

***The Nanhai 1*, Maritime Silk Routes, and Macao**

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The *Nanhai 1* was a wooden vessel of the Southern Song dynasty. Its wreck was found in the water in the vicinity of Shangchuan, Xiachuan Islands, Guangdong. It was also the first successful shipwreck salvage in its entirety after the underwater archaeological team was assembled by China. The ship could not have set sail before 1165 AD because, among the coins discovered in the wreck, the latest ones were those of *qiandao yuanbao* (乾道元寶) which were issued during the reign of the Emperor Xiaozong of Southern Song (1165–1173). The mid-Southern Song dynasty witnessed a heyday of China's maritime trade. The discovery of the *Nanhai 1* has made it a significant and valuable specimen for many research subjects on China's maritime history in the Southern Song dynasty, such as shipbuilding industry, maritime goods, porcelain trade, navigation technology, maritime route, etc. It provides with us an opportunity to have a direct empirical appreciation of many aspects of the Southern Song dynasty, including its artistic humanism exhibiting through elegant stylish utensils, its visions of the prosperous maritime trade, and its magnificence of thousands of technologically advanced ships pivoting around Quanzhou Port which was then the largest port in the East.

China is a maritime power with a coastline of 34,415 km, which is the sixth longest in the world. However, it has a history of being a land power, a self-centred celestial empire that valued the land more than the sea and so was unfamiliar with maritime knowledge and island culture. Therefore, it has not been a stable maritime power in the history. The official historical records show four historical periods that were important for China's early maritime trade, or four peaks:

1. Han dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Wu of Western Han in the 2nd century BC, the “Yellow Gates” imperial envoys set sail respectively from Rinan Commandery (now the central area of Vietnam), Xuwen of Hepu Commandery (now Guangdong Province), and Hepu (now Guangxi Province). They sailed to *Duyuan*, *Yilumo*, *Chenli*, *Fugandulu*, and eventually reached *Huangzhi*. During Emperor Ping's ruling in Eastern Han, envoys were dispatched to *Huangzhi*, *Yichengbu*, and *Pizong*.¹ Henceforth, China started the tributary trade with the nations in Southeast Asia and South Asia. As China's major export was silk at the time, the routes were later named the Maritime Silk Routes.

2. Sui and Tang dynasties. From the 6th to 9th centuries, Sui and Tang dynasties embraced the glory of the second peak of maritime trade in the history of China, witnessed by the Nanhai God Temple and the Huaisheng Mosque built respectively in Sui and Tang dynasties, as Canton was the primary port at the time. The Tang dynasty court set up Maritime Trade Official which initiated the regulatory system for the business. The Maritime Silk Routes of Tang dynasty prioritized “Guangzhou—Foreign Seaways”² that led to fifty-five countries and regions in Southeast Asia,

¹ *Book of Han* (漢書), 28 (2), “Geography” 8.

² *New Book of Tang* (新唐書), 43 (2), “Record” 33, “Geography” 7 (2).

South Asia, and the Middle East. At the time, a great number of Persian merchants travelled to Guangzhou, which consequently became the biggest trading port in the East where *Fanfang* was set up for foreigners' residence. However, the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763)³ in late Tang dynasty resulted in the northern nomads blocking the Silk Road to the Middle East; the Huang Chao Peasants Uprising (879)⁴ also in late Tang dynasty incurred a genocide of 100,000 Arabic merchants from Middle East in Guangzhou. After the two historical incidents, the land routes and waterways to the Middle East gradually declined.

3. Song and Yuan dynasties. In the 10th century, Northern Song dynasty moved its capital to Kaifeng. In the first year of Emperor Taizu of Song's ruling, the court re-instituted Maritime Trade Bureau in Guangzhou which was at the time still the most important port in China. They opened seven ports in total, including Mingzhou (now Ningbo), Hangzhou, Quanzhou, etc., and sanctioned partial free trade. There was another capital relocation from Kaifeng, Henan to Lin'an (now Hangzhou), Zhejiang in the Southern Song dynasty (12th to 13th centuries). Hence the south gradually outweighed the north in the status of the economy and so increased the court's reliance on the maritime routes in the south in diplomatic affairs. Therefore, the trade and maritime traffic in the South China Sea reached a heyday in the Southern Song period. It was in the two Song dynasties (especially Southern Song) that China became a true maritime power. Numerous ships loaded with delicate Chinese porcelains sailed from Ningbo, Quanzhou, and Guangzhou to Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. From that time to the Yuan dynasty, Quanzhou outgrew Guangzhou and became the most important port of China. The maritime routes in that time period are usually called Maritime Silk and Porcelain Routes. It was in this historical background that the *Nanhai 1* fully loaded with elegant Song dynasty porcelains hoisted its sails.

