

The Origins of Omani-China Friendship: A Historical Review

Abdullah Saleh Al SAADI^①
(Embassy of Oman in Beijing)

Abstract: *Oman and China are both of importance in world history and in the international system. Therefore the study of the relation between Oman and China and the two countries' historical interactions and present intercourses is of great significance. This paper emphasizes the relations between Oman and China and its influence on each other and the impact of the relations between Oman and China on the international system and international relations from a historical perspective.*

Key Words: *Omani-China Relations; Diplomatic History; China and the Arab Nation; Civilization Exchanges*

Both Oman and China have long histories from ancient times, and the intercourse between the two countries have never discontinued for thousands of years. This article consists of four parts, which are the period before the Tang dynasty, the Tang dynasty, the Song and Yuan dynasties and the Ming and Qing dynasties. This article expounds the intercourse between Oman and China before the foundation of the Republic of China.

I. In the Period before the Tang Dynasty

Since ancient times, the Arabian Peninsula has been the transfer

^① Dr. Abdullah Saleh Al Saadi is the Omani Ambassador to China.

station between East and West, and it is also the bridge for the communication of the African countries and Asian countries. Oman is located in the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula, and it is the distributing center for the goods in the business between the East and the West. At the same time, it is inevitably the essential passage for the vessels traveling between the East and the West. Muscat, the capital city of Oman, was a bay of great importance for the maritime traffic between Oman and other Gulf states.

The Sohar harbor in Oman, situated on the shore of the Batinah, the north of Muscat, is the gateway to the Indian Ocean. The bays there are splendid with rich products. It was once one of the biggest harbors in Asia and the fourth famous city in the Islamic world from the 4th century to the 10th century. Until to 15th century, trade on the sea here was still booming. Every 10th-15th in July in the Islamic calendar, there was a great bazaar held here, and businessmen from many Arab countries and countries on the east shore of Africa came here for their business. Great amount of ivories, spices, and the specialties of the Arab countries would be sold to China and the East from Sohar harbor. Sohar was a primary harbor for the friendly relations between ancient Arab countries and China. Yagoot Hamayw, an Arab geologist, considered Sohar as "the gateway to China" in his work *Dictionary for Names of Places* (Wilkison, 1997).

The background of the historical communication of Oman and China is the interaction between Arab area and China. As one of the actors of the Arab world in politics, economy, and culture, Oman completely participated in the communication process with China.

In ancient times, the Chinese people who inhabited on the land of the East Asia had much touch and communication with their neighbors around them. However, it was Zhang Qian, who lived in the West Han Dynasty, who explored the traffic between China and the Central Asia directly, which was definitely recorded in the

historical reference. In 138 B.C., Zhang Qian was commissioned by Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty to visit the West Region^①. He visited Farghana (大宛), Yuezhi (大月氏), Bactria (大夏), Sogdiana (康居), and didn't return until 126 B.C. In 115 B.C., he was commissioned to visit the West Regions again. This time he got to Wusun (乌孙), and let his assistants to visit the countries in West Asia respectively, including the one which developed to Oman now. Most of his assistants came back with the envoys of these countries to give tributes to the Han Dynasty, and this was the beginning of the associations between the governments of the Han Dynasty and the Arabian countries. Zhang Qian's visits to Arab countries were not easy and of enormous feat. At that time, on one hand, he had to overcome the mistrust and suspicion of the bristly tribes and countries in the West Region to the Han Dynasty; on the other hand, he also had to overcome the geographical danger of traveling over the Pamirs, also known as "the Roof of the world". According to his contemporary famous Chinese historian Sima Qian praised, Zhang Qian explored the route to the West Regions.^②

Back with Zhang Qian from his two visits to the Western Regions was the large number of information relevant to the Central Asia and the West Asia. He and his companions probably learned about the West Asia from Anxi People (安息人), and called it "Tajik" (条枝国), which is from the pronunciation of the Persian "Tajik". Historical Records (finished in about in 91 B.C.) and Chronicles of the Han Dynasty (finished in about in 84 A.D.) have the information of Tajik, and this is the first formal record about the West Asian countries in Chinese historical books.

Since then, the Han Dynasty sent increasing numbers of envoys to the West Asian countries, sometimes more than ten in one year. The

^① The Western Regions is a Han Dynasty term for the area west of *Yumen Guan*, including what is now Xinjiang and parts of Central Asia.

