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The historical value of the Work *Lingwai Daida* by Zhou Qufei

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To Emma and Riccardo

We are all infants born on a boat in the ocean.
We don’t know where we came from, nor where we are going.

Bing Xin, 1923, *Poem 99*

Contents

Notes on translation

This book follows the *pinyin* system to transliterate Chinese names and terms, and the system of the Library of Congress to transliterate Arabic names and terms. Common words and place names, such as Abbasid, Baghdad and Guilin, are written in the generally accepted English form without diacritics and not in italics. The book uses Chinese traditional characters.

For the original Chinese text (in the appendix of this book), the author refers to the version of the *Qinding Siku Quanshu* 欽定四庫全書 (*Complete Works of the Imperial Library*), *Dili lei* 地理類 (*Category Geography*).

Preface

by Paolo De Troia[1]

This work addresses a topic that has long needed to be addressed in depth. It regards a fragment of the history of cultural relations between the Chinese and the Arab Islamic worlds, a history that for objective reasons few in the past have been willing or able to undertake.

Notes from the Land Beyond the Passes by Zhou Qufei is a difficult and precious text. It is difficult because of its length and because it is written in not easy to understand literary Chinese, and contains numerous place and person names, whose identifies are often difficult to trace and to translate into English. And it is precious because, like a snapshot of a precise moment in time, it is a written trace of that complexity and cultural richness which was the 12th century China in which Zhou Qufei lived. It is a compendium of stories whose genesis has now been lost, and hands down narratives and names belonging to different cultures.

Victoria Almonte has patiently translated and analyzed the Chinese text with scientific rigor, and in this volume offers some extracts.

In this monograph, Almonte presents for the first time in English the annotated translation of the geographical sections of the *Lingwai daida*, preceded by a comprehensive discussion of some important problems relating to this treatise and its author: the life of Zhou Qufei, useful for tracing the history of the text; the structure and the sources of the work, its editorial history and diffusion; and the relationship of this work with two of the most important geographical works of the Chinese past, the *Guihai yuheng zhi* (*Treatises of the supervisor and guardian of the Cinnamon Sea*) and the *Zhufan zhi* (*Description of the Foreign Lands*).

Notes from the Land Beyond the Passes records a fragment of the history of relations between China and the outside world and the par-

[1] Paolo De Troia is Associate Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of Sapienza University of Rome.

ticular way in which that history was told. Song China traded with many countries and cultivated frequent and innumerable contacts with other non-Chinese territories, with some countries of Asia and with the West.

Zhou Qufei, born in Zhejiang but an imperial official in Guangxi, was intrigued by the stories of merchants, foreign travelers and their interpreters, and began to collect them. He wrote about animals (real or fantastic), plants, customs and traditions, the administrative organizations of distant countries (barbaric and exotic populations), the wars and battles to defend and conquer territories, and the embassies and court ceremonies on the occasion of official visits. Most of those stories reached Song China by way of caravans or ships laden with exotic cargoes, heading to the markets of Hangzhou and the wealthy Chinese coastal cities.

This book one provides a glimpse of the world as it was known by the Chinese people a millennium ago, and how this image was influenced (in some cases) by Arab culture.

Although this book, due to the breadth of its subject matter, does not give an exhaustive treatment of the history of relations between China and the Arabic-speaking countries, it nevertheless provides an essential piece of the historical mosaic of China's contacts with the outside world, and as such is a worthy scholarly endeavor.

Introduction

From the eighth to the thirteenth century, Asia witnessed an important metamorphosis: two of the most influential civilizations, the Arab and the Chinese, located at the two opposite ends of the *ecumene*, developed a new geographical concept, expanding their geographical knowledge and, above all, transforming into *terra cognita* what was previously considered *terra incognita*.

The year 1492, which in a Eurocentric approach is usually recognized as the first significant moment in the history of interaction between two such culturally and geographically different civilizations, should be outclassed by other events and dates. In this work, the author has analyzed some historical sources that show how the maritime trade network between the Chinese Empire and Arab-Islamic world[1] grew over the centuries, before the arrival of the European explorers; and consequentially, how people became increasingly aware of foreignness. Cultural and commercial exchanges have had remarkable implications in world history, supporting great geographical discoveries and explorations.

