

Contact between China and Africa before Da Gama:

Historiography and Evidence

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The evidence in China and abroad both indicates that China has a long history of contact with Africa. There was cultural exchange between China and Egypt as early as or even before the Han Dynasty (206B.C.- A.D.220). Du Huan, a Chinese of the Tang Dynasty (A.D.618-907), visited Africa in the 8th century. He is probably the first Chinese who left a written record about Africa (Du Huan, A.D.762?). The great African traveler Iban Battuta visited China in the 14th century and left a vivid description of the metropolitan life in the Yuan Dynasty (A.D.1271-1368). The Chinese fleet led by Zhen He visited East African coast several times during the 15th century. Interesting enough, two African animals, Zebra and Giraffe, also appeared in Chinese classics of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644, A.D.). There are archeological discoveries as well.

This paper is intended to introduce the Chinese historiography and evidence of the contact between China and Africa. It will be divided into three periods, the period of Pre-Tang Dynasty, the Tang and Song Dynasties, and the Yuan and Ming Dynasties.¹

1. The Period of Pre-Tang Dynasty (before the 7th century)

First, the historiography in the history of Sino-African relations is focused on several issues, but the start-point of the contact is the most discussed field.²

1.1. Historiography

Regarding the question when the China-African contact started, there are generally two viewpoints. Some scholars think it began before the Han Dynasty, while others consider the Han was the period when the contact started.

1.1.1. Before the Han Dynasty ((206B.C.- A.D.220).

Zhang Xiang holds that the exchange and contact between China and Africa should have started before Zhang Qian's mission to the West. According to him, Chinese merchandise reached in Bactria (Da Xia, 大夏, present north Afghanistan). It is easy for them to extend to Egypt, since Da Xia and Egypt had bilateral relations before 600 B.C.³ His is only a presumption.

Shen Fuwei also holds the same view and made the date to the Spring-Autumn Period (Chun Qiu, 春秋, 770-476, B.C.) and the Warring Period (Zhan Guo, 战国, 475-221, B.C.). He argued that the contact and exchange of goods must have been indirect because of the barrier of transportation. In the official history *Hou Han Shu* (Post-Han History, 后汉书, 25-220 A.D.), there is a place called Dou-le, Shen suggests that Dou-le is Adulis, a famous ancient port city, located in today's Eritrea, and its missionary arrived in Luoyang, the ancient capital of China,

¹ Most materials are taken from Li Anshan's *A History of Chinese in Africa*, China's Overseas Publishing House, 2000, pp.43-75.

² For a general introduction, see Li Anshan, 2000.

³ Zhang Xiang, 1987; 1993.

which indicates a significant event in the history of China-African relations. Therefore, “The Axum Kingdom of Ethiopia sent its Adulis mission to China, thus became the first African country which established diplomatic relations with China.”⁴

1.1.2. During Han Dynaty.

Zhang Xinglang raised this idea cautiously, based on some names of places mentioned in classics at home and abroad.⁵ Yang Renbian pointed out it was certain that the inderect commerce between China and Africa started from Han.⁶ Chen Gongyuan also supports this view. “As early as 200 B.C.(Han Synasty in China),Egypt, the African ancient civilization was contacting China indirectly and had commercial in the sea.”⁷ Zhang Junyan holds that during the Dong Han Dynasty (东汉, 25-220, A.D. also called Hou Han, 后汉) China had the direct communication with Roman Empire by sea through North Africa.⁸ Here, one supports the “indirect contact”, the other “direct communication”, and both indicate the same period. Other authors also support this view.⁹ Fang Hao, a Taiwan scholar holds the same argument.¹⁰

The evidence we have really point to the direction, e.g., there is contact between China and Africa before the Tang Dynasty. We can divide the sources into four categories, direct archeological evidence, indirect archeological evidence, direct documentary evidence and indirect documentary evidence.

1. 2. Evidence-Direct archeological one

1.2.1. In 1993, Austrian archeologists discovered something in the hair of a female corp of the 21st Dynasty (1070-945.B.C.). After analysis, they found it is the fibre of wormsilk. At the time, only China had the techonology of producing silk. Therefore,most probably the product was made in China. The product made in China was transferred to Egypt.¹¹

1.2.2. In 1979, some stone pictures were discovered at Jiawang in Xuzhou.The stone pictures belong to Han Dynasty. In the picture, there are several Kilin (麒麟, Qilin, an imagined animal), at least three of them look very much like Giraffe.¹² How could this be? (Picture 1)

Picture 1

⁴ Shen Fuwei, 11-12, 70-72.

⁵ Zhang Xinglang, 7-8.

⁶ Yang Renbian, 112.

⁷ Chen Gongyuan, 1.

⁸ Zhang Junyan, 11.

⁹ Sun, 142; Ai & Mu, 1.

¹⁰ Fang Hao, 150.

¹¹ People’s Daily, 1993/4/2.

¹² Xuzhou Museum, 1979, p.55.



图一四 徐州甄旺出土汉画像石

Kilin is an imagined animal which can bring fortune or good luck in Chinese tradition.¹³ French sinologist G. Ferrand's studies suggested that Kilin was a transliteration of "geri", a Somali word for Giraffe. He suggested that the two words are very similar, only "Kilin" has a bit nasal sound "n" at the end. According to his view, the Somali word "geri" is equal to "giri", and the Chinese found the pronunciation of "giri" very similar to Qilin, an fortune animal in the Chinese legend, therefore they put these two in connection.¹⁴ This explanation seems a bit difficult to accept, since the Chinese term "Qilin" appeared in historical book thousand years ago, and the imagined animal has its concrete form.

1.2.3. The famous South African archeologist Raymond Dart once found some interesting pictures in South Africa by the San people. Figure 9. "Bushman painting on a stone block, Eliweni, Kei River, depicting a foreigner"; "Figure 10. "Bushman painting in black in cave on White Kei River, Cape Province, depicting a foreigner".

Picture 2

Chinese hat

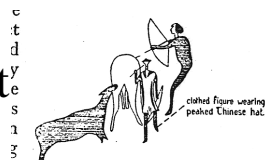


FIG. 8. — Bushman painting in light brown and dark brown, from Magdala, near Barkly East. (After Miss Tongue.)

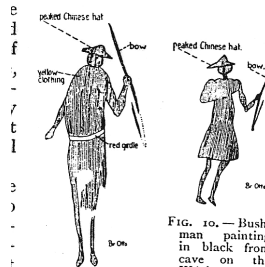


FIG. 9. — Bushman painting on a stone block, Eliweni, Kei River, depicting a foreigner.

FIG. 10. — Bushman painting in black from cave on the White Kei River, Cape Province, depicting a foreigner.

¹³ Qilin (Kilin) is a good animal in Chinese tradition, which appeared in LI YUN(礼记·礼运篇, 西汉人戴圣编定)。Male is called Qi, female Lin..

¹⁴ G. Ferrand, 1918, 155-158.