^② *Historical Records, Biography of Zhang Qian.*

envoys took eight or nine years to and from if it was far from China, and if it was near, it took two or three years. These were still delegates of great scales at that time. Actually these envoys conducted some business during their visits. They took specialties of China, such as silk, with them when they left China. After they passed through Hexi Corridor and traveled over Pamirs, they went to the Central Asia and the Arabian Peninsula with Chinese specialties, and then they sold them to Europe. Thus, the way they took when the envoys came back got the name “the Silk Road”. We can say that this is the first record in Chinese history books about the communication between China and the West Asia. In the period of Wang Mang’ usurping during the West Han Hynasty (9-23 A.D.), this road was once interrupted. In the East Han Dynasty, another famous explorer Ban Chao (31-102 A.D.) got through the traffic to the Western Regions again. Owing to Ban Chao and Gan Ying’s visits to the West Region, when they returned with much information about the Arabian Peninsula, the name “Oman” appeared in Chinese books. In *Chronicles of the Later Han Dynasty* (后汉书), it is recorded that if go westward for about three thousand four hundred miles you will arrive in Oman; go on for about three thousand six hundred miles it is Binns kingdom (宾斯国), then get across the river on the south of Binns Kingdom and turn southwest to Yuluo Guo (于罗国), after nine hundred and sixty miles, then you arrive at boundary of Parthia (安息国), then go southward by ship you will get to Daqin (大秦). This is the earliest record of Oman in Chinese ancient books.^①

Chinese people took the lead in getting through the overland traffic from the East Asia to the West Asia under the Han Dynasty, and then it was the Arabs who hewed out the ship route from the Red Sea and the Gulf, going through the India Peninsula and the Malay Peninsula to the south of China around that time. The shipbuilding technology and navigation technology of ancient Oman

^① *The Chronicles of the Laterr Han Dynasty, Biography of the West Regions*. Vol.118.

was very famous. Sohar was once called "the gateway to China" by the Arab geologists. This obviously reveals the fact that people of Oman contributed a lot to connect the East and the West through the sea.

In Volume 88, the *History of Late-Han Dynasty*^① refers to the Land of Anxi in "the Sect of West Region". Here, it clearly records the geographic location of Oman, which is the earliest in recorded history. It says that going west for 3400 li (1700 km) from the Land of Anxi (today's Iran), one could reach the Land of Oman, namely today's Oman; going west for 3600 li (1800 km), one could get to the land of Sibir, near Bagdad of Iraq today. The original document is as follows:

"Going West for 3400 li (1700 km) from the Land of Anxi, one could reach the Land of Aman; going west for 3600 li (1800 km), one could get to the Land of Sibir."

According to the history books of China, Chinese merchant ships had arrived in the Gulf in latest about the 5th century A.D., namely in the Liu Song Period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties.^② In the sixth century, in his *Golden Prairie*, the famous Arab historian Masud said, China's merchants often visited the Gulf. At that time, Chinese boats could directly reach Oman, Bahrain, Basra, etc., and ships from those cities can directly reach China (Na, Z., 1979). It is obvious that the maritime traffic between China and Arabian areas was expedited.

II. Under the Tang Dynasty

Communications between China and the Arab world, beginning from the Tang Dynasty, developed a lot in the Song and

^① *The History of Late Han Dynasty* is a classic of block-printed edition, finished in 28th year of Jiajing Reign, Ming Dynasty(1549), written by Fan Ye (in Nanchao Song Dynasty), noted by Li Xian (in Tang Dynasty and recorded by Sima Biao).

^② Biography of the South China, *History of Song Dynasty*.

Yuan Dynasties due to the fact that there was the powerful Tang Empire in the east, and at the same time, Islam, founded by Prophet Mohammed, helped unite the Arab world and setting up the Arab empire.

Since ancient times, the Indian Ocean has been the cradle of maritime traffic. In the 5th century A.D., China's ocean-going vessels had ever got to the Gulf. Under the Tang Dynasty, as "the Spices Road" opened up, trade through the sea between China and the Arab countries became increased considerably. At that time, Chinese ocean-going vessels were high up to two or three layers, which could directly sail to the Gulf. Many Arab merchants did business in India and China using Chinese ships. In order to develop the overseas trade, the Tang Dynasty first set up super-intendancies of Merchant Shipping in Guangzhou. More Arab merchants, including Omani merchants, came to China to do business and settle there. Large number of ships loaded with Chinese and Omanis sailed on the vase blue sea. What a spectacular scene it was! The Arab world was called Tajikin the Tang Dynasty, which is from the pronunciation of the Persian words "Tajik" or "Tazi". Before Islam spread, Prophet Mohammed had been to places such as Palestine and Syria, so he knew something about China. However, the first envoys of Tajik were sent to China in 651 A.D., when it was under Ottoman rule, the third Caliph. From then on, more envoys were sent. According to the material of the Tang Dynasty, Tajik envoys sent to China were 39 times, which was one time in less than four years in average during 651 A.D. to 798 A.D..

