ISLAM IN THE PHILIPPINES AND ITS CHINA LINK*

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During ancient times, the Arabs of the southeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula were the first navigators of the Indian Ocean. They had discovered the secret of its monsoons. The Romans learned of the ocean routes from the Arabs and used them, to be followed by the Sassanian Persians. But by the 4th century, the Arabs came to monopolize the routes once more. From India, they sailed further east to the Malay Peninsula; and China was not far away. Chinese records inform us that as early as 300 A.D., long before the advent of Islam, the Arabs (possibly with Persians) had a counting house in Canton (which they later on called "Khanfu") where they met for business transactions and which also served as a warehouse for their merchandise. Thus, it can be said in general that from the 4th century to the 7th century, the sea trade between Egypt, Persia and India on one hand, and that of India to Southeast and East Asia on the other hand, were progressively falling under Arab control.[1] It is certain that the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions knew a lot about China and a *hadith* or Prophetic tradition attests to this. In addition, it is highly probable, in spite of the contention of some Western Orientalists, that some of the Prophet's Companions had gone to and died in Chinese sea ports.

Students of the Sirat un-Nabi or Biography of the Prophet will recall that when the Prophet Muhammad and his followers were being persecuted in Makkah, he arranged to have about 83 of them plus 18 of their women folk emigrate to Abyssinia to seek asylum there — a total of 101 persons, not including children. Arab and other Muslim scholars have meticulously studied the lives of these individuals and tried to indicate their parentage, tribe, and final days. What resulted from their careful studies was the information that about 33 of the men returned to Makkah on or before 622 or the first year of the Hijrah, 16 joined the Prophet

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in the battle of Khaybar in 628-629, and 19 returned sometime later on to Madina to join the Muslims there. The Muslim annalists, while knowing the names and much of the early lives of the remaining ten, are silent on their ultimate fate.[2]

A few years ago, Dr. Sayyid Qudratullah Fatimi, the well-known Pakistani scholar, attempted a search on the fate of these ten Companions of the Prophet. By dint of hard work, he was able to gain further knowledge of at least five of them. He came across a tradition of South Indian Muslims that a companion of the Prophet named Tamim Ansari is supposed to be buried in Kovalam (Covelong) on the Coromandel Coast, a place known to the Arabs as Ma'bar, an important port haven for Muslim traders from Arab lands sailing further east. Professor Fatimi believes that Tamim Ansari is none other than Tamim bin al-Harith bin Qays. (Ar, "Ansari" or Helper is just a title here). Rereading and more carefully interpreting various Chinese records, while correcting past studies of Western scholars, Professor Fatimi arrived at the following: four Muslim wise men are reported to have come to China during the Wu-te period (618-626) during the Tang Dynasty. Their leader was Su-ha-pai Sai Kan-Ko-shihn (or Said Sa'd bin Abd Qays). He is supposed to have been buried in Canton (Guangzhou, Khanfu of the Arabs) after having preached there. The other three were: Kai-Ssu (or Qays bin Hudhafah), Wu-Ai-Ssu (or Wu-Wai-Ssu) or Urwah bin Abi Uththan), and Wan-Ko-Ssu (or Abu Qays bin al-Harith).[3] Two of the last three are believed to have died and been buried in Ch'uan-chou (Quanzhou, Zaitun of the Arabs) in Fu-kien province. So, five of the ten Companions of the Prophet whose last days were for some time unknown have, according to the esteemed professor, been located, and four of them had died in China.[4]

By the end of the 8th century, the Muslims of Canton (Khanfu) must have been quite numerous, since in 758 some of them (possibly mercenary soldiers) were able "to sack the city and make off to sea with their loot."[5] In the next century, trade between Western and Eastern Asia started to accelerate. It is generally agreed by scholars that by 801 Arab merchants and sailors had begun to dominate the Nanhai or Southeast Asia trade.[6] At this time, Muslim lands had become centers of population, culture, art and wealth, and demands for foreign goods, including luxury ones, increased dramatically. It was during this century that an increase of Arab accounts of trade in Southern Asia started to appear. This was a time, too, which coincided with the heyday of the Srivijaya empire, which had its inception at the start of the 7th century. It was a commercial empire, with a Buddhist orientation, that once extended its power or influence over Sumatra, Java, the Malay Peninsula, and up to Champa in the present south coast of the Malay Peninsula, an important *pied a terre*. It was a Srivijayan port and of great importance to Arabs since tin, swords

and other metals were imported from it. It is believed that in 674, the Khalif Mu'awiya had coveted it but finally opted for friendly trade relations as a better alternative.[7] (Kalah had been identified with Kedah by some scholars. However, the researches of Professor Fatimi conclusively identify it with Klang in Penang, Western Malaysia. Kalah was also known as Qalah to the Arabs).