What makes it relevant to my topic is that Raymond Dart presumed the hat on the head of both the foreigners is a “peaked Chinese hat”.¹⁵ We understand the Bushman is the derogatory name of the San people, and the San are one of the indigenous people who settled in the region long time ago, and spread in present Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Whether the hat is really a “Chinese hat” is not certain, but in the south part of China, this kind of hat is very popular, it can both shield sunshine and rain, it is called “Dou Li” (斗笠) as its formal name.

1.3. Indirect archeological evidence

1.3.1. A very big ancient boat-building site dated around Christ (秦汉时期) was found in Guangzhou in 1975, three building berths were found where a boat as heavy as 50 tons can be built.¹⁶ This indicates that China at the time had the advanced technology of ship-building and it is possible to build a big boat. It is not coincident that Panyu (番禺) became one of the important towns of commerce. This shows the possibility of China to carry out the long distance navigation.

1.4. Direct documentary evidence

1.4.1. In *The Records of the Grand Historian* (Shiji, 史记), finished in 91 B.C. by the famous Chinese historian Sima Qian (司马迁, 145-90, B.C.), there is a place called Li Xian, Paul Pelliot, J. Duyvendak, T. Filesi and some Chinese scholars think this is Alexandria in Egypt.

1.4.2. In *Qian Hanshu* (前汉书, Qian Han, e.g. Xi Han, or West Han, 西汉, 206 B.C.-24 A.D.), there mentioned a place called “Yi-cheng-bu State”, Albert Herrmann thinks that it is a transliteration of “Ethiopia”, and Zhang Xinglang supported this view, judging from the pronunciation of a dialect in South China.¹⁷

1.4.3. In *Hou Han Shu* (后汉书), there is a place called “Da-Qin State”. Friedrich Hirth suggests that this place refers to the east part of Rome Empire which includes Syria, Egypt and Minor Asia.¹⁸

1.4.4. In *Wei Lue* (魏略, 222-), “Chi-San”, “Wu-Chi-san” was mentioned, which was regarded as Axandria in Egypt.¹⁹

The above-mentioned 4 sources are only presumption, which can not serve as pure evidence to support the argument of China-African relations.

1.5. Indirect documentary evidence

Several data indicate that China at the time had started navigation from coast regions such as Guangdong to islands in Indian Ocean such as Sri Lanka. There are also quite a few books on astrology which could provide direction to those seamen who are on board in Indian Ocean. Although there is no direct connection with Africa, yet foreign books offered some links. For example, Cosmas talked about some ships from India and Ethiopia went as far as China with different goods.²⁰ This indicates that during the period of South-North Dynasty (), Chinese ships were very active in the commercial activities in the Indian Ocean with Sri Lanka as the center.

As for the China-African relations before Tang Dynasty, we may draw two conclusions.

¹⁵ Raymond Dart, 1925, p.427.

¹⁶ Zhang Junyan, 11-14.

¹⁷ Zhang Xinglang, 6-20.

¹⁸ 《大秦国全录》，4.

¹⁹ Ibid, 68,78.

²⁰ Zhang Junyan, p.23.

The first is that people's contact went before official contact; and secondly, indirect contact went before direct contact.

2. The Period of the Tang Dynasty (618-907, A.D.)

From the archeological discoveries in both China and Africa, China's contact with and understanding of Africa transfers from indirect to direct. The academic studies have more data and scholars have dealt with the period in several works.

2.1. Historiography

For the contemporary historiography, there are some studies on the subject. In Zhang Xinglang's works on ancient data, he listed a special chapter of "Chinese historical works on Africa during the Tang Dynasty".²¹ Shen Fuwei also used a chapter to deal with various contacts between China and Africa.²² Chen Xinxiong, a Taiwanese scholar, studied on the period and made his own conclusion on the subject.²³ Li Anshan also made a study on the China-African relations in the Tang Dynasty.²⁴

During the Tang Dynasty, there were three works on some aspects of Africa, Du Huan's *Jing Xing Ji* (杜环: 经行记), Fuan Chenshi's *Youyang Zazu* (段成式: 酉阳杂俎) and Jia Dan's *Gujin Junguo Xiandao Siyi Shu* (贾耽: 古今郡国县道四夷述, Neighbouring Babarians of Countries's Road in History and Today).

21.1. *Jing Xing Ji*

Du Huan was following General Gao Xianzhi's army, and was captured in the battle of Talas by the Arabs in the year of 751. After more than 10 years, he returned by sea to Guangzhou in 762 A.D. and wrote *Jing Xing Ji*. Although the book itself was missing, yet a paragraph of about 1500 words was kept in an encyclopedia (Tong Dian, 通典). In the paragraph, a place named "Molin" was described.

"We also went to *Molin*, Southwest of *Yangsalue*. One reaches this country after having crossed the great desert and having travelled 2,000 Li. The people there are black, their customs rough. There is little rice and cereals and there is no grass and trees. The horses are fed with dried fish, the people eat XX [word not identified] and also Persian dates. Subtropical diseases [Malaria] are widespread. After crossing the inland there is a mountainous country, there are a lot of confessions, Arab religion (大食法, Islam), East Rome religion (大秦法, Catholicism) and Xunxun religion (Xian religion, 袄教, Zemez, Zoroastrianism?). The followers of the Xunxun religion are the most in being sexually promiscuous regardless of relatives among the barbarians.The followers of Arab religion don't eat the meat of pigs, dogs, donkeys and horses, they don't respect neither the king of the country, nor their parents, they don't believe in supernatural powers, they only perform sacrifice to the heaven. According to their customs, every seventh day is a holiday, when no trade and no cash transactions are done, whereas they drink alcohol and behave casually. Within the East Roman confession the medical doctors know diarrhoea - or they

²¹ Zhang Xinglang, 8-24.

²² Shen Fuwei, 188-240.

²³ Chen Xinxiong, 125-159.

²⁴ Li Anshan, 48-55.

recognise it already before the outbreak of the disease, or they open the head and insects come out."²⁵

Where is "Molin"? Except one view that considers it probably refers to north India, most scholars think Molin is located in Africa. So far there are the following views regarding the possible location of Molin, Mauritania or Libya,²⁶ Morocco,²⁷ Magrib region,²⁸ Egypt coastal region near Red Sea,²⁹ Malindi in Kenya,³⁰ Mande in Kenya (near Lamu),³¹ Meroe in the Sudan,³² Axum Kingdom of Ethiopia,³³ the dry desert lowlands in Sudan and Eritrea.³⁴ Wang Ting thinks it is located in West Africa.³⁵

To summarize the above-mentioned views, we can make two conclusions. First, Molin refers to a place in Africa. Second, this data represents what Chinese knew or thought of Africa at the time.

2.1.2. *Youyang Zazu*

A scholar with broad knowledge and excellent memory, Duan Chenshi (803-863, A.D.) also wrote about Africa in his *Youyang Zaxu* (酉阳杂俎, *Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*) in the period of 850-860 A.D. In his book, he described about the special products and customs in Bobali State (拔拔力国). For the place of Bobali, scholars have located it as today's Berbera in Somali. His description is very vivid.