The present work is the final result of four years of research, during my Ph.D. studies, in Italy and in China. It offers the English translation and analysis of two chapters of the Song geographical work, *Lingwai Daida* 嶺外代答 (*Notes from the Land Beyond the Passes* or *Various Replies from Beyond the Passes*)[2], written by Zhou Qufei in

[1] In this work I used the term Arab-Islamic world (or empire) as all those territories that in ancient times were included in present-day Iran, Iraq, North East Africa and Turkestan in Central Asia. See Francesco Gabrieli, *Viaggi e viaggiatori arabi,* Sansoni, Firenze, 1975, introduction, p. 1 and following.

[2] Henceforth *LWDD*. There is no English translation of *Lingwai Daida*. Almut Netolitzky provided a German one in Seventy's. See Almut Netolitzky, *Das Ling-wai tai-ta von Chou Ch'ü-fei: e. Landeskunde Südchinas aus d. 12. Jh*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1977.

In 2001 it was published a Russian translation: Ulyanov, Mark Yuryevich (Марк Юрьевич Ульянов) (tr.): Za Khrebtami. Vmesto otvetov (Ling Wai Dai Da) (За Хребтами. Вместо ответов [Лин вай дай да]). Moscov: Izdatelskaya firma "Vostochnaya literatura" RAN, 2001. The English version of the title provided by Hyunhee Park is *Notes from the*

1178. This work requires further detailed analysis because of the account's innovative features, which set it apart from all older works of Chinese maritime literature. Its great value lies in the large amount of information, of its significant and new content system, of the sequence of its new sections and of its innovative concept of the world, which shows some similarities with Arab geographical knowledge.

Following this brief introduction, in which I provide a broader context to Zhou's work and its origin, highlighting the importance of Song maritime history and literature, and mentioning the main works about this field of research, the corpus of the work comprises two chapters. The first is divided into four subchapters, of which the first two are focused on Zhou's life on the historical background of *LWDD*'s creation, the history of its publications, its structure and its features. In the third and fourth subchapters, the analogies between *LWDD* and the previous *Guihai Yuheng Zhi* 桂海虞衡志, written by Fan Chengda and just after Zhao Rukuo's *Zhufan Zhi* 諸蕃志, are analyzed.

The second chapter contains the annotated translation of the geographical sections written by Zhou, with particular attention to the Arabic sources.

Importance of Song dynasty maritime history

Between the foundation of the Song dynasty in 960 and the conquest of northern China by the Jurchen nomads in 1127, China passed through a phase of economic growth that was unprecedented in earlier Chinese history, perhaps in world history up to this time. At least for this brief period, China became the leading society in the world in terms of productivity per capita, and behind the achievement was a combination of technical capabilities and political circumstances. The most general stimulant behind this development was an era of peace

Land Beyond the Passes. Please see Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds, Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-Modern Asia*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, p. 46. James Hargett in his introduction to the annotated translation of *Guihai Yuheng zhi* by Fan Chengda uses *Vicarious replies from beyond the ranges*. See James M. Hargett, *Treatises of the supervisor and guardian of the Cinnamon Sea*, Washington press, Seattle and London, 2010, p. XL.

and a large internal market, linking cities that could be supplied at considerable distances with agricultural and industrial products[3].

In 1127 the Song dynasty lost the capital Kaifeng to the Jin dynasty, which had been founded by the Jurchen population. The Song emperor Huizong and his son Qinzong were captured, but another son, Gaozong, fled and reached Lin'an (today Hangzhou), where he founded the Southern Song dynasty. The invasion by the Jurchen population and the loss of the capital Kaifeng are known as the Jingkang incident, in Chinese *Jingkang zhichi* or *zhibian* 靖康之耻 or 之变, or *Jingkang zhihuo* 靖康之祸[4].