In 878, during the last decades of the Tang Dynasty, an event with far-reaching consequences to the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia took place in Canton (Khanfu). It was a time when the Tang Dynasty was disintegrating. A rebel leader, Huang Ch'ao, with his army, sacked Canton and massacred, according to Muslim accounts, thousands of merchants composed of Muslims, Nestorian Christians and Jews.[8] The deterioration of law and order coupled with increased piracy in the region forced thousands of Muslims to flee to Kalah, with some of them disembarking in Champa (Sanf). For the next half century, Arab and Chinese records about Muslim traders in the sea ports of China are silent. But Kalah increased its importance and, for some time, it became the farthest eastern stop for Muslim merchants, both Arabs and Persians. The merchants there came to learn about new products as well as better sources of other older ones, principally spices. In partnership with the local inhabitants, or having them serve as agents, the Muslim merchants steadily accelerated the growth of a local or regional Southeast Asian trade. "This local trade was the cause of a slow but steady penetration of Southeast Asia, reaching as far as eastern Java by the end of the eleventh century."[9] It was their having been instrumental in the acceleration of a Southeast Asian local trade that led Muslim traders to come to know Borneo more intimately. And Sulu was not far away. Nevertheless, some Chinese ships did appear in Kalah — but they were owned by "smugglers." Thus Kalah could have served as an indirect venue to get at Chinese products.

When the Sung Dynasty came to power in 960, it adopted a policy to encourage the return of the Muslim traders. In 971, it opened Canton to foreign trade. In 977, a Chinese ship owned by a Muslim from Canton named P'u Lu-hsieh (Ar. Abu Rashid?) appeared in Borneo to initiate trade.[10] In this same year, too, Pu Ni (Brunei or Borneo or a site in it) sent an embassy to China. It was headed by a Muslim named P'u Ali (Ar. Abu'Ali). It is probable that the initiative for a Borneo-Canton trade originated from Muslim merchants domiciled in Canton.[11] In 982, a ship owned by a Muslim carrying goods from Ma-I (Mindoro, the Mayyid of the Arabs) arrived in Canton. But the reopened door to China did not lead to a decline of the flourishing local trade. Actually, it even further accelerated it, since the enterprising traders now brought more Southeast Asian products to China as part of their profitable ventures. A new route had emerged: Borneo – Sulu –

Palawan – Mindoro – Luzon – Canton. In time, another route would also become frequent, that is, from China to Java passing by the coast of Champa.

It is not gainsaying that the local trade that emerged after the 878 event witnessed the opening of additional Southeast Asian ports to participate more intimately in it. And when trade flourished, with new-found wealth and connections with rich Muslim traders, these ports became, in effect, principalities with powerful chieftains. And when China once again opened its sea ports to foreign trade, many of these sea principalities came to trade directly with the Celestial Empire using their own home-built ships.

Before the 878 event, there were few Muslim settlements in Southeast Asia and these few were mainly in the north of Sumatra. But after the development of the local trade, more Muslim settlements became discernible. By the 13th century, what became noteworthy was the emergence of port principalities with Muslims at their head, such as that of Samudra-Pasai in Sumatra, Perlak in the Malay Peninsula, etc. By now, Pasai had supplanted Kalah as a better center for the trade activities of the Muslim traders. In the first decade of the 14th century, Trengganu in Eastern Malaysia had a Muslim ruler. In 1414, the ruler of Melaka became a Muslim. Thus was Islam able to have a religious and political base in the lands of the Malays in Southeast Asia.

The rise of Muslim sea principalities during the 14th and 15th centuries coincided with the progressive decline of the Srivijaya empire. Indeed, by 1300 this decline could be attributed to Siamese incursions into the Malay Peninsula, the rise of Hindu Majapahit, the rise of "independent" port principalities during its weakness, and Islam's erosion of its Buddhist base. Some scholars maintain that Srivijaya had ceased to exist in 1372. Others suggest that it managed to survive a few years more till the final blow came in 1397 from Majapahit troops. For all practical purposes, the Muslim traders were taking over Srivijaya's commercial empire piece by piece.