Bobali State is located in the Southwestern Sea, [people] Don't eat five grains, but only meat. They usually stick a needle into the veins of their cattle and drawing out the blood, which they mix with milk and consume raw. They wear no clothes, but merely use goatskins to cover the parts below their waists. Women are white and beautiful. People sell women to foreign merchants and the price is several times dearer. They have ivory The state has never belong to other country..... There are 200 thousand infantrymen, Da Si (大食, Arab Empire) always invades it."

²⁵ Zhang, 1963. Another passage in which Du Huan gives a brief geographical overview has been preserved in another work, the *XinT'angshu* of Ouyang Xiu. In chapter 221 (Dashi-zhuan) he notes : "Coming from Fulin²⁹ (Baizhanting) one reaches, after having crossed the desert in a Southwestern direction and having travelled for 2,000 Li, a country called Molin, respectively Laobosa." Wolbert Smidt, "A Chinese in the Nubian and Abyssinian Kingdoms (8th Century): The visit of Du Huan to Molin-guo and Laobosa," *Chroniques Yemenites* No.9, 2001. In the article Wolbert Smidt mentioned Munro Hay's forthcoming work. <http://cy.revues.org/document33.html>. 吴毅, 《经行记及其重要价值》, 2008.

²⁶ Quoted from Ai & Mu, 43.

²⁷ Ding Qian, Quoted from Chen Xingxiong, 131.

²⁸ Zhang Xinglang, 2-9.

²⁹ Hirth, 81.

³⁰ Berthold Laufer, 238.

³¹ CASS, 326.

³² Whitley, Quoted in Roland Oliver, 3-193.

³³ Shen Fuwei, 227.

³⁴ Wolbert Smidt, 2001.

³⁵ Wang, 2001.

Zhang Xinglang thinks Bobali State is an equivalent of “Bibalu” in *Zhu Fan Zhi* of the Song Dynasty. The director of the Tanzanian Museum supported this “Somali presupposition”.³⁶ Only British scholar Freeman-Grenville considered it as the Masai in present Tanzania and Kenya.³⁷ However, there are two points in the book disagreeable with the reality. The first is the Masai are black people while the women in *Youyang Zazu* are “white and beautiful”. The second is that the Masai migrated to Tanganyika only after the 16th century. It seems that Freeman-Grenville’s view cannot hold water because of the two facts. Besides, *YouYang Zazu* also mentioned four other places, Xiaoyi State, Renjian State, Xida State and Wusili State. According to Zhang Xinglang, *Xiaoyi* (孝亿国) refers to south Egypt, *Renjian* (仍建国), Tunisia. *Xida* (悉怛国) seems to refer to the Sudan while *Wusili* (勿斯离) is Egypt.³⁸ And there are detailed illustration of each of them. The description tells us that firstly Bobali is located in Eastern Africa, and secondly, the Chinese at the time had somewhat detailed knowledge of some Eastern African countries.

2.1.3. Jia Dan’s *Gujin Junguo Xiandao Siyi Shu*

Jia Dan’s work illustrated a sea route from Guangzhou through Persian Gulf to East African coast. In the work, another place San Lan (三兰) was mentioned, which again caused some discussion. Scholars generally agree with the route yet there is no agreement regarding where San Lan is located. Some suggest that it is Sri Lanka or Aden, yet most think it is in Africa. Zhang Xinglang thought it should be in some place in East Africa coast according to the navigation time and route.³⁹ Others take it as Dar es Salaam,⁴⁰ Zeila port in Somali,⁴¹ the region from Tanganyika to Mocambique.⁴²

Besides the three books, many other books (旧唐书、唐会要、册府元龟) in the Tang Dynasty also mentioned some black servants or slaves, described as “curly hair and black skin”, or “black skin with red lips and white teeth”. The Tang Dynasty is a prosperous period with Arab merchants coming and going and the Arab world carried out the slave trade much early than the Triangle Trade. It is natural for those Arab merchants to bring some black or white slaves to China. During the trade, the Arab merchants could bring black slaves to China through three ways. First, when they dealt with Chinese merchants, they could use black slaves as commodity. Second, they could send black slaves as gift to Chinese businessmen in trade. Thirdly, they could present blacks to the Chinese court as gift. It should be noted that the “Kunlun Nu” (昆仑奴) or “Zengzi Nu” (僧祇奴) could be the indigenous in the Southeast Asian with dark skin.

2.2. Evidence

The evidence during this period includes the china discovered in Africa, the currencies found in the East African coast, a pottery figure of black and black figures in the picture of the Tang Dynasty.

2.2.1. Porcelains

³⁶ Fasi, 498.

³⁷ Freeman-Grenville, pp.36-37.

³⁸ Zhang Xinglang, 2-11-12.

³⁹ Zhang, 2-159.

⁴⁰ Cen Zhongmian, 1935; Ai & Mu, 29-33; Chen Xingxiong, 133-136.

⁴¹ Chen Gongyuan, 1983.

⁴² Shen Fuwei, 208-213.

A large quantity of pieces of china are now stored in the 富斯塔特 in the south suburb of Cairo. In the year of 642, the Arab invaded Egypt and established this city, which served a center of politics and commerce for a long time. In 1168, it was destroyed during the second Crusades.⁴³ The study of the explorations in the city has been more than one century and about 20 thousand pieces of china were excavated there, which now spread and stored in museums in Egypt, Sweden, Italy and Japan. The pieces of china excavated in the city are characterized by four features, large quantity, good quality, last long and many kilns.⁴⁴ Some of the pieces are products of the Tang Dynasty, which were also found in other places in Africa, such as north Sudan, Manda Island in Kenya, Comoro Island, etc. The pieces of china found in Africa are mainly four types, Yue Kiln, white china in Xing Kiln, Changsha Kiln and Tangshancai.⁴⁵

2.2.2. Currencies

Besides the china, few Tang currencies are also found in Africa. According to the statistics, five currencies were found in Africa, four from Zanzibar,⁴⁶ another in Mugadiso, yet without detailed information. There are also other reports about the discoveries in Kilwa and Mafia, but no much confirmed details to be definitely identified.⁴⁷

2.2.3. Black Pottery Figure

In 1954, in Madam Pei's tomb in Xi-an, one black pottery figure was discovered. The pottery is 15 centimeters high, with black skin, curly hair, thick lips and other features of the black, which can be easily identified as a black figure. Besides, some black figures also appeared in ancient pictures in China, such as the paintings by famous artists like Yan Liben and Zhou Fang. Yet it is not certain whether they are blacks from Africa.⁴⁸ In the Dunfang frescoes, there also appeared some figures with identical black features.⁴⁹

From the historiography and evidence above-mentioned, we can make the following presumptions.

First, during the Tang Dynasty, only few people went Africa. Otherwise, there should be some traces in written work.