The coastal area of the Arabian Peninsula is one of "the ancient birthplaces of the world civilization". For thousands of years, peoples in this area, including the Omanis, had already mastered the irrigation technology, learned to irrigate with ground water, and built complex irrigation systems. In plateau areas and grassland areas of Oman, the nomadic livestock farming had developed at very early times.

Handicraft industry and business of Oman were flourishing. Since ancient times, Omani people were famous in the world for shipbuilding and navigation. British historian Vere Gordon Childe wrote: "The southern coastal areas of the Arabian world, especially the areas around Oman, are the birthplace of the navigators who do business with Ethiopia, Sindh and the Gulf." The Arabian Sea is named after these navigators. As early as 4000 B.C., these maritime trade centers had already flourished. Five thousand years ago, the Sumerians living in Iraq called Oman "Maghan Country". In Sumerian, "Maghan" means "ship". It reveals that residents in Oman lived on shipbuilding and sailing. Oman had built many large ports on its coasts, with shipyard and wharf, the largest of which are Sohar, Muscat, Sour etc. Oman's wooden junks possess superb seaworthiness performance: fast, agile, light with special technology of shipbuilding. People of Oman had great contribution to the development of navigation passes on the Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the maritime traffic between the East and the West.

In 750 A.D. Abu Abbas overthrew the Umayyads Dynasty with the help of the rebellion of the Arabs and then established the Abbasid Empire. In order to tie Chach (which is Tashkent now) with the Tang Empire, the viceroy of Khorasan and his soldiers defeated the army of the Tang Empire under the leadership of the military governor Gao Xianzhi in Talas in 751 A.D. In 752 A.D., a year after the Talas war, the first recorded envoys of the Abbasids were sent to China, and others were sent continually after that. Sometimes they even went to China several times in a single year. Therefore, no wonder the Abbasids had ever sent his army to China to help Tang Suzong quell the riot in 757 A.D. when the "An Shi Rebellion" happened in China. It is said that when he established his new capital, Baghdad, in 762 A.D., the second caliph of the Abbasids Mansur said: "We are lucky enough to have the Tigris River to get touch with the faraway lands, like China." (Needham, 1954) His words strongly

prove that the friendly intercourse between the two were frequent.

It was this frequent friendly intercourse that further enriched the Chinese people's geographical knowledge of the Arab areas. A famous geologist Jia Dan in the Tang Dynasty recorded in minute detail Chinese traffic conditions outwards, which describes the situation from Guangzhou to Oman. At that time, Persians occupied Sohar regions in Oman, and the Persian governor garrisoned Sohar nearby. Persians named Sohar "Mazun". According to Jia Dan, going northwest for eleven days from Mazun, you can get to the estuary of the Euphrates, after passing by Basra, then take land route toward northwest for a thousand miles to reach the capital of the Khalif, Baghdad. According to the materials found in Oman, the route for commerce from Aden to Baghdad, indeed, passed through Oman, and Sohar. Jia Dan's records basically accord with geographical conditions of the Arabian Peninsula (*Records of the Geography, New History of the Tang Dynasty*).

Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Yangzhou, and other cities constituted important ports for oversea trade of the Tang Empire. In 760 A.D., a military official Liu Zhan rebelled, the government of the Tang Empire sent army to Yangzhou to quell the rebellion. During this quelling, thousands of Arabs and Persians lost their lives. It shows that there were many Arab and Persian merchants living in Yangzhou. Guangzhou was a gateway to China by sea, so Arabian merchants there were more numerous. There is a piece of precious material, named Chain of History (Silsilah al - Tawarih). It was written, in 851 A.D., about what he had seen and experienced by an Arab merchant, Suleiman, who did business in China in the ninth century, after his travelling to China and India, and later an Arab historian, Abu Sayid Hasan supplemented this material (the supplement were finished in about 916 A.D.). In this supplement, it is said that Chinese government levied taxes on foreigners in Guangzhou at that time, so it fairly certain that there were 120,000 Muslims, Jews, Christians and

Zoroastrians in Guangzhou at that time, and that was indeed a large number.