Most, if not all, Western scholars have argued that the Islamization process in Southeast Asia started from the Western route, that is, from the Arab, Persian and Indian lands, to Sumatra and other places nearby. However, Professor Fatimi believes that "the dawn of Malaysian Islam definitely broke on the eastern horizons of Malaysia" and that this "line runs all through the eastern coast facing the China Sea: Phan-rang, Patani, Trengganu, Pahang and Leran [in Java]."[12] Professor Fatimi gave many reasons for the existence of this line, like the early Muslim sea principalities there many years before the foundation of Melaka around 1400. To be

added were the close relations between the Muslim merchants of both Champa and China, the marriage of a Champa princess with a Majapahit prince and so on. Professor Fatimi did not deny a parallel western line of Islamization. What he emphasized was that the eastern line had to be taken into account if a more complete picture of the Islamization of Southeast Asia is to be gained. And what is important to anticipate at this point are the strong traditions in Sulu that attest to the coming of Muslims from China with missionary aims as early as the 4th century, if not earlier.

When the Sung Dynasty reopened its ports to foreign traders at the end of the 9th century, Canton was their major entry. But in 1087, during the North Sung Dynasty, an imperial order decreed the setting of the foreign trade office in the nearby port of Chu'an-chou (Quanzhou). This was the famous port known to Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta as Zaitun. It became "full of foreign vessels and merchandise."[13] During the Yuan or Mongol Dynasty (1278-1638) the port became more prosperous than ever. "Quan(zhou) became the capital of Qimin (Fujian) as well as a collecting center of foreign goods, strange treasures and curiosities from various foreign lands. It was known as the most popular place where wealthy merchants took up their residence."[14] Ibn Battuta visited this port city when he was in China in 1345-1346. He witnessed its commercial prosperity and large population. He described how it had a Shaikh-ul-Islam, a *qadi* or Muslim judge, and a Muslim quarter. He even claimed that the city had the biggest harbor in the world.[15] However, just before the end of the Yuan Dynasty, there was a ten-year tumult in the city. From 1357 to 1366, a Persian garrison revolted there. With Chinese allies, it came to control the city and nearby areas. The revolt caused the city's destruction and gradual decline.[16] In 1368, two years after the revolt, the Ming Dynasty came to power. Having the revolt in mind, it initially forbade foreign trade in the city and closely monitored events there. Consequently, the remnants of the Muslim community there, more specifically the merchant class and families, left the city for good. They left behind a large and well-built mosque, possibly seven or eight smaller mosques, and their ancient graveyards — of which many stones were used later on to strengthen the city walls and houses of farmers. When the Foreign Trade Office moved north to Fuzhou in 1472, during the Ming Dynasty, the use of the sea port further declined.[17] In time, even the name and location of Zaitun was erased from the memory of the foreign Muslim traders. The importance of Zaitun to Philippine historians is that it was the main port where Muslims visiting Java and the Philippines embarked from the 11th to the 14th century.

On one of the slopes of Bud Dato, a few miles overlooking Jolo, stands a centuries-old venerated tomb of a Muslim. Tradition has it that it was around this

spot where some Sulu sultans were crowned — hence its name. The tombstone was intact till around the 1950s or 60s, when some vandals broke it into various fragments. However, since then, some civic-minded Jolo residents as well as some Muslim religious leaders had repaired the tombstone and did additional work to protect it from the elements. Good photos of the tombstone before its initial damage are still available.[18] The gravestone reads:

> Said the Prophet, peace be upon him:
> "Whoever dies far away dies a martyr."
> Allah has taken away the late blessed martyr Tuhan
> Maqbalu on the date: The sacred, holy month of Rajab.
> May Allah increase its holiness. The year ten and seven
> hundred.

The date 710 Anno Hejira is equivalent to the year 1310 A.D. Since the day of the month Rajab is not specified, Rajab here could have been either November or December. Who was this Tuhan Maqbalu? That he was a Muslim who died far away from his home or land of origin, that is, a foreign Muslim, is attested by his description as a martyr (*shahid*) in accordance with a Prophet *hadith*. That he was entitled "Tuhan" implied that he had some political authority, since contemporary tombstones in Southeast Asia had used this title to designate ministers of state.[19] The name "Maqbalu" is based on the Arabic tri-literal root Q-B-L. "Maqbul", which means acceptable or reasonable in Arabic, is a known proper name. However, so far, I have not come to know any person with the name of "Maqbalu." It may have been due to an error in spelling or transcription, or simply a local non-Arab variation of "Maqbul." This is something to be left to the experts.

