicles, one may add, also list such birds in their chapters on local products and one may find them in the *Shunfeng xiangsong* as well, as Zhou explains.
- 8 Furthermore, there is a very elaborate examination of the region around the Anambas and Natuna groups and, indeed, of the entire sea space between the eastern side of the Malay peninsula and the western shore of Kalimantan. As far as I can tell, no one else has investigated this part of the Zheng He map in such a detailed manner. Another terrain is the area near modern Singapore. Zhou makes use of several studies, including Lin Woling’s 林我玲 famous monograph *Longyamen xin kao* 龙牙门新考 (Singapore 1999), to disentangle the data pertaining to this geologically very complex zone. It is very likely that the waterways through that region were different in the late medieval period from what they are now, mainly due to geological changes. Several English language studies may be read together with Zhou’s work for additional information.
- 9 The various sailing routes along the shores of Sumatra form another theme that takes up much space in Zhou’s book. One interesting segment is the channel between Bangka and the Sumatran mainland. It rarely emerges in nautical texts of the pre-European period. Special attention should also be drawn to the connection from the Sunda Strait via the Sumatran west coast to the camphor-growing region of Barus and beyond. This sea lane poses a series of difficult questions. Zhou has tried to solve these issues as best as he could and although certain conclusions remain conjectures, the final impression is that he has made a great leap forward here. At least, from his study it becomes evident that Chinese sailors were familiar with the western side of Sumatra and some of its offshore islands. Possibly this knowledge derived from earlier informants.
- 10 With respect to the coast of Bengal, Zhou cites a fairly unknown source suggesting the existence of a *guanchang* in the area of modern Chittagong. This leads him to reconsider the history of diplomatic contacts between the early Ming and Bengal. European scholars may of course read these parts along with the relevant sections in the well-known works by Haraprasad Ray, Tansen Sen and others. The Andaman and Nicobar segments of the map are also discussed in great detail. From Bengal the map “turns to” Orissa, Sri Lanka, Malabar, the Maldives and Gujarat, and then to Hormuz, the Arabian peninsula and East Africa. Again, in all these cases, readers learn many new things. One toponym is Shili’er 失里儿. Some scholars have proposed to identify this name with Ash Shihr or Ras Salif, but Zhou shows that on the Mao Kun map it should stand for the Suleil region east of Ras Salif and north of Hodeida (in Yemen). A further example is Silong liu 巳龙溜. Zhou thinks this should be the southern rim of the Maldives. The islands shown to the south / southwest of that zone, he believes, could point to the Seychelles. He also provides evidence for direct navigation from South / Southeast Asia to the Chagos group and beyond, in the general direction of Madagascar and the

- Comoro Islands, suggesting, once again, that Chinese sailors knew of these spaces. Archaeological evidence seems to support his view.
- 11 Another recurrent topic concerns the coast “opposite” of Sumatra and the Maldives. Several scholars have argued this part of the map might show Australia, but Zhou states that one should better associate it with Madagascar or the African mainland. This is followed by a thorough examination of the names Bila 比刺 and Sunla 孙刺 and some general comparisons between the depiction of Africa on the Mao Kun chart and the beautiful Ming world map of 1389, which follows the cartographic tradition of Zhu Siben 朱思本 (Yuan dynasty).
 - 12 Finally, Zhou believes the Mao Kun map was originally drawn at some point between the sixth and seventh Zheng He voyage and not in the middle of the Ming period. However, the author of the map remains unknown and it is also not clear whether and how one should relate his work to Wu Pu’s 吴朴 *Du hai fang cheng* 渡海方程 and other nautical treatises. This is discussed in chapter 7 of Zhou’s book.
 - 13 The remaining parts (chapters 8 to 10) read like appendices. Chapter 8 concerns a number of individuals travelling with Zheng He or on their own, as special envoys dispatched by the Ming emperor. In recent years scholars have discovered many references to such individuals in local chronicles, genealogies and epigraphic material. One famous example is the case of Hong Bao 洪保, whose biography is reviewed in a separate section. Chapter 9 deals with the impact of Zheng He’s expeditions on the province of Zhejiang, the island world of which constitutes a major segment of the Mao Kun map. This chapter also looks at a number of “spectacular” animals imported to Ming-China or described in Ming sources: for instance, ostriches, cassowaries, hornbills, Arabian horses, etc. Zhang Jian, Zhang Zhijie 张之杰, A. C. Moule, Sally Church and others have dealt with such creatures as well. But certain zoological terms are still difficult to explain. One term is the combination *huoji* 火鸡, literally “fire chicken,” which also occurs in the context of Hainan and continental South China; in these contexts it could perhaps relate to one of the *Tragopan* birds or, as far as Hainan is concerned, to *Arborophila ardens*, i.e., the Hainan hill partridge. Chapter 10 deals with the novel *Xiyang ji* 西洋记. Zhou Yunzhong shows that Luo Maodeng 罗懋登, usually thought to be the author of this long narrative, was very familiar with Nanjing and other locations inside China. Furthermore, Zhou comments on the *zaju* 杂剧 play *Xia Xiyang* 下西洋, arguing that it was probably written by someone from the Taicang 太仓 region near modern Shanghai. All these sections, one may add, are based on articles which Zhou has published separately. Generally, they are well-written works that deserve careful attention.
 - 14 As was explained, *Zheng He xia Xiyang xin kao* is in a class of its own. Scholars wishing to conduct further research on the Mao Kun chart will definitely need to consult this study, which provides new insight into navigational issues and the nature of certain toponyms. All parts of Zhou’s monograph were prepared with utmost care and are highly reliable. In sum, this is a most refreshing and intellectually stimulating item that will be of great help to historians working on the early Ming, the Chinese in Southeast Asia, and the maritime world of the Indian Ocean during the late medieval and early modern periods.