Although the Song dynasty had lost control of the traditional "birthplace of Chinese civilization" along the Yellow River, the Song economy was still strong, as the Southern Song Empire contained a large population and fertile agricultural land. The imperial government focused greater attention on the China's role in the international trading network between East and West. And the Song period was marked as a period of comprehensive promotion of maritime trade[5].

Although southern islands such as Java (Shepo) and Sumatra (Sanfoqi) gained greater importance in Indian Ocean trade, Chinese harbors still remained reference points for foreign merchants. Foreign ships were often welcomed by officials of new *shibosi* 市舶司, the of-

[3] Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History,* Cambridge University press, Cambridge, 1984, pp.109-110. For further detail see John Winthrop Haeger, *Crisis and prosperity in Sung China*, The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1975, pp. 13-43. For an overview on the Song history in Chinese see Wu Gou, 吴钩, *Song, Xiandai de fuxiao shichen*, 宋，现代的拂晓时辰, (*Song Dynasty, The Dawn of Modern China*), Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin, 2019 (reprint).

[4] See Ari Daniel Levine, "The Reigns of the Hui-Tsung (1100-1126) and Ch'in Tsung (1126-1127) and the fall of the Northern Sung" in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, part one, *The Sung Dynasty and its precursors, 907-1279*, edited by Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith, pp. 556-643. In particular, the professor Levine deals with "the tragedy of Ching-k'ang", p. 639. See also Don J. Wyatt, "The Invention of the Northern Song", in *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries, and Human Geographies in Chinese History*, edited by Nicola Di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt, Routledge Curzon, London and New York, 2003, pp. 220-243.

[5] It was particularly the extension of trade and commerce, which sometimes has even been considered a "commercial revolution", that nourished the thesis of "China's transition to modernity", proposed by the Japanese sinologist Naitō Kōnan 内藤湖南 (1866-1934) and the so-called Kyōto-School of sinology. They considered the Song dynasty the end of the "Chinese middle ages" and the beginning of "modernity". See Angela Schottenhammer, "The Song dynasty (960-1279) - A revolutionary Era Turn?", in *China Across the Centuries*, papers from a lecture series in Budapest, edited by Gábor Kósa, Department of East Asian Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 2017, pp. 133-173: 133.

fices for supervising maritime trade[6]. From the commercial point of view, the Song dynasty was able to improve and take advantage of the tribute system (even better than the Tang dynasty had)[7]. It was subjected to the mercantile system: the trade network and its consequent enrichment became not only the goal of the Chinese empire but also one of its political instruments for controlling foreign countries. The variety and abundance of Chinese goods, and the efficiency of the mercantile services (offered by the *shibosi*) were able to attract merchants and travelers from foreign countries, even those further afield. In such a context, the number of Arab merchants increased too, promoting the formation of Muslim communities in Southeast China. The Islamic communities already established in Southeast Asia and in the area of the Indian Ocean played a remarkable role in the development of Chinese communities, enhancing the mercantile network between Java, Sumatra, Malaysia, Ceylon and Song China[8]. The importance of these communities grew to such an extent that the Song government