Besides Yangzhou and Guangzhou, Arabians also lived in Quanzhou. Now outside the East Gate of Quanzhou, on the Lingshan Mountain there are the graves of Muslims, Sanxian and Sixian, who came to China to do missionary works during the Tang Dynasty. The Tang Empire and the Arabian world communicated extensively with each other not only through the sea, but also through the land. The fact that Tajik commissioned its army (probably the army garrisoned in the Central Asia) to help the Tang Empire quelling "the An Shih Rebellion" bears witness to it. In addition, the previously mentioned Hassan recorded in his work that a man was seen carrying a bag of musk, to leave from Samarkand, after passing through many Chinese cities, and finally get to Guangzhou. According to this, we can see the prosperity of the land traffic between the two at that time.

As for the Gulf, Oman was not only one of the important distributing centers but also a process-required hub that the ships passing. Suleiman mentioned Muscat of Oman repeatedly in his itinerary, and Hassan considered Oman as an essential port for the trade to China. Hassan mentioned that due to the Huang Chao's Rebellion, the business in Guangzhou was deeply influenced, and thus many of the people of Oman who had lived on the business with China bankrupted everywhere then.

As large quantities of Islamic Arabs swarmed into China, many of them settled here for a long-term, and they even married and had children, which contributed to the spread of Islam to China. Under the second Chaliph Omar (634-644 A.D.), Islam began to expand beyond the Arabian Peninsula. In 636 A.D. the Arabs defeated the Byzantine army and occupied Damascus. In 638, they entered Jerusalem, in 640 A.D. Syria, Palestinian etc., and then in 642 A.D. conquered the Sassanids and Egypt and occupied Alexandria, consequently they monopolized the land route to China. In China, the

Muslim Arabs' arrival appeared earlier than the religious need of these merchants, and then the Islamic missionaries arrived in China, too. Therefore, the possibility of large numbers of Muslim merchants' commercial activities in China should be dated no earlier than 642 A.D..

In the middle of the 8th century A.D. a famous navigator of Oman, Abu Obide Xinya Tuoluo Qasim, sailed across the Indian Ocean along "the Spices Road", and came to visit Guangzhou in the middle of the eighth century. His visit was kept in written records, and he became the first recorded navigator from Oman to China.

In the middle of 9th century, the Arab navigator Suleiman wrote a book titled *The Itinerary of Suleimanto the Orient* after he returned home from China and India where he did business for many years. The book recorded the route sailing east from Oman to China, namely, starting from the Gulf, passing by the Arabian Sea and India, and from India Malabar coast, going through the Malacca Strait, the Bay of Bengal, South China sea, then arriving in Guangzhou. This record basically conforms to that in a book of Jia Dan named *Gu Jin Qun Guo Xian Dao Si Yi Shu* (古今群国县道四夷述). This famous maritime route for trade was as important as the "Silk Road", and was called the "Spices Road".

The information about the maritime route in Suleiman's book provides proof to the research of the maritime route between the East and the West. There are many vivid descriptions of the situations of the Arabs in China at that time. According to this, we know that early in the Tang Dynasty, in Guangzhou there were living areas specifically for Arabs, with a government-appointed Arab Muslim leader to manage the litigation and religious activities. There is still a Huaisheng Temple in Guangzhou now, which is said to be one of the earliest mosques built in China. Although there is not yet conclusive evidence whether it was built under the Tang Dynasty, according to the records of Suleiman, there had been mosques in

Guangzhou in the 9th century anyway.

Along with the frequent exchanges between China and the Arabian world, there would be a large number of cultural and technological communications. One of the most significant facts was Chinese paper-making technology spread westward. Under the Song Dynasty China's ocean-going sailing industry got a huge development. At that time China was very active in sailing on the Indian Ocean. The traces of Chinese vessels could not only be seen at the Gulf, but also in the Red Sea and even on the East African coast. During the inspection of the maritime traffic between China and the Arab world during the Tang and Song eras, there is a noteworthy fact that before the Sui and Tang dynasties, Chinese monks often traveled overseas by foreign vessels, and then in the Tang and Song dynasties, and especially the Song dynasty, foreign businessmen came to China mostly by Chinese boats. According to French scholar Paul Pelliot's research, in 762 A.D., Du Huan was in a Chinese vessel when he returned home from the Gulf to Guangzhou. Rules for the trades of ship transportations in the Yuan Dynasty were made mostly following that of the Song Dynasty, so it could be known from the regulations of the Yuan Dynasty that foreigners had been allowed to get aboard on Chinese vessels during the Song Dynasty. From this we can see the large number of foreigners who took Chinese ships then because that was the same time when China's shipbuilding technology and navigation technology were getting great progresses.