Although *Haojing* (an ancient name of Macao) had not risen to people's horizon in the two Song dynasties, its foundation of becoming a significant port in the future was laid in the Southern Song period. Xiangshan County, with the territories of Xiangshan Island (where Macao was) and the islets in its vicinity, was established in the 22nd year of the Shaoxing era of Emperor Gaozong of Song's reign (1152). "In the 22nd year in the Shaoxing era of the Song dynasty, townsman Chen Tianjue advanced the revamp in order to facilitate taxation. The magistrate of Dongguan county Yao Xiaozi made a proposal of Chen's idea to the court and was approved. The coastal areas of four counties, i.e., Nanhai, Panyu, Dongguan, and Xinhui, were taken to establish Xiangshan county, which was named after the town and was under Guangzhou's jurisdiction."⁵ The fact that the reason for establishment was to facilitate taxation proves the Xiangshan area, with its population and economic scale,

³ *New Book of Tang* (新唐書), 5, "From the Fourteenth Year of the Tianbao Era in the Reign of Emperor Xuanzong to the First Year of the Shangyuan Era in the Reign of Emperor Suzong"; 6, "From the Second Year of the Shangyuan Era in the Reign of Emperor Suzong to the First Year of the Guangde Era in the Reign of Emperor Daizong."

⁴ *New Book of Tang* (新唐書), 9, "The Sixth Year of the Qianfu Era in the Reign of Emperor Xizong."

⁵ *Gazetteer of Xiangshan County* (香山縣志) (*Jiajing Era of the Ming Dynasty*), 1, "Geography" 1.

was no longer considered remote or barren, and the authority recognized its potential maritime economic value. Although Haojing came to the stage of history in as late as the mid-Ming dynasty, historical records show that Emperor Duanzong of Song fled southward with the royal family to dodge the pursuit of Yuan's army. Emperor Duanzong's escape route was the southeastern coastline, which was the part of the Maritime Silk Routes, from Zhejiang to Fujian, and to the estuary of Guangdong's Pearl River. In the 12th month of the 2nd year in Southern Song's Jingyan era (Jan 1278), they reached the sea area of the Cross Gates channel just beyond Haojing and stationed in Jing'ao (now Dahengqin). The royal family received the protection of a group of local people and warriors in Xiangshan county led by Ma Nanbao, who also pledged a thousand piculs of millet to the emperor's army. Unfortunately, an unexpected typhoon hit this place: "Arrived at Jing'ao on the Bingzi day of the 12th month (Jan 16, 1278). Typhoon ruined the ships. He was nearly drowned and was sick. Ten days later, the soldiers re-assembled, forty percent dead."⁶ *Gazetteer of Guangdong* reads, "In the 12th month, the emperor's ship was moored in Jing'ao. Zhang Shijie fiercely fought off the attack of Yuan's army led by Liu Shen. *The New History of Ya Shan* reads, 'In the 12th month, Shijie ushered the emperor into Xiu hill and moved again to Jing'ao because of the Bingzi typhoon. The ship sank, and the emperor was nearly drowned. He was terrified and fell ill. After ten days or so, soldiers were re-assembled, forty to fifty percent dead. Liu Shen led another attack on Jing'ao, which was fought off by Zhang Shijie'."⁷ Emperor Duanzong died a few months later, followed by the demise of the Southern Song dynasty yet another year later. Besides, after the battle on the Lingding Channel near Macao, Southern Song's grand chancellor and military affairs commissioner Wen Tianxiang wrote down the famous poem *Crossing the Sea of Loneliness* that contains these two lines, "Whose life, ever since antiquity, is without death? / Let my loyal heart shine on the bamboo tablets!"⁸ Rhythmic and forceful, the poem reflects Chinese people's courage of defending the nation against the invasion of foreign powers and narrates a heart-rending poetic tragedy.