[6] Also called superintendent of maritime trade or maritime trade offices. See Billy K. L. So, *Prosperity, Region and Institutions in maritime China: The South Fukien Pattern, 946-1368*, MA, Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 46-47. On the prominence of these offices see John Guy, "Tamil Merchant Guilds and the Quanzhou Trade", in *The Emporium of the World*, edited by Angela Schottenhammer, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2001, pp. 283-308: 286. See also Xiong Zhaoming and Wei Liguo, *Guangxi gudai haishang sichou zhilu* 广西古代海上丝绸之路, (*Guangxi's Ancient Maritime Silk Road),* Guangxi Science & Technology Publishing House, Nanning, 2019, 089. Derek Heng, "Shipping, Customs Procedures and the Foreign Community: the "Pingzhou Ketan" on aspects of Guangzhou's maritime economy in the late eleventh century", in *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 38, 2008, pp. 1-38.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Regarding the role of Islamic communities in the merchant network in South East Asia see: Hugh R. Clark, "Muslims and Hindus in the Culture and Morphology of Quanzhou from the Tenth to the Thirteenth century", in *Journal of World History*, 6, 1, 1995, pp. 49-75; John W. Chaffee, "Diasporic Identities in the Historical Development of the Maritime Muslim Communities of Song - Yuan China", in The *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 49, 4, 2006, pp. 395-420. John W. Chaffee, *The Muslim Merchants of Premodern China: The History of a Maritime Asian Trade Diaspora, 750-1400*, (New Approaches to Asian History), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, pp. 62 and 76-123. Tansen Sen, "Maritime Interactions between China and India: Coastal India and the Ascendancy of Chinese Maritime Power in the Indian Ocean", in *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies*, 2, 2011, pp. 41-82. See also Yokkaichi Yasuhiro, "Chinese and Muslim Diasporas and the Indian Ocean Trade Network under Mongol Hegemony", in *East Asian Economic and Sociocultural Studies*, edited by Angela Schottenhammer, East Asian Maritime History 6, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2008, pp. 73-98. André Wink, "From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean: Medieval History in Geographic Perspective", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44, 3, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 416-445.

provided imperial posts to Muslim Arab and Persian merchants who contributed to promoting trade between China and the Islamic world[9].

In addition, many royal family members and officials invested in the maritime trade for profit[10]. Moreover, the quality of the ships increased due to the improved techniques of shipbuilding of this period.

Thanks to the knowledge and experiences of previous travelers,[11] Song merchants expanded their maritime trade activity and gained not only great wealth, but also a wider exchange of knowledge, both of which – knowledge and goods – went hand in hand. On the one side, the interest in foreign countries increased due to the prosperity of maritime trade, and on the other the first travel journals and geographical works inspired people to travel and expand the maritime trade network in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

[9] During Northern Song the title of General of Submission to Virtue (*jiangjun*) was conferred on the Arab merchant Abu Obide Xinya Tuoluo Qasim, from Oman. See Abdullah Saleh Al Saadi, "The Origins of Omani-China Friendship: A Historical Review", in *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, 6, 2: 84-105, pp. 93 and 97-98. The Southern Song court appointed Pu Shougeng, an Arab immigrant, as Director (*tiju*) in Quanzhou. See Zhang Junyan, "Relations between China and the Arabs in Early Times", in *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 6, 1980, pp. 91-109: 102. And Gang Deng, *Maritime Sector, Institutions, and Sea Power of Premodern China*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1999, p. 120. Kuwabara Jitsuzō 桑原隲藏, "P'u Shou-keng 蒲壽庚. A Man of the Western Regions, who was Superintendent of the Trading Ships' Office in Ch'üan-chou 泉州 towards the End of the Sung Dynasty, together with a General Sketch of Trade of the Arabs in China during the T'ang and Sung eras", in *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Tōyō Bunkō*, 1935, 7, pp. 1-104.

[10] John W. Chaffee, "The impact of the Song: Imperial Clan on the Overseas Trade of Quanzhou", in *The Emporium of the World*. *Maritime Quanzhou, 1000-1400*", edited by Angela Schottenhammer, Brill, Leiden, 2001, pp. 13-46; Robert M. Hartwell, "Foreign Trade, Monetary Policy and Chinese 'Mercantilism'", in *Collected Studies on Sung History dedicated to Professor James T.C. Liu in Celebration of his seventieth birthday*, edited by Kinugawa Tsuyoshi, Kyoto, Dohosha, 1989; Jung-pang Lo, "The Emergence of China as a Sea Power during the Late Sung and Early Yuan Periods", in *Far Eastern Quarterly*, 14, 4, 1955, pp. 489-503.