Second, it seems that China's ships had not been to Africa yet. Although there is the record of a sea route between Sanlan Guo and Persian Gulf, yet the route is described in detail how it goes from Sanlan Guo to Persian Gulf, not vice versa.

Thirdly, those pieces of china should be the commodities of indirect commerce or as ballast. If they are the goods of direct trade, there should be other commodities.

Fourthly, it seems that Egypt is the first stop of those indirect goods, and the pieces of china in other places in Africa must be transferred from Egypt.

Fifthly, the middle-men of the trade between China and Africa should be the Arab merchants with a long history of commercial activities who had the better geographical position and rich experience in navigation.

⁴³ Xia Nai, 1963.

⁴⁴ Ma Wenkuang & Men Fanren, 4.

⁴⁵ Ma Wenkuang & Men Fanren, 37-55.

⁴⁶ Zhang Tieshen, 1972, 49.

⁴⁷ Chen Xingxiong, 147-148.

⁴⁸ Chen Xingxiong, 149.

⁴⁹ Zhang Junyan, 92.

Picture 3

African pottery figure



3. The Song (869-1279, A.D.) and Yuan (1271-1368,A.D.) Dynasties

During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the contact between China and Africa deepened, which is expressed in two aspects. First, the transportation by the sea became the fact, which is reflected by Zhou Qufei's (周去非) *Lingwai Daida* (岭外代答, written in 1178), Zhou Rukuo's (赵汝适) *Zhu Fan Zhi* (诸蕃志, written in 1225) and the Yuan scholar Wang Dayuan's (汪大渊) *Dao Yi Zhilue* (岛夷志略, written in 1349). Secondly, Non-official and official relations were developed in some way.

3.1. Historiography

3.1.1. *Lingwai Daida*

The book divided the sea into several big areas and mentioned several places in Africa, such as Wusili (勿斯离), Molanpi, Kunlun Cengqi, Moga (默伽) and Tuopan Di (in Egypt). However, there are more detailed description about Molanpi and Kunlun Cengqi. According to *Lingwai Daida*, there were big ships in Molanpi, one could hold several thousands people. Sheeps were very big in Molanpi. Zhang Xinglang thought that Molanpi was the mispronunciation of Maghrib, it not only referred to Morocco, but North Africa, even West Europe as well.⁵⁰ Other scholars generally support his view.

There is a place called "Kunlun Cengqi" in volume three in *Lingwai Daida*. Several things unique are mentioned. The big bird with a huge wing, which can eat the wild camel. There were ortriches, ivory and Hipo horn as well. He also mentioned "wild men" with black skin, whom were trapped and sold as slaves. For the location of Kunlun Cengqi, opinions differ. Some suggest that it referred to the East African coast in general.⁵¹ Others think it is present Madagarscar and its

⁵⁰ Zhang Xinglang, 2-31.

⁵¹ Zhang Xinglang, 2-30.

neighbouring region.⁵²

3.1.2. *Zhu Fan Zhi*

The names of African places in *Lingwai Daida* are used in *Zhu Fan Zhi*. Zhao Rukuo (1170-1232), the author of the book *Zhu-Fan-Zhi* (诸蕃志, written in 1225) had never been abroad, but he worked for a long time as an official of the port in South China, thus had many opportunities to get contact with foreigners. He mentioned 57 places in the book, including more than 10 African places. The most valuable is the description of East Africa.

Cengba Guo (层拔国). The population of the island is mainly the people of Arab, who have followed the Arab religion. There are quite a few special products in the island, such as ivory, gold, etc. This place is identified as Zanzibar.⁵³ *Lingwai Daida* and *Zhu Fan Zhi* both mentioned Kunlun Cengqi. “Cengqi” seems to be the transliteration of Persian word “Zenj”, which means “the black”. “Bar” means “coast” and “land”, therefore “Zanjibar” is the “land of the blacks”, referring to the coast region of East Africa. “Cengba” seems to be the transliteration of “Zenjibar”.⁵⁴ . the non-governmental and official contact between China and Africa was further improved. This was mainly because both governments paid more emphasis on foreign trade. By the Yuan Dynasty, there were three routes on the sea between China and Africa.⁵⁵

“Zhongli Guo” (中理国) is another place in the book. The description includes the dress, house, special products, customs, and social classes as well. The place is next to Bibalo (Berbera). The Chinese word “中” could be the miswriting of “申”, thereafter “Shenli”, which is identical to “Somali”. Therefore, Zhongli Guo is generally considered as present Somali. Three points should be stressed. First, the details indicate that China knew the place pretty well and there were much conduct between China and Zhongli Guo. Second, Zhongli Guo placed an important role in this region.

Zhu Fan Zhi also mentioned some animals such as elephant, hipo and African ostrich.

3.1.3. *Daoyi Zhilue*

Both Zhou Qufei and Zhao Rukuo wrote the books based on the materials taken from others, while Wang Dayuan travelled by sea several times by himself. His book *Daoyi Zhilue* mentioned some names of countries and places, such as A-shi-li, Ma-na-li, Ceng-yao-luo, Jia-jiang-men-li. Besides the former-mentioned places, the book also mentioned places in Egypt and Mocambique. Jia-jiang-men-li is a place in Mocambique that was first mentioned in a Chinese literature. In the description, the gathering of Muslims and the trade of “black children” (黑囡) were mentioned.

3.2. Evidence

3.2.1. Porcelains from China

According to the study of Ma & Meng, more and more pieces of china of this period were discovered in African countries, including Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, Ethiopia, Somali, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Madagascar. For example, in Great Zimbabwe, 43 pieces of china belonging to 13 articles were found in one cave.⁵⁶ Ibn Battuta also mentioned in his book that china in China is as cheap as porcelain in our country, or even cheaper. The pieces of china were

⁵² Ferrand, 32; Duyvendak, 23.

⁵³ Feng Chengjun, 53-54.

⁵⁴ Zhang Tieshen, 19-20.

⁵⁵ Ai Zhouchang and Mutao, Ibid, pp. 53-54.

⁵⁶ Ma & Meng, 3-6, 8-14, 18-23, 26-29, 31-32, 35. Also refer to R. Oliver, 203, 206, 215-216, 225.

transported to India, or Magreb, and they are the best among porcelains.⁵⁷

3.2.2. Currency

Hirth in his works once mentioned that the British discovered in 1888 currencies of the Song Dynasty in Zanzibar, and the German also found the currencies of the same period in Somali in 1898. The most significant discovery is the one in Kazengwa (卡珍格瓦) in 1945, 176 currencies were found at the time. Four of them are of the Tang Dynasty. Besides 8 are unidentical, the rest are of the Song Dynasty.⁵⁸ And the archeological discovery indicates that East African merchants went to Quanzhou during the Song. Chitick led the archeological excavation in Kilwa remains in Tanzania, and found more than 20 pieces of currencies from the Song to the early Ming (1368-1644, A.D.).⁵⁹

3.2.3. Sea Route

During the Song and Yuan, both non-official and official contacts increased. This is closely linked to the government policy to encourage the foreign trade which give a big push to more commercial activities during this period. During the Yuan, there were three sea routes between China and Africa.

