

THE EUROPEANS DISCOVERY OF XINA

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THE FRIAR'S MISSIONS AND MENDOZA'S BOOK

THE TESTIMONY OF TWO MAPS

The cultural level of the Sangleys also becomes obvious through a map. From the moment they landed in the Philippines, the Spanish had been trying to obtain a map of China, appealing first to the Portuguese of Macao, who flatly refused to provide it. Then they turned to the Chinese, who produced some freehand drawings done in situ. But to take a map of China out of China was no mean feat.

Maps had a strong political charisma and it was strictly forbidden to take them out of China. But the Sangleys produced a map, and not a minor one, certainly not one that could be bought in an ordinary bookshop. This was a huge printed map: the Seville Indian Archive has the only extant copy of it. It has the shape of a classical Ming map, with China occupying all the surface in a perfect rectangle. And, as was usual in Ming maps, and as its title signals, it contains both ancient and modern information, with an exhaustive reference to all Chinese administrative levels accompanied by long historical explanations. This is an extraordinary map, crammed with encyclopedic knowledge, in which long inscriptions summarize the history of the different provinces and bordering states. The oversized Korea and the misplaced Japan and Ryukiu islands are also in tune with classical Ming maps. The provincial boundaries are clearly drawn, and all the biggest cities of each province are present. It also shows the Great Wall, with mention of it being started by the first emperor Qin Shihuang Ti, the sources of the river Huanghe, and the various courses followed by the lower Huanghe throughout history.

As usual in these Ming maps, the tributary nations such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Sumatra, Java and so on appear flattened around the essential body of China in the southwest corner of the map, as if they were a prolongation of China proper. The map was immediately sent to Spain together with a lengthy translation of its numerous inscriptions.

The translator, probably Rada, was helped by a Fujianese interpreter, because all transliterations appear in Minnan, Fujian's dialect. Not being in the least a maritime router, this map must have been brought to Manila on purpose and well protected, because it is in perfect

state. Judging from its size, its accuracy and its style, this map has to come from a scholar's studio, probably from the family house of the Sangley that provided it, in exchange for some exclusive favour in the trading contracts with the Spanish. It clearly points to a very close family relationship between the Manila Sangleys and the Fujian gentry.

The economic links between the Sangleys and the great merchant families of Fujian are also easy to discern. This is the case, for instance, of another Sangley, named Sinsay. Like Canco, he appears often and from the very first years selling iron and silks to the Castilian newcomers. He also appears, again together with Canco, accompanying a failed Dominican expedition to China in the early 1590s: both Canco and Sinsay were eager to achieve and control an easier relationship between the Spanish and the Chinese. The involvement of Sinsay with the Spanish is clear from the fact that he managed to learn Spanish and act as interpreter both when the Limahon pirate landed in Manila and when the Rada expedition went to China in 1575. But it wouldn't be fair to imagine these Philippine Chinese as people exclusively involved in a Fujian-Manila trade.

The well established sea lanes connected the Chinese Fujian merchants with every port city stretching from Japan to Indonesia. They did business with the Philippines of course, but also with the ports of Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, the Malay Peninsula and ultimately with Java. One has to keep in mind that in the 16th century, in spite of the presence of Portuguese and Spanish colonists - and even the Dutch and English when they arrived at the turn of the century - the control of East Asian waters was always in the hands of East Asian sailors.

A 17th century Chinese text gives a thorough description of the Fujian ships: they were over ten meters in the beam and over thirty meters long. These ships needed a capital investment to be built, and every year, on returning, they had to be refitted. The Fujian families also had to employ skilled and expensive pilots capable of finding their way in the network of maritime lanes that the routers signalled.

One further proof of active inter-Asian trade has been provided by the 2008 discovery in the Bodleian library of the Selden map, a router that was probably made for a Chinese merchant family with ties to Fujian. This unique piece of Chinese merchant cartography corroborates Spanish documents, which had already hinted at the international ties of the Chinese Diaspora. And Martin de Rada had also noticed that the Chinese used maritime routers in their ships.

The Selden map is a huge map, probably made for display, whose complex maritime routes were drawn with technical instruments and which adds to the extremely accurate commercial routes a striking depiction in six colours of rivers, mountains, trees, isolated or in plantation rows, flowers, and even butterflies overflying the Great Wall. The detailed itineraries that connect the South China Sea with Japan and the Philippines provide an unmatched picture of the original commercial vitality of East Asia. The transcription of the map gives an accurate idea of the outstanding number of China seas city ports where Fujianese sailors were doing business at the beginning of the 17th century. The highly detailed mention of all the available ports in the Philippines, highlights the importance of Manila, with its bay neatly drawn, and specifies its connection with Pacific trade.

European historiography has over-emphasized the role of its own men as the key players in launching the first globalization. But at least in East Asia, global trade was constructed on the bases of the well structured global networks that were already in place many centuries before the European arrival.