[11] As Du Huan and Jia Dan, which will be introduced in the following paragraphs. The most recent and perhaps most comprehensive surveys with a detailed bibliography regarding the Song dynasty maritime history and literature are Hargett and Chaffee. James M. Hargett, "Some preliminary remarks on the travel records of the Song dynasty (960-1279), in *Chinese literature, Essays, articles, reviews* (CLEAR), 1985, pp. 67-93. James M. Hargett, "Song dynasty local gazetteers and their place in the history of Difangzhi writing", in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 56, 2, 1996, pp. 405-442. Hargett, *Treatises of the supervisor,* introduction, pp. 19-55. John W. Chaffee, "Song China and the multi-state and commercial world of East Asia", in *Crossroads – Studies on the History of Exchange Relations in the East Asian World,* 2010, 1, 2, pp. 33-54. John W. Chaffee, "Introduction: Reflections on the Sung", in *The Cambridge History of China*, 5, 2, *Sung China, 960–1279*, edited by John W. Chaffee and Paul J. Smith, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 1-18.

Through the maritime Silk Road, a great process of interaction took place: a fruitful circulation of goods and information thanks to merchants, travelers, sailors and interpreters from different countries. Therefore, Chinese knowledge of the Arab-Islamic world and vice versa became more detailed.

This is the background of Zhou Qufei's life and his work, *LWDD*, one of the most important of Song literature dealing with maritime contact, and of other geographical works, such as Fan Chengda's *Guihai Yuheng zh*i (*Treatises of the supervisor and guardian of Cinnamon Sea*)[12] and Zhao Rukuo's *Zhufan zhi* (*Description of the Foreign Lands*)[13]. Fan Chengda wrote his geographical treatise, *Guihai Yuheng zhi,* (henceforth referred to as *Guihai*) in 1175 when he was moving from Jingjiangfu (today's Guilin district) to Sichuan province as *zhizhishi* 制置使 (military commissioner)[14].

Zhufan zhi was written by Zhao Rukuo, a member of the Song imperial family, in 1225. It was composed by two long chapters: one on countries (Zhiguo 志國) and the other on products (Zhiwu 志物). He

[12] Fan Chengda (1126-1193) was a poet and a government official of the Song dynasty, he was considered an academic authority in geography, especially of southern provinces of China. He wrote three travel diaries: *Wuchuan lu* (*Diary of a boat trip to Wu*), in which he described his journey from Chengdu toward the north; *Lanpei Lu* (*Diary of grasping the carriage reins*) regarding his mission to Jin dynasty capital in 1170; and *Canluan lu* (*Diary of mounting a simurgh*) about his journey to Guilin in 1173. Hargett 2010, XV. Fan was older than Zhou, in 1173 he was in Guangxi as *anfushi* (military commissioner), there they likely met and became friends. Hargett 1989. Yan Pei 严沛 1986. For a complete English translation see Hargett, *Treatises of the supervisor*. In the first chapter I has compared the work written by Fan Chengda (1126-1193) and that written by Zhou Qufei.

[13] The name of this author has been transcribed in different ways from different scholars. Chinese characters are 赵如适, the transcription can be Zhao Rukuo or Zhao Rushi, but in the Western source you can find Zhao Rugua, as mentioned in Hirth and Rockhill. See Hirth and Rockhill, *Chau Jukua: His work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, entitled Chu-fan-chi*, Oriental Press, Amsterdam, 1966. Also see Zheng Yangwen, *China on the sea: how the maritime world shaped modern china*, Brill, Leiden, 2014, p. 209, the author uses Zhao Rushi. The professor Hargett uses the transcription Zhao Rukuo. Henceforth the present author uses Zhao Rukuo. Professor Hargett translated the title as *Treatises on Various Foreign Peoples*. Hargett, *Treatises of the Supervisor,* p. XLI (introduction). Zhao Rukuo lived between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He worked in the office for supervising maritime trade (*Shibosi*) in Quanzhou, the great port in Fujian, therefore he had many opportunities to speak with the people who engaged directly in foreign trade. In the first chapter the author has compared the work written by Zhao Rukuo and that written by Zhou Qufei.

[14] Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of official title in imperial China,* Taiwan Edition, Taipei, 1987, p. 156, entry 957.