- 1) From China to North Africa: China—India—Aden—Egypt.
- 2) From China to East Africa: China—Maldives—East Africa.
- 3) From China to Madagascar. Divided into two sub-routes.
 - a. China—Socotra Island—Madagascar;
 - b. China—Malabar Coast—Madagascar.

3.2.4. Ibn Battuta's Visit to China

In 1346, the famous Moroccan tourist Ibn Battuta came to China. In addition to staying in the capital, he travelled to Quanzhou and Guangzhou in the south. He stayed in China for one year and the prosperity of China left him a deep impression. He dictated his experiences in China after going home and others put his oral accounts into the publication of *Travel Notes of Ibn Battuta*. (The initial name was *Yiyu Qiwen Lansheng*.) The book mentioned Chinese political systems, legal systems, local customs, construction style, local products, communication, economic life, monetary systems and a very detailed description of the structure of Beijing city and the internal conflict within the royal court.⁶⁰ The introduction of China in the book had a great influence on Arabic North Africa back then.

3.2.5. Maps

China's understanding of Africa also improved during that period. Zhu Siben (1273--1333) in the Yuan Dynasty drew a rather accurate African map in the world, with southern Africa in it and one angle pointing to the south. It is a pity that the map drawn by Zhu Siben was lost and it could only be traced in *Guangyutu* (Broad World Atlas) by Luo Hongxian (罗洪宪) of the Ming Dynasty. However, another map drawn by geographer Li Zemin (李泽民) who was in the same period with Zhu Siben, also includes Africa and Europe.⁶¹ In the maps by contemporary Arabians

⁵⁷ Ma Jingpeng's translation, 546.

⁵⁸ Zhang Tieshen, 49-50, note 5.

⁵⁹ Ma & Meng, 25.

⁶⁰ See chapters "Chinese china", "Some information about Chinese", "Paper currency in communication", "Chinese virtuosity" and "Laws on ship registration" in *Travel Notes of Ibn Battuta*, translated by Ma Jinpeng, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People Press, 1985), pp. 545-549.

⁶¹ Shen Fuwei, *Ibid*, pp. 385-387.

and Europeans, the southern part of Africa was drawn to the east, and it “continued until the mid 15th century,” noticed by the famous British sinologist Joseph Needham.⁶²

3.2.6. Diplomatic Contact

In the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the official contact had also strengthened. Here are some of the records.

The Song dynasty (1008)—China established diplomatic relations with the Fatima dynasty. Then both sides sent ambassadors to each other.⁶³

Song dynasty (1073)—Yulu (俞卢) and Diguó (地国) in East Africa (as Kipulu and Gedi in Kenya) sent envoys to China.⁶⁴

The Yuan dynasty (1282)—China sent envoy Adan to Alu Qianbo Guo (阿鲁乾伯国) and established relations with the Mamluk Dynasty of Egypt.

Yuan dynasty (1283)—Ancient Danu (Gandala in Ethiopia) “was willing to be a tribute to the Yuan Dynasty, owing to the words brought by Awei.”

Yuan dynasty (1291)—China sent envoys to Madu (Ethiopia).

Yuan dynasty (1328)—Yaji (Ethiopia) sent envoys to China.⁶⁵

In addition, according to the records of Marco Polo, the Chinese emperor Kublai Khan sent envoys to visit Madagascar.⁶⁶

In sum, we can draw a conclusion that during the Song and Yuan dynasties, China’s understanding on Africa further improved and there was an increased trend of communication between China and Africa.

1) More African place names were mentioned in Chinese literature in this period than that of Tang dynasty. The description of some African states and regions was more detailed and more specific.

2) Chinese scholars had a deeper understanding on African states, from geographic position and local products to customs, mode of production and social systems.

3) The marine communication between China and Africa has been a fact, various kinds of trade grew, and a few new sea routes to the coasts of East Africa was established.

4) The direct non-governmental communication between China and Africa had been realized. Wang Dayuan’s visit to Eastern Africa and Ibn Battuta’s visit to China strengthened mutual understanding.

5) The official communication was strengthened, peaceful diplomatic relations developed between China and Africa, and there were records that both sides sent envoys or merchants who acted as diplomatic envoys to each other.

4. The Period of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

⁶² Joseph Needham, *China’s Ancient Civilization*, Vol. 3, London: Cambridge University Press, pp.552-555.

⁶³ Shen Fuwei, *Ibid*, pp. 252-258.

⁶⁴ Zhang Junyan, *Ibid*, p. 118. Regarding the records of the envoys of Dashi to Song dynasty, Zhang Junyan had listed a form and there were 54 times in total, pp. 11-117.

⁶⁵ Shen Fuwei, *Ibid*, pp. 374-378.

⁶⁶ *Travels*, book iii, ch. 26, London, 1918. R. Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders*, p. 19. Zhang Tiesheng, *ibid*, p. 26. Some scholars believes that “Madagascar” mentioned by Marco Polo was actually “Mogadishu”. See Shen Fuwei, *ibid*, pp. 380-381.

By the beginning of the Ming dynasty, Sino-African communication had further improved. It is embodied in two aspects. First, Sanbao Eunuch General Zheng He travelled to the West Oceans; he passed through the west Indian Ocean and reached the Eastern coast of Africa. Second, a few important works about Chinese-foreign communication were published, including *Xingcha Shenglan* (星槎胜览) by Fei Xin, *Yingya Shenglan* (瀛涯星览) by Ma Huan and *Xiyang Fanguo Zhi* (西洋番国志) by Gong Zhen. The three people were on Zheng He's trip to Africa, therefore their works were more detailed in the description of African states and regions and had a higher historical value.

4.1. Historiography

4.1.1. Fei's *Xingcha Shenglan*, Ma's *Yingya Shenglan* and Gong's *Xiyang Fanguo Zhi*

Works on Ming dynasty's voyages provide us with relatively accurate knowledge about Africa. The works of Fei Xin, Ma Huan and Gong Zhen were more specific and detailed than the older ones because they themselves took part in Zheng He's voyages. Fei Xin's *Xingcha Shenglan* mentioned Zhubu, Mugu Dushu and Bolawa. Among these the record of Zhubu was worth citing.

"Zhubu locates adjacent to Mugu Dushu. There are few villages and the cities and houses are made by stone. Their customs are simple and honest and both men and women have wavy hair. They do not expose their skins with cloth on them; women use cloth to hide their face. There are rare rain and the land is yellow with no grass or wood. People there live on fishing. There are lions, leopards and ostriches. Some ostrich is 6-7 chi tall and its feet are like tuoti. Products such as tuzhu, duanjuan, gold and silver, chinaware, pepper and grain. Local chiefs pays local products as tribute to Ming."⁶⁷

Zhubu is generally identified as the mouth of Juba River in Kenya. In addition to Zhubu's location, houses, climate, production, custom and products, the article mentioned that local chiefs were moved by the gifts that Zheng He's fleet gave them and paid their local products as tribute to establish a friendly relation with Ming. Ma Huan's *Yingya Shenglan* mentioned "Mixi" (Egypt) only in "there are business in Dawan and Mixi" in its "Jixing Poem".⁶⁸ Gong Zhen's *Xiyang Fanguo Zhi* mainly discussed southeast Asia.