4. Ming and Qing dynasties. No maritime activity can be more critical than Zheng He's seven voyages to the West. China's ocean routes stretched beyond Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, and reached the coast of East Africa. In the early Ming dynasty, Zheng He's fleet set sail from Taicang (now Nanjing). *Zheng He's Navigation Map* recorded more than 500 place names. Some consider the end of Zheng He's voyages as the end of China's Maritime Silk Routes, but this view is incorrect. Despite Ming government's sea ban policy that forbade civilians' maritime trade both before and after Zheng He's voyages, China's conventional maritime trade with Southeast Asian countries had been going on; merchant ships from different nations kept sailing to China to do business. Moreover, some believe that Macao became an open port after the Portuguese settlement in 1557; thus,

⁶ *History of Song* (宋史), 47, "Biographic Sketches of Emperors" 47, "Yingguo Gong and Two Emperors."

⁷ Guo Fei, *Gazetteer of Guangdong* (廣東通志) (*Wanli*), 5, "Foreign Nations" 5, "Incidents" 4.

⁸ *Gazetteer of Xiangshan County* (香山縣志) (*Jiajing Era of the Ming Dynasty*), 7, "Art and Letters" 7, "Poetry."

[Translation from Zong-qi Cai, *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. 391.]

Macao was an exemplary port of the route of Europe's Age of Discovery; therefore, the conclusion goes Macao was not a port on China's Maritime Silk Routes.

However, it is historically untrue that the Portuguese had opened the port of Macao. *The Annals of Macao* clearly records that Macao became an open port in 1535 which was before the Portuguese settlement: "In the 14th year [of the Jiajing era], regional military commissioner Huang Qing accepted a bribe and proposed that the port be moved to Haojing with an annual levy of 20,000 gold ingots. Macao started its foreign trade because of Huang Qing."⁹ Because of Macao's geographical advantage, foreign merchants requested to do business at Haojing. With the approval of the authority, the port was moved from Dianbai to Haojing where Southeastern merchants gathered and did business. "Since then Haojing became the only port that accommodated a large number of ships, while all other ports were deserted."¹⁰ Besides, many other historical materials prove that there were at least merchants from five countries trading at Haojing before the Portuguese settlement: "The foreign merchants in Macao came from several places. The port of Guangzhou opened in the early Ming dynasty. It was moved to Dianbai county in the Zhengde era. It was moved again to Haojing in the Jiajing era, along with the merchants from Siam, Champa, Java, Ryukyu, and Boni. It was after that the Portuguese settled in."¹¹ Though slightly different, the record in *Gazetteer of Guangdong* also contains a record of the merchants from these three countries: Siam, Sunda (Java) and Champa. This record confirms that the port of Macao was not opened by the Portuguese.

Although the Portuguese settled in Haojing'ao in 1557, they were not the only nation trading there, whose glory was contributed by maritime merchants from various countries. In the 14th year of the Wanli era (1586), Guangdong's right provincial administration commissioner Cai Ruxian¹² visited Haojing'ao of Xiangshang. He recorded the physiognomic features and basic information of the merchants from many countries in the forms of writing and illustration collected in *Images of the Eastern Barbarians: An Illustrated Account of Eastern Barbarians*. He mentioned in this book: "Haojing'ao, Xiangshang of Guangdong is a place for foreign trade in Guangdong. Their stalls appeared and disappeared as they came and went. No harms were done. During the Jiajing era, the Superintendent of Coastal Defense Affairs improved their business, and they proposed to move from the outer Langbai into Haojing'ao, where became the most prosperous port throughout the years. Merchants from more than a dozen countries set up stalls. Barbarians haunted the place and were not subject to be questioned. Neither Guangdong nor Fujian had their household registrations. However, they were living in swamps among the locals and became a burden like warts. [...] A responsible administrative official tried to find out their countries of origin. There were twenty-four countries in total. The

⁹ Yin Guangren and Zhang Rulin, *The Annals of Macao*. (澳門記略) Annotated by Zhao Chunchen. The Macao Cultural Institute, 1992. p. 64.

¹⁰ Guo Fei, *Gazetteer of Guangdong* (廣東通志) (*Wanli Renyin*), 69, "Record of the Foreign" 3, "Barbarians."