III. Under the Song Dynasty

In the 10th century, the confrontation between the Song and Liao regimes worsened in China. Both had communications with Tajik mainly through land transportation and sea transportation, respectively. According to Chinese historical records, in 924 A.D., Tajik once sent envoys to the Liao Dynasty. In 1021 A.D., the Liao

Dynasty even consented to the request of the king of the Tajik, and married a princess to a royal prince of Tajik, son of the king of a Central Asian country who converted to Islam. In 966 A.D., a monk traveled to the West Regions with an official letter to the Tajik from the Song Empire. From the first year of the Kai Bao (968 A.D.), Tajik had continued to send envoys to the Song. According to the existing historical statistics, in the 284 years from 924 A.D to 1207 A.D., there were roughly 43 batches of recorded envoys between the two countries, that is, one batch in every six years.

In the latter half of this period, the entire Islamic world faced the threat of the Crusades, and the Abbasids had been replaced by the Seljuk Turks to dominate Mesopotamia, and Anatolia was in a long period of war, so the envoys from these areas to China were from the Arabian world, such as Jeddah, Maghera, Sohar, and even East Africa, Kenya and other countries, while the envoys from Tajik were mostly sent by the caliph.

It was in this period that China's porcelain technology was spread to the Arab world and then to Europe. Chinese porcelain (as well as silk, medicine, etc.) was sailed oversea in large quantities. In recent decades, from the Gulf of Basra and other places, to the Gulf of Aden, East African coast, a lot of the Song Dynasty coins and porcelain fragments are found. This gives proof to the fact that Chinese vessels were numerous in this route then.

Under the Song Dynasty, China's ocean-going merchant ships also opened up a new "Spice Road", which was from Guangzhou (or Quanzhou), proceeding across the Indian Ocean, without passing through India, straight from the Sumatra to Dhofar regions. By taking this route, not only the distance was shortened, but the monsoons on the Indian Ocean could be taken full advantage of. In winter, when the northeast monsoon prevailed, they sailed straight to Dhofar regions by the west route. In the summer of the next year, when the southwest monsoon prevailed, they returned to Quanzhou or Guangzhou. In this

way, the time could be shortened by more than one third. The opening of new routes further strengthened the trade and friendly exchanges with Oman.

While returning, Chinese junks carried ivories, rhino horn, glass and pearls, agate and other exotic and goods from Maghera, Oman, but Arab spices were always in bulks. Perfume was prevalent among the upper classes of China, and the consumption of spices was indeed in a great number. Therefore, the Song government made spices a government monopoly. According to the foreign trade statistics, in the 10th year of Song Shenzong Xinin years (1077 A.D.), the frankincense collected in one place in Guangzhou was up to 174,336 Kg. Therefore, this "Spice Road", from Arabia to China could be as essential as the "Silk Road" during the Han Dynasty. The sea routes at that time, no matter the traditional one to the Gulf (passing by Sohar) or the new route across the Indian Ocean (to Dhofar), passed through Oman. In medieval times Oman's Dhofar regions were rich of and famous for frankincense. A record of Song, said: "Frankincense, or land incense, is from the mountains and the valleys of the Dhofar regions in the Arabian world." Therefore, this "Spice Road" is closely linked to Oman, and until now we can still see the fragments of porcelain, and complete porcelains of the Ming and Qing era in the museum of Muscat.

The friendly relations between Oman and China can also be found some available evidence from some of our literature works.

Zhao Rushi, the officer of Quanzhou Maritime Affairs, edited a book in 1225 titled *The Records Of Various Countries*, which documented the *Weng Man Guo* (瓮蛮国, that is, Oman). The records in this book about Oman's geographic location, customs, specialty, trade and monetary situation basically correspond with that in the Arabian historical books. The mentioned *Wu Ba Guo* (勿拔国) in Zhao Rushi's book might be Marbat in today's Dhofar. The book also referred to the *Nu Fa Guo* (奴发国), which many Chinese and foreign scholars

consider being Dhofar.