4.1.2. Names of African Places

Names of African Places in Different Literature

<i>Lingwai Daida</i>	<i>Zhufan Zhi</i>	<i>Daoyi Zhilue</i>	Zheng He's voyages	Current location
			Ge'er Defeng	Cape Guardafui
			Sugu Dala (also Xuduo Dayu)	Socotra island
	Bipiluo Guo			Berbera in the north of Somali
	Zhongli Guo			Somali coast including Socotra island

⁶⁷ *Jilu Huibian Ben* has a more detailed version of the paragraph, see Feng Chengjun, *Xingcha Shenglan Jiaozhu* (Houji), p. 20.

⁶⁸ According to Feng Chengjun, "Mixi is Misr in the 332th volume of *History of Ming Dynasty*." See Feng Chengjun, *Yingya Shenglan Jiaozhu*, Changsha: Commercial Press, 1938, p. 2.

			Mugu Dushu (also Mugu Du)	Mogadishu of Somali
			Bolawa (also as Bolawa, or Bila)	Brava of Somali
			Manbasa	Mambrui (also as Mombasa)
			Sunla	eastern Africa ?
			Zhubu	The end of Jumba river in Somali
	Cengbo Guo	Cengyao Boluo		the south of Somali
		Manali	Malin (also as Malindi)	Malindi of Kenya (also as Kilwa)
		Jiajiang Menli		The end of Zambezi river in Mozambique
Kunlun Cengqi Guo	Kunlun Cengqi Guo			Madagascar and its coast
Wusili Guo	Wusili Guo (Mixuli)			Egypt
	Egentuo Guo			Alexandria of Egypt
Tuopandi Guo	Pandi			Damietta of Egypt
Mojia Guo	Mojialie Guo			Morocco
Mulanpi Guo	Mulanpi Guo			Northwest of Africa and south of Spain
Pinuoye				Tunisia and Tripoli of Libya
			Hei'er	South of Hafuni, Ell of Somali
			Muer Liha Bier	Huor Dier
			Muluwang	Merca
			Menfeichi	Mombasa
			Moer Ganti	Meileika
			Lasi Nahe	Laascaanood
			Hafuni (also as Hafuer)	Cape Hafun
			Zheji Laha Zela	Jiale Hajiaer

Sources: Zhang Xun, *Ancient China's Communication on the Sea*, Beijing: Commercial Press,

1986 (revised edition); Feng Chengjun, *Zhufan Zhi Jiaozhu*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1956; Su Jiqing, *Daoyi Zhilve Jiaoyi*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1981; Xiang Da, *Maps of Zheng He's Voyages*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1982 [1961].

4.2. Evidence

Ming Taizu attached importance to foreign communication even before he established Ming dynasty. Early in the 27th year of Yuan Shundi (1367), the first year that Zhu Yuanzhang (Ming Taizu) took Hangzhou and changed the title of his reign, he established an institution “Shibo Tiju Si” (市舶提举司). According to *Zhiguan Zhi* (职官志) of *History of Ming Dynasty*, the institution was set up to “in charge of foreign tribute and foreign trade”. During the period of Hongwu, Ming Taizu sent many envoys to promote mutual trade and relation in both land route and sea route; later, because of the Japanese pirates, Ming Taizu forbade the trade on sea in order to prevent the coastal “bad citizens” who colluded with Japanese pirates.

After Ming Chengzu Zhu Di took the throne, he reopened the sea route and encouraged to develop foreign relation. More envoys and merchants came to China as Ming Chengzu carried out policies that encouraged foreign merchants to engage in trade. In the third year of Yongle (1405), Ming Chengzu set up hotels at “Shibo Tiju Si” in three coastal cities to welcome foreigners. The three hotels were Laiyuan Yi (Fujian Guan), Anyuan Yi (Zhejiang Guan) and Huaiyuan Yi (Guangdong Guan). Meanwhile, Ming Chengzu sent large numbers of envoys to build a harmonious relation with neighboring states. From the first year of Yongle (1403) to the 18th (1420), he sent envoys for 29 times on the sea route. Except for the 4th (1406), 8th (1410) and 17th (1419) year of Yongle, there were envoys sent to South Ocean; sometimes there were 7 times in one year.⁶⁹

4.2.1. Zheng He's Voyages

Picture 4 Zheng He's Picture

Zheng He (1371-1433)



Six of Zheng He's seven voyages to the West Ocean (1406-1433) happened in the period of

⁶⁹ Zhang Junyan, *ibid*, pp. 182-184.

Yongle, which was not accidental.

Below is the time of seven voyages of Zheng He:

The first voyage: 3rd-5th year of Yongle (1405-1407)

The second voyage: 5th-7th year of Yongle (1407-1409)

The third voyage: 7th-9th year of Yongle (1409-1411)

The fourth voyage: 11th-13th year of Yongle (1413-1415)

The fifth voyage: 15th-17th year of Yongle (1417-1419)

The sixth voyage: 19th-20th year of Yongle (1421-1422)

The seventh voyage: 6th-8th year of Yongle (1431-1433)

Zheng He's old family name was Ma, and he was born in Hedai village of Baoshan, Kunyang county of Yunnan Province (Jinning district today). He was kidnapped into the palace and became a eunuch. "At first, he served Yan King at king's house, followed the king and was promoted for his performance." "Zheng" was granted by Ming Chengzu in the 2nd year of Yongle (1404). Zheng He was tall and handsome, therefore being chosen as the principal envoy for the voyages to the West Ocean. From the 3rd year of Yongle (1405) to the 8th year of Xuande (1433), Zheng He travelled to the foreign states 7 times with the Ming Chengzu's order, including Southeast Asia, the peninsula of South Asia, Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, Arabic peninsula and the coast of East Africa.

In general, scholars believe that Zheng He arrived in Africa for the first time on his 4th trip. E.g., from 1413-1433, lasted for 20 years.⁷⁰ Shen Fuwei argues that Zheng He sent a fleet to Mogadishu on his 3rd trip; therefore, the first time Zheng He's fleet reached Africa was between 7th to 9th year of Yongle (1409-1411) on his 3rd trip.⁷¹ Shen Fuwei based his argument on the sea routes recorded in the 3rd volume of *Shuyuan Zaji* by Lu Rong.

