

***Book Review of “The Last Journey of The San Bao Eunuch Admiral Zheng He”
authored by Dr. Sheng-Wei Wang, published by Proverse Hong Kong in
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I was first immersed in Chinese classics during my early school years before embarking on a process of Westernized education and professional career. It gives me great pleasure in reviewing Dr. Wang’s latest painstaking “Sherlock Holmes” research to ascertain what might actually have happened to Admiral Zheng He’s sixth and seventh voyages to support Gavin Menzies’ claim in his seminal work “1421: The Year China Discovered the World” published in 2002.

Before this groundbreaking book, Dr. Wang already launched a Chinese-language book on 1 August, 2015 – 《鄭和發現美洲之新解》 or *New Evidence for Zheng He’s Exploration of the Americas* – in collaboration with Mark Nickless and Laurie Bonner-Nickless.

Dr. Wang has waded through a thicket of prominent ancient records in the original Chinese language, including official histories of the Ming Dynasty and antique Chinese maps bearing on the period in question. Having examined patterns of oceanographic currents, meteorological data, flora and fauna characteristics, cultural anthropology, and latest not-yet-published archaeological finds, she has found amazingly detailed clues of timelines and locational indications in the epic historical work of Luo Maodeng – 《三寶太監西洋記》 or *An Account of the Western World Voyage of the San Bao Eunuch* – published in 1597, consisting of 100 chapters and over 750,000 words.

Allowing for literary license and missing jigsaw pieces, Dr. Wang convincingly deduces, step by step, that during Zheng He’s seventh and last voyage (started from 1430 A.D.), his squadrons of the massive “treasure fleet” did not stay together throughout. Admiral Zheng He ordered his assistant envoy Hong Bao to lead a squadron to Gu-li/Calicut in India while he and the other Principal Envoy Wang Jinghong would lead the remaining fleet for wider explorations.

According to Dr. Wang, later (in 1432 A.D.), Hong Bao ordered Ma Huan and six other senior officers to board a Calicut merchant junk for trade to Tunisia and the delegation also went on a pilgrimage to Tunisia’s Mosque of Uqba in Kairouan, the “Mecca” of North Africa. After proceeding to the Arabian Sea, Hong Bao

himself visited Hormuz (in today's Iran) near the Persian Gulf. Eventually, he regrouped with Wang Jinghong in Calicut to return to China in July 1433.

Meanwhile, according to Dr. Wang's research, Admiral Zheng He and Wang Jinghong led the remaining fleet to visit Liushan/Maldives and several small countries in today's India before they proceeded to the east coast of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Hormuz, and Aden (in today's Yemen). There, Wang Jinghong separated company with Zheng He to escort envoys from eleven countries (including from Mecca) to pay homage to China. At this point, Admiral Zheng He, born to a Muslim family, decided to visit Mecca (in today's Saudi Arabia) on pilgrimage.

After Mecca, Admiral Zheng He went for the open ocean for wider explorations, presumably in search of the missing Imperial Seal of China (also a main objective of these extraordinary Voyages). Quoting detailed timeline and weather descriptions in Luo Maodeng's tome, including the sailing for some 100 days without seeing land, and some two more months in adverse weather conditions, Dr. Wang deduces from oceanic current patterns that the fleet probably followed the South Equatorial Current, the North Equatorial Current, the Gulf Stream and sailed against the Labrador Current to reach the Grand Banks – the world's foggiest area and a prolific fishing ground. After overcoming the dense fog, the fleet sailed for about one more month until they were stopped by an accident near the Labrador coast. The Cape Breton Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence is nearby. There, ruins with Chinese characteristics were first discovered in 2002 by Paul Chiasson, a local Canadian architect born on the island, who published his research findings in his May 2006 book – *The Island of Seven Cities: Where the Chinese Settled When They Discovered America*. With its strategic location facing the Atlantic Ocean and a temperate coastal climate, the island would be an ideal location to serve as the Chinese mariners' Atlantic base, as suggested by T. C. Bell, a surveyor specializing in Roman and Chinese engineering, who explored the island extensively in 2005.

Dr. Wang suggests that onwards, Admiral Zheng He's contingent used light river boats to cross consecutively the St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Huron and finally, Lake Michigan. The journey required the Chinese mariners to traverse two short land routes to pass the Niagara Falls and the Chicago swampland. From Lake Michigan they sailed down the Illinois River to reach the Mississippi River. At the junction – north of St. Louis – of the Mississippi River

and the Missouri River, the Admiral's boats docked. There, Zheng He's scout Wang Ming was sent to explore this foreign land and he encountered a strange city, Cahokia, a little over 30 kilometers from the shore. It was the largest pre-Columbian city north of Mexico, whose ruins became today's Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site in the central Mississippi Valley. Luo Maodeng called Cahokia the Fengdu Ghost Country (a city state). While trying to project Cahokia/Fengdu Ghost Country with an image similar to the legendary ghost city Fengdu in China to describe his narratives under a "veil", Luo Maodeng also explicitly pointed out that the two places were far apart.

Comparing ancient maps, Dr. Wang demonstrated that the Zheng He mariners' success in exploring the central Mississippi Valley probably relied on the earlier Chinese discovery of this area (but not the Great Lakes) during a journey of the sixth voyage approaching from the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr. Wang observes that ancient Chinese astronomy texts in the second century B.C. already had concepts of a spherical earth, and a Chinese ancient wooden map dated 1093 was found from a Daoist tomb unearthed in 1971 showing the profiles of the world's five inhabited continents including the Americas and Australia. This suggests that the Chinese discovered the contours of the actual world much earlier than the West.

Dr. Wang refers to findings of T.C. Bell about Moeraki being the largest Chinese harbor site in New Zealand and the "Moeraki stone balls" being scattered on the beachfront of the South Island. These stone balls are thought to be cannon balls of mobile giant catapults used by the Treasure Ships in their seventh voyage's skirmishes. Bell also discovered the ruins of a shipyard capable of building the largest Treasure Ship in the South Island as well as those of rammed earth walls with stone cores complete with a semi-circular city enclosure typical of ancient Chinese architecture in the North Island. Dr. Wang surmises that most probably New Zealand was a Pacific base for Treasure Ships, including those in the seventh and last voyage, which probably met an untimely destruction by the heat from a falling meteorite.

Dr. Wang refers to an artifact discovered in early 21st century, a plain copper medallion of seven centimeters in diameter with the inscription "*Authorized and awarded by Xuan De of Great Ming*": as first suggested by Dr. S. L. Lee, it may have been the medallion awarded to Admiral Zheng He by the Ming Emperor Xuanzong before the seventh and last voyage. The artifact was unearthed four

inches below the surface in North Carolina. Dr. Wang therefore poses the question whether Admiral Zheng eventually stayed and died in North America.

Dr. Wang's latest book is full of insightful deductions and analyses. Relying extensively on a historical novel, however erudite, has drawbacks. It is sometimes not easy to distinguish fact from fiction, especially in verbal conversations between characters. Nevertheless, the meticulous combination of oceanography, meteorology, botany, historical texts and maps, archeological finds, coupled with earlier research and collaboration with prominent scholars, lends much credence to the veracity of Dr. Wang's conclusions. A historical analogue may be the famous story of the Trojan Horse in Homer's epic poem *The Iliad*, which led to the archaeological discovery of Troy in Turkey. In a new era of expanding global Chinese connectivity, Dr. Wang's many fascinating leads may well blaze a trail for on-site carbon-dating archaeological research, which she would warmly welcome to substantiate or throw more light on her eye-opening findings or deductions.

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