Under the Song Dynasty, China's navigation and shipbuilding industries became more advanced, and maritime traffic abroad was extremely popular. At that time, Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Mingzhou (Ningbo), Wenzhou, Xiuzhou (Jiaxing), Jiangyin, Mizhou (Zhucheng) and other places set up Maritime Affairs, to continually encourage foreigners to do business in China. The maritime trade and closer friendly exchanges between Oman and China increased exponentially. Oman merchants gave Chinese ivories, rhinoceros horn, pearls, precious stones and various spices, herbs they shipped from overseas, and got Chinese silk, porcelain, tea, gold, silver and coins in return. On the "Spice Road", there was a prosperous picture of clusters of sailing vessels, flocks of merchants, piles of goods.

Under the Song Dynasty, the number of merchants from Oman and other places of the Arab world who settled in Guangzhou, Quanzhou and other places in China increased. At the same time, merchants from Sohar, Oman, were also very powerful in Guangzhou.

Under the Song Dynasty, most of the foreign businessmen lived in Guangzhou and Quanzhou, and a large percentage of them were among the richest Arab businessmen. After the Southern Song Dynasty, due to the social and economic destruction in Anatolia caused by the wars, many of the Arabs moved eastward, and even settled in China permanently. At that time in Guangzhou and Quanzhou, there were areas for foreign businessmen to live in, known as *Fanfang* (蕃坊), with a leader in each of them who managed their own affairs and attracted foreign businessmen to trade in China. The leader was chosen by the Song government from these foreigners only if he was highly respected.

There was a noteworthy Arab businessman from Sohar in Guangzhou whose name was Xinya Tuoluo. He was once the leader of the *Fanfang* in Guangzhou, and the Song government specially gave him the honor "The Gui De General". Interestingly, the King's decree,

drafted by the famous writer and statesman of the Song Dynasty, Su Shi (1037-1101 A.D.), mentioned that the reasons why Xinya Tuoluo was given the honor was that Xinya Tuoluo had personally seen the emperor with some presents in Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty, and had contributed to attracting Arab traders, so he was called "Gui De General", in hope that he would make more efforts. Now the original words of the decree can still be found in Su Shi's collected works.

According to *History of the Song*^①, Xinya Tuoluo^② had told the Song government that he was willing to donate money to help repair the city wall of Guangzhou. Although his proposal was not accepted, this shows how rich he was. In the fifth year of Xining (1072 A.D.), he was prepared to return home from Guangzhou, Song Shenzong, the emperor, gave him "a white horse with a set of saddle and bun" in particular. A foreign businessman was surprisingly bestowed the honor of general, and was given presents by the emperor when he returned home, this indeed a privilege. This also provides evidences to the fact that the Omani people made outstanding contributions to the friendly exchanges between Oman and China.

In his book *Golden Grasslands and Gem Mining*, Masudi (who traveled to Guangzhou), an Arab historian and geographer, also recorded that in the sixth century, Chinese merchant ships regularly visited the Gulf, and could directly reach Oman, Bahrain, Basra and other places and vice versa. Sohar was also one of the major freight stations on the sea route from the countries on the East coast of Africa to China. According to Biography of *Ceng Shan Guo* (层檀国, now Zanzibar) in the *History of the Song*, with the tailwind on the sea, it would take 160 days from *Ceng Shan Guo* to Guangzhou, China,

^① The *History of Song Dynasty*, written by Tuo Tuo (Yuan Dynasty)etc., was carved by Ming Nanjing and revised by Ming Qingdi.

^② Xinya Tuoluo is a merchant of Sohar, Oman. The land of Muskat, according to academic appraisal, is Maskat or Mezoen on the east Coast of Oman.

passing by Sohar. In the third chapter of his work, Masudi also kept some records: "in order to get ivories, Zanzibar killed plenty of elephants. The ivories are transported to Oman, then to China and India."

IV. Under the Yuan Dynasty

The Mongolian nomads rose in East Asia in the beginning of the 13th century and Temujin was chosen as the Genghis Khan by the Mongolian tribes in 1206. After he unified Mongolia and gained most of the land in northern Jin Kingdom, he led his army to move westward and conquered the West Liao Kingdom and Huacizimu in Central Asia. Later during the reign of Ogodei, Mungo and Kublai Khan, the Mongols established the Golden Horde (1240-1480 A.D.) in Sarai along the Volga River, Ilkhanate (1258-1388 A.D.) in Iran, Afghanistan, Mesopotamia, and the southwest part of the Central Asia, the gedei Khanate on the west of Mongolia and the Chagatai Khanate in Central Asia and Xinjiang. In 1279 A.D. Kublai Khan overthrew the Southern Song Dynasty and established the Great Yuan Empire.