Lu Rong lived in Taicang, the place where Zheng He's fleet stayed, and he assumed the office of Yanfeng Si in the Board of Personnel and Zhifang Langzhong in the Board of War. Fei Xin, the author of *Xingcha Shenglan*, accompanied Zheng He on this visit, so Lu Rong is very possible to have access to the earliest edition of *Xingcha Shenglan*. His records had his proof. Besides, "Zhubu" (a place near Juba River of Somali) was in the article. According to *Biography of Zhubu in History of Ming Dynasty*, "Zhubu is next to Mugu Dushu. It paid tribute to Ming during the mid of Yongle. There were not so many people there and the people were simple and honest, Zheng He used to be there." The records of Zheng He's next 4 voyages did not mention "Zhubu". Therefore, Zheng He may have reached Somali on his 3rd voyage. "Bolawa" in the article is Brava in Somali, "Mugu Dudong" should be "Mugu Dushu", which is in today's Mogadishu in Somali.

In the 10th year of Yongle (1412), Ming Chengzu ordered Zheng He to start his fourth mission. Zheng He prepared for more than one year and chose many talents including Ma Huan, the author of *Yingya Shenglan*. There were two different records in *Mingshi Lu* (A Record of Ming Dynasty's Events) about the route of the fourth trip. Volume 134 records:

"On Bingshen Day of November in the 10th year of Yongle, (Ming Chengzu) sent Zheng He the eunuch to go to Manlajia, Java, Sumatra, Alu, Kezhi, Guli, Nanboli, Pengheng, Jilandan, Jiayile, Jilumosi, Bila, Liushan and Sunta and grant their kings thin silk and leno."

⁷⁰ Zhang Tiesheng, *ibid*, p. 26, footnote 1; Chen Gongyuan, Zheng Yijun.

⁷¹ Shen Fuwei, 2005, 493.

According to this record, Zheng He seemed to reach only one African countries on this travel, Dabila (Brava). However, volume 128 in *Mingshi Lu* had a different record about envoys from African countries. These envoys came to China together with Zheng He on his way back.

“On Renzi Day of November in the 14th year of Yongle, kindoms including Guli, Java, Manlajia, Zhancheng, Sumatra, Nanwuli, Shali Wanni, Pengheng, Xilanshan, Mugu Dushu, Liushan, Nanboli, Bulawa, Adan, Malin, Lasa, Hulu Mosi and Kezhi and the Office of Pacification Commission of Jiugang sent envoys to pay tribute such as horses, rhinoceros, elephants and local products to Ming dynasty.”⁷²

In sum, on his fourth voyage, Zheng He visited Mugu Dushu of Somali (Mogadishu), Malin (Malindi) and Bulawa (Brava).

On his 5th voyage in the 15th year of Yongle (1417), Zheng He sent the envoys of Mugu Dushu back to their states and paid a visit to these states. According to *Nanshan Sibeiji*, “Zheng He led the fleet to the West in the 15th year of Yongle. Hulu Mosi paid lions, leopards and Daxi horses as tribute. Adan paid kylins, also called Zulafa⁷³, and Mahashou with long horns. Mugu Dushu sent Huafulu⁷⁴ and lions as tribute. Bolawa sent camels and Tuoji⁷⁵ ...”

On his 6th voyage, Zheng He’s main mission is to send envoys from other states back and paid a visit to these states. He carried out a friendly visit to Mugu Dushu and Bulawa when he sent envoys of the two states back to their home.

Ming Renzong Zhu Gaozhi took the throne after Ming Chengzu died in July of 22nd year of Yongle (1414). Ming Renzong took Xia Yuanji’s advice of opposing spending money on remote oceans who was the then Minister of Revenue and order “ships for sailing to the West oceans stop going abroad.” Renzong took the throne for only one year and then died; Xuanzong Zhu Shanji took the throne. In the 5th year of Xuande (1430), he ordered Zheng He to start his 7th voyage to the West. Feixin, Mahuan and Gongzhen accompanied him.

Zheng He’s fleet visited more than 20 states on this voyage including Mugu Dushu (Mogadishu) and Bulawa (Brawa).

4.2.2. Sea Routes between China and Africa

There were many routes to reach Africa from China through the ports of Indian Ocean according to Zheng He’s route to the West. Zhang Tiesheng thought that there were two routes on the sea for China to go to Eastern Africa: 1) Along the Arabic Sea Coast—Northern Coast of Somali—Socotra islands—Eastern Africa Coast; 2) Across the Indian Ocean—Islands of Maldives (Male), or Xiaogelan of India (Quilon), or Bieluoli of Sri Lanka (Beilie Jiamu).⁷⁶

Some scholars believed that there were 3 routes:

- 1) Maldives—Aden Gulf—Egypt;
- 2) Xiaogelan—Mogadishu;

⁷² According to the record of volume 103 of *Ming Chengzu Shilu*, “On Dingmao Day of December in the 14th year of Yongle, kindoms including Guli, Java, Manlajia, Zhancheng, Xilanshan, Mugu Dushu, Liushan, Nanboli, Bulawa, Adan, Sumatra, Malin, Lasa, Hulu Mosi, Kezhi, Nanwuli, Shali Wanni and Pengheng, and the Office of Pacification Commission of Jiugang left China and were granted clothes made in silk and leno.” The names listed here were same with volume 182 of *Mingshi Lu*.

⁷³ In Arabic, it is Zarafah; in English, it is giraffe; it is called “Changjinglu” now.

⁷⁴ Zebra.

⁷⁵ Ostrich.

⁷⁶ Zhang Tiesheng, *ibid*, pp. 96-97.

3) India—Hormoz—Aden—Cape Guardafui—Eastern Africa Coast.⁷⁷

Some scholars believed there were 5 routes:

- 1) Sumatra—Maldives—Egypt;
- 2) Sumatra—Maldives—Mogadishu;
- 3) Xiaogelan—Maldives—Mogadishu;
- 4) Bieluoli—Maldives—Magadishu;
- 5) Bieluoli—Brava.⁷⁸

In fact, the above classifications had the same basic routes. There were at least three sea routes from China to eastern Africa coast.

- 1) China—Quilon of India—Mogadishu.⁷⁹
- 2) China—Bieluoli of Ceylon (or Male of Maldives)—Brava.⁸⁰
- 3) China—Male of Maldives—Mogadishu.⁸¹

Zheng He's fleet could also sail from Aden (or Egyptian ports) and Cape Guardafui to the coast of eastern Africa.