¹¹ Yin Guangren and Zhang Rulin, *The Annals of Macao*. (澳門記略) "Foreigners in Macao" (attached with a list of foreign nations).

¹² The provincial administration was responsible for receiving the tributary envoys from foreign countries.

appearances of twenty were occasionally recorded with illustrations. [...] There are many past and present hearsay stories in the South China Sea, which were collected in this two-volume record.”¹³ It demonstrates that merchants from a total of twenty-four nations were doing business in Haojing’ao. Its author witnessed and illustrated the clothes of twenty of them. The nine nations clearly noted therein include Hui Hui, Ceylon Hill, Boni, Pahang, Sumatra Flores, Luzon, Keling, Camboja, and Sunda. It not only shows the scale of foreign trade in Haojing’ao in the second half of the 16th century but also provides a first-hand record of the place.

In the Qing dynasty, Guangdong’s customs office categorized foreign ships into Eastern and Western, which were subject to different tariff rates. Macao’s Portuguese ships were taxed at the rate for Eastern vessels. Emperor Kangxi in his last years intended to centralize the foreign trade to Macao. However, the Portuguese settlers in Macao worried the inception of other foreign merchants might incur crises for them. They greased some wheels and the Qing court consequently revoked the order.¹⁴ In 1723, Emperor Yongzheng lifted Emperor Kangxi’s 1717 sea ban which had forbidden Chinese nationals from sailing out to South China sea for business. In that year, forty Chinese trade ships voyaged to Batavia and Manila.¹⁵ Emperor Yongzheng restricted the maximal number of Portuguese ships to twenty-five and subject to the jurisdiction of the Qing court. He further proposed that Guangzhou’s foreign trade should be transferred to Macao and that the Portuguese Macao’s Loyal Senate should report to provincial officials the foreign vessels’ arrivals. In that same year, the Qing government established another customs office at Praia Grande.¹⁶ As the Portuguese Macao government turned down the proposals from the Qing government again, Emperor Qianlong ordained in 1736 that all foreign ships must berth at Guangzhou’s Huangpu port, which caused the sharp decline of Macao’s maritime trade and economy.

Therefore, in the two hundred years between 1535 (mid-Ming dynasty) to 1735 (mid-Qing dynasty), Macao was a trading port of primary importance on China’s Maritime Silk Routes; between 1736 and 1842 (mid-Qing dynasty), Guangzhou became China’s only port for foreign trade, while Macao diminished to be an outer port of Guangzhou. It can be said that this period of time witnesses the cross of China’s Maritime Silk Routes and Europe’s Age of Discovery. The 1842 defeat of the First Opium War forced the Qing government to cede Hong Kong Island to Britain and open five treaty ports for foreign merchants. Henceforth, China lost its autonomy over the affairs of foreign trade. And so 1842 should be viewed as the end

¹³ Cai Ruxian, *Images of the Eastern Barbarians: An Illustrated Account of Eastern Barbarians* (東夷圖像•東夷圖說), p. 1–5.

¹⁴ Montalto de Jesus, *Historic Macao*, (Chinese edition), Fundacao Macau, 2000, p. 86-87.

¹⁵ Anders Ljungstedt, *A Historical Sketch of the Portuguese Settlements in China*, (Chinese edition), 東方出版社, Beijing, 1997, p. 104, 145.

¹⁶ Beatriz Basto da Silva, *Cronologia da História de Macau, Volume I – Séculos XVI a XVIII*, Livros do Oriente, p. 249; Anders Ljungstedt, *A Historical Sketch of the Portuguese Settlements in China*, (Chinese edition), p. 107.

of China's Maritime Silk Routes and Macao entered the colonial rule of Portugal in 1849.

One of the museum's responsibilities is to exhibit and promote the correct history and its evidence to the public, as a realization of its function of social education. Historians must re-discover and verify various historical materials; researchers of the museum must grasp what is closest to the historical truth among many disagreeing versions and synthesize it to provide the overall context. "Correct the bias. Fill the gap." is an essential mission of the museum officer. In the history of the Maritime Silk Routes in the South China Sea and in the history of Macao are still many mysteries waiting to be resolved. We hope more and more scholars, youths and interested individuals would join us to tell a Macao story more correctly.