Of course, the expansion had brought great sufferings to the conquered people in this region, but on the other hand, it contributed a lot to the promotion of the traffic between the East and the West. Mongols paid much attention to the establishment of the post system in various places, and to the protection of the traffic between the East and the West. During the more than one thousand years since the Han Dynasty till then, traffic both on the sea and on the land were always blocked due to the political turbulence. However, till this period, since the Asia and the majority of the East Europe, areas from the Shanghai Pass to Budapest, were under the control of the Mongols, and the traffic was uninterrupted any more and reached its peak.

Since the establishment of the Abbasid Dynasty in the 8th century, the political situation of the Arab Empire was relatively stable.

Because of its location just it acted as a transport hub between the East and the West. The Arabs did large amount of translation of the Greek classical works on the one hand, and on the other hand they made many new contributions to the formation of the new Arabian culture by absorbing Eastern inventions, combining them with the characteristics of their own and doing their research. At that time the Arabs made great achievements in mathematics, astronomy, earth science, medicine and other fields. Furthermore, the establishment of the Mongolian Empire created a favorable environment for the scientific and cultural exchanges between China and the Arab world. Exchanges between the two regions reached their climax at that time.

For example, the application of powder was spread into Arabia in this period. Back under the Tang Dynasty, nitrate invented in China had already been spread to the Arabian area, and the Arabs called the nitrate the "Baruch de", meaning "Chinese snow". However, they only knew how to use it in making glass, medical treatment and alchemy. Until 1225-1248, gunpowder was introduced by the Arab traders via India. As the firearms for wars introduced to the Arabian areas, it was because of the war between the Mongols and the Arabians until 1258 that Hulagu Khan conquered Baghdad.

As mentioned above, since the Tang Dynasty, there were Arabs (including the Omani people) settling in China, marrying with Chinese women and having children for generations. This situation had a rapid development in the Yuan Dynasty. We know that the expansion of the Mongolian empire, was first westward and then Southward. After it conquered the Central Asia and the West Asia, large number of local young men were forced to join the army to attack the Southern Song Dynasty. These people from the Western Regions were generally called *Huihui* in Yuan dynasty, including Central Asians, Persians, and of course, many Arabians. After the founding of the Yuan Empire, they were not sent back, but settled in

the cantonment and reclaimed. It was impossible for these young men to bring their families with them to the East, so after they settled in China, they married local women, mostly Han women, and set up their own families, and got assimilated by the Chinese.

Among the people coming East to Yuan from the Western Region were intellectuals and people for the upper classes. They joined the Mongolian army and moved to China with their families or whole clan. In addition, some merchants voluntarily stayed in China, too. They resided in China for a long time and were gradually assimilated. According to the sequence of their conquests, rulers of the Yuan Dynasty divided the community residents into four classes: the first one, the Mongols; second, *Semu* (色目人, including the Hui people); the third, the Han people (referring to indigenous Liao, Jin ruled region residents); forth, the *Nan Ren* (南人, the residents of Southern Song territory). According to the four classes, the residents' political status and social status were quite different; therefore, *Semuren* often got more important and decent jobs. According to statistics, under the Yuan Dynasty, *Semuren* who worked as *Zaixiang* and *Pingzhang* (平章政事), administrators of public affairs in the central government) were as much as 32, and as for the officers in charge of the local administration at all levels they numbered much more than that.

One well-known figure is *Xianyang Wang* (咸阳王) Sayyid Ajjal Shams al-Din Omar (1211-1279 A.D.). According to the *History of the Yuan Dynasty*, he, a nobleman, was one of the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. When he was in China, he had even been the head of political affairs of Shanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan. Especially in his tenure in Yunnan, he actively built water conservancy projects, reclaimed about twenty acres of farmland in six years, promoted education vigorously, and improved the transportation between Sichuan and Yunnan. In this way, he contributed a lot to the development of the culture and production of Yunnan and the strengthening of the communications between Yunnan and the

Mainland. In addition, many of his descendants also served as high-ranking officials of the Yuan Dynasty.

A number of famous Arab scholars also emerged in Yuan Dynasty, such as the brother of Pu Shougeng, a famous poet at the end of the Song and the beginning of the Yuan. Another scholar Shansi (1277-1351 A.D.), an Arab whose family had settled in China for three generations, had been a senior official of the Yuan government. After his death, he was bestowed the honor of Marquis. He was erudite, and proficient in history. What is more, he finished many writings in his life, including *Biology of the Person* from the West Region and *Maps of the West Countries*, but unfortunately, they were both lost. The only one available now is found in the Yongle Canon named *He Fang Tong Yi* (河防通议), of two volumes.