4.2.3. Porcelains from China

Because of the sea routes between China and eastern Africa, Chinaware were transported to Africa in large numbers. Blue and white porcelain, which were mainly made in Jingde Zhen, was the mainstream product of chinaware at that time; the production of blue and white porcelain made a big progress during the Xuande Period, in glaze, color, shape and emblazonry. Therefore, chinaware that were sold to Africa in Ming dynasty was mainly blue and white porcelain. According to the statics of a Japanese scholar Koyama Fujio, there were 1656 pieces of blue and white porcelain in the remains of Fustat in Egypt, while there were fewer pieces of Longquan celadon and only 7 pieces of color porcelain.⁸² In addition, chinaware of Ming dynasty was also found in other areas of North Africa, East Africa and middle-south Africa.⁸³

4.2.4. Trade between China and Africa

Sino-African trade also made a great progress in Ming dynasty. Zheng He's voyages to the West definitely promoted the trade. According to *Xingcha Shenglan* by Fei Xin, the fleet exchanged local products with Chinese products. In Zhubu, "(people) use tuzhu, duanjuan, gold and silver, porcelain, pepper and grain." In Mugu Dushu, "(people) use gold, silver, seduan, sandalwood, grain, porcelain and color silk." In Bolawa, "(people) use gold, silver, duanjuan, rice, beans and porcelain."⁸⁴ China imported local products from Africa, such as ivory, rhinoceros horn, mastic, red sandalwood, zishu, shengjin, yazuidanfan, and moyao.

4.2.5. Maps

⁷⁷ Ai Zhouchang and Mu Tao, *ibid*, p. 75.

⁷⁸ Shen Fuwei, *ibid*, p. 462.

⁷⁹ "It took 20 days from Xiaogelan if the wind was favorable." Feng Chengjun, *Xingcha Shenglan Jiaozhu (Houji)*, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1954, p. 21.

⁸⁰ "It took 21 days from Ceylon Mountain and Bieluoli to the south." Feng Chengjun, *Xingcha Shenglan Jiaozhu (Houji)*, p. 24.

⁸¹ "???" Xiang Da, *Maps of Zheng He's Voyages*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1982 [1961], p. 57.

⁸² Ma Wenkuan and Meng Fanren, *ibid*, p. 50.

⁸³ In addition to the works of Ma Wenkuan and Meng Fanren, see R. Oliver, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. 3, pp. 574-575, 579-580.

⁸⁴ Cited from *Jiluben Huibian*, see Feng Chengjun, *Xingcha Shenglan Jiaozhu (houji)*, p. 20, p. 23, p. 25.

In the Ming Dynasty, the Chinese had a better image of African map. There is one atlas made by colorful silk (3.86X4.75 meters) in 1389, with identical rivers (the Nile and the Orange), and mountain (Drakensberg) in southern Africa.

Picture 5 Great Ming Atlas (1389,A.D.)



4.2.6. African Animals

Various goods from Africa and porcelains from China indicate the bilateral communication and trade activities between both sides. What's more, China also imported some African animals such as giraffe, ostrich and zebra. Here are picture of two African animals, Zebra and Giraffe, which appeared in Chinese literature and paintings. In the literature, Giraffe is called "Ju-la" (祖蜡), which appeared in the explanation of "Bibaro State" (弼琶罗国), e.g., Berbera, a place located at the middle belt of today's Somali.⁸⁵ "Ju-la" is a transliteration of Persian word "zurnāpā", which in Arabic is "zarafa".⁸⁶ Therefore, Ju-la is a literary translation of Giraffe. With the Zebra, the two Chinese characters "Fu-lu"(福鹿) are "happy" (or "good fortune") and "deer", therefore, the ancient Chinese took Zebra as "fortune deer".

⁸⁵ Zhao Rukuo, Zhu Fan Zhi.

⁸⁶

Picture 6 Zebra and Giraffe



图 1-1 中国古籍中的非洲动物——长颈鹿与斑马

Did Zheng He arrived in Kenya and the south of Tanzania? According to current research, no direct evidence could be found to prove that Zheng He had been to the south of East Africa or South Africa. However, some western historical materials seem to provide something for deduction. When Vasco da Gama arrived at the coast of Mozambique after rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1498 for the first time, he and his crews sent local Africans some gifts including clothes and food. To their confusion, local people did not really seem concerned about their gifts and told them that some whites⁸⁷ navigated the same kind of ships like theirs from the place where the sun rises.⁸⁸ This indicates, from one aspect, that Chinese may have come there. In addition, when anthropologists carried their survey in Pate island of Kenya, they found that local Shanga's ancestors came from Shanghai according to oral legends of Shanga and that it was where the name of Shanga came from.⁸⁹

Geographical works by western missionaries who came to China during this period mentioned Africa. It played a role in introducing Africa.⁹⁰ In sum, we can get the conclusions

⁸⁷ I have been to Ghana before and stayed at the house of an African friend. They usually regarded Chinese as whites, instead of yellows.

⁸⁸ Philip Snow, *The Star Raft*, p. 35.

⁸⁹ Report on Shanga Excavation, 1980, by Mark Horton of Cambridge University, cited from Philip Snow, *The Star Raft*, p. 33.

⁹⁰ Such as Matteo Ricci's *Great Universal Geographic Map*, Giulio Aleni's *Zhifang Waiji* and Ferdinand Verbiest's *Kunyu Tushuo*. See Chen Yulong, "The Introduction of Posthumous Manuscripts of Mr. Xiang Da—*Zi Mingchu zhi Jiefangqian (1405-1948) Zhongguo yu Feizhou Jiaotong Shiliao Xuanji Shuming*", Yan Wenru and Chen Yulong, eds., *Festschrift of Mr. Xiangda*, Urumqi: Xinjiang People Press, 1986, pp. 22-45.

below about Sino-African relation in Ming dynasty.

1) China and states in North African and East Africa developed a pretty close relationship. They often sent envoys and gifts to each other.

2) From the aspect of official relation, China took the leading position and at least they felt so. The fact that some African states took the initiative to sent envoys and gifts to the court of Ming dynasty may illustrate the idea.

3) Zheng He's voyage to the West was a great event of world significance. It reflects not only China's national power and navigation skill, but also make the occasional non-governmental trade relation between China and Africa develop into regular official relationship.

4) Zheng He's voyage to the West enabled China's understanding of Africa to have a qualitative leap. In several literatures that recorded Zheng He's fleets' routes, there were as many as 16 names of African states or regions which were mentioned.

5) With Zheng He's voyage to the West, Sino-African business relationship further strengthened, which could be seen from the excavated materials from Africa and China's imported goods.

Unfortunately, the peaceful and friendly diplomatic relation between independent states that own sovereignty did not continue. After Ming Renzong, the attack of conservative bureaucrat and the policy of isolation greatly handicapped the Sino-foreign relations and China's foreign trade. Sino-African relations were also influenced.

Afterwords

It is worth mentioning that although there were records of "Kunlun Nu"(black slaves) in old Chinese literatures, more Africans started to come to China after Western colonists invaded Africa and China. At that time, Portuguese colonists brought some black slaves to China's coastal areas. According to the records, there were 7,000 people in Aomen and 5,100 of them were slaves, mainly African black slaves. There were black soldiers in Zheng Zhilong's army. In 1661, to defend China's territory Taiwan, Zheng Chenggong had a fierce fight with Dutch colonists. During the fight, black soldiers fought bravely together with Zheng Chenggong and helped to defend the territory successfully.⁹¹

That is a new page of the contact between China and Africa after Da Gama.

⁹¹ Philip Snow, *The Star Raft*, pp. 39-40.