After a long residence of the Arabs and other peoples from the West Regions in China, their intermarriage with Chinese women and bearing their own children, they gradually formed a new nation of China - the Hui people. By the Ming Dynasty, the Hui people became a member of the multi-ethnic Chinese nation.

V. Under the Ming and Qing Dynasties

In the early days of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the government laid stress on the contacts with foreign countries. The aim of sailing was later achieved by the fleet under the leadership of Zheng He, a eunuch of the Yongle Emperor (1403-1424 A.D.).

Zheng He was a Hui from Yunnan, and both his father and grandfather had been to Mecca for pilgrimage to obtain the title of Hajj. From this we discover that it was no accident that Zheng He could undertake the important task of the seven voyages to the Indian Ocean. From his first voyage in the third year of he Yongle (1405 A.D.) till his last returning in the eighth year of Xuande (in 1433), Zheng He went overseas for seven times and stayed at sea for nearly three decades.

During this he had been to the Indochina Peninsula, the Malay Peninsula, Malaysia, the Indian subcontinent, the Arabian Peninsula, the coastal countries of East Africa, totaling more than thirty countries, including Oman's Dhofar, Aden, Mecca and other countries, which located on the Arabian Peninsula. His deeds wrote a glorious page in the history of China's maritime industry.

According to the *History of the Ming: Biographies of Foreign Countries*, Dhofar sent envoys to the Ming Empire in the 19th year of Yongle (1421 A.D.), and the Yongle Emperor ordered Zheng He to bring gifts and credentials to Dhofar in return. This could be the sixth time for Zheng He to visit the Western part (the 19th to 20th years of Yongle, in 1421-1422 A.D.). Dhofar also sent envoys to the Ming Dynasty in return and arrived in Beijing in twenty first year of Yongle (1423 A.D.). In the fifth year of Xuande (1425A.D.) Zheng He's seventh voyage led him to Dhofar again. This time the king of Dhofar commissioned his envoys to go back with Zheng He to Ming; he arrived in Beijing in the eighth year of Xuande (1433 A.D.). Three years passed before these envoys set off home. These are the official records in the history books of the friendly exchange of envoys between Oman and China.

During his missions, Zheng He had Ma Huan, Fei Xin and Gong Zhen with him, who knew Arab. In this way, he obtained more first-hand materials of the Arabian Peninsula by going to these places personally without language barriers. These data recorded what they saw and heard during their mission which could indeed be valuable. Most of the records of these countries in History of Ming Dynasty came from the material Zheng He received in his mission which describes the exact situation of Dhofar. Generally speaking, the Arabian Peninsula is a dry place with very little rain, but the Dhofar region is just directly affected by the southwest monsoon, so rainfall here is abundant in summer, and this is suitable for farming, with vegetables and fruit trees green everywhere. Residents here still

maintain to this day the habit of incense, and we can also see the various glazed clay incense burner unique to Dhofar in the Muscat museum. History of the Ming Dynasty also keeps the record that when Zheng He and other Chinese envoys got to Oman, the king asked his people to take out frankincense, myrrh and other spices to trade with the Chinese guests. He also sent envoys to China to pay visit in return with frankincense and ostrich.

VI. Conclusion

As detailed above, we can see in the long period of 1500 years from the Han Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, the friendly relations between Oman and China experienced constant development. However, after the period of Wanli in Ming Dynasty, the friendly exchanges in maritime trade between Oman and China and other Arab countries gradually diminished, and even completely discontinued. One of the important reasons was the expansion of Western colonial aggression and piracy. From the 15th century to the 16th century, the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires rose. In 1468, the ships of Portuguese colonists sailed eastward around the Cape of Good Hope and broke into the coast of Oman in 1507. In 1508, the head of the Portuguese colonial army destroyed the harbor cities, such as Muscat, Sohar, etc.. He pillaged the wealth and forced thousands of residents into slavery. The Portuguese colonists established a number of fortresses along the coast of Oman to brutally rule the people of Oman. Then, they got further into Iraq and the coastal areas of India. They quelled the revolt of the native states all over, occupied Oman, Iraq, Iran and coastal areas of India, and continued to expand to Southeast Asia. Due to their aggressive expansion and piracy, the economy withered all around, the trade declined and the trade routes were cut off. Thus, after the mid-sixteenth century, Chinese merchant ships almost disappeared in

the west of the Malacca Strait, and China could not be interlinked with the Arab countries. One important reason was the armed aggression and expansion and piracy of Portuguese colonialists.

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