In the early days of the American occupation of Sulu, there was a plan to convert the tomb area in Bud Dato into a park. It was then that some Sulu datus claimed that the tomb was that of Rajah Baguinda, an ancestor, who hailed from Sumatra and established a principality in Buansa. This claim, while having political overtones, did not seem to have any firm historical basis. Rajah Baguinda, the Sumatran prince referred to, was most probably buried in Mt. Tumangtangis near Buansa, where he ruled and he, at any rate, must have died during the first half of the 15th century — nearly a hundred years after Tuhan Maqbalu. At any rate, Maqbalu's tomb may well be the earliest important archaeological data for establishing a chronology of the history of Sulu, as well as that of the coming of Islam to the Philippines. The tombstone appears to be unique in form and structure in Sulu. The tombstone of Mohadum (Ar. Makhdum) Aminullah in Bud Agad in Sulu island has somewhat of a similar shape. But it appears to be of a much later

construction, probably using Maqbalu's tomb as a model, unless it was based on another similar one that has long disappeared.

In 1984, a very important work, *Islamic Inscriptions in Quanzhou* (*Zaitun*) appeared in China. It was sponsored by the Quanzhou (Ch'uan-chou) Foreign Maritime Museum of Fujian, China.[20] It contains more than 200 photos of tombstone tables and related objects, their descriptions, transcriptions in their full texts, translations into English, as well as learned annotations. The vast majority of the tombstones belong to the 13th and 14th centuries.

Clear photos of the Bud Dato tombstone before its destruction, as well as a careful study of its later restoration, reveal the following characteristics: it is carved of diabase and its top is of the so-called pointed bow shape. It has a protruding tenon designed to be set upon a recumbent slab. It quotes in relief the Prophetic tradition (*hadith*): "Whoever dies far away [from his home] dies a martyr." Its calligraphy is generally of the *naskhi* style. Moreover, the borders of the original yellow rectangular recumbent slab had lotus flower petal carvings of typical Chinese design. These carvings were still extant in the 60s. Comparing Maqbalu's tomb with many of the extant tombstones and recumbent slabs in the above work by Chen Dasheng, the similarities are so striking that one cannot but conclude that the Bud Dato tombstone was cut in Quanzhou (Ch'uan-chou), the Zaitun of the Arabs and Persians.[21] At the very least, it must have been cut or carved in nearby Canton or Hang-chou (Ar. Khansa) where there was also a thriving Muslim community during the 12th-14th centuries, as attested by travelers. Friends or associates of Tuhan Maqbalu must have plied the route Sulu – Ma'I – Zaitunj. It was this route that brought Muslim traders from China. Whether they were Chinese Muslims or Muslims from other parts of Asia or their Chinese descendants is another question.

Sulu *tarsilas* (Ar. Silsila) or genealogical accounts narrate how a certain Karim ul-Makhdum came to preach Islam in Sulu. Oft-repeated traditions reveal that he was accompanied by Chinese traders or companions. These are often designated by informers as "Hoy Hoy" or "Sini Hoy." What is clearly meant here is "Hui Hui" ("Hui Hoy" or "Huei Hoy"), a Chinese designation from the Muslim people of China. Who was this Makhdum Karim? The *tarsilas* reveal that he was either a Muslim preacher or merchant, or both. His name "Karim" strongly suggests that he belonged to the guild of famous and wealthy merchants called "Karimi merchants," whose ships were also called "Karimi." As early as the 12th century, these traders had a loose organization in Egypt and they did quite well up to the end of the 14th century, when they had already expanded their trade activities up to China. At the beginning, they sort of monopolized the spice trade from Yemen

to Egypt, and then from India to Yemen. Then, they expanded their trade from India to China. It is reported how a Karimi merchant claimed that he had made at least five trips to China. One who was in Aden in 703 A.H. (1303) had just arrived from China.[22] That the Makhdum Karim "walked on water" might only mean that he was a Sufi who belonged to the Qadiriya Tariqat or Sufi order, since its founder, Abdul Qadir al Jilani was reputed to have walked on water. And, as is well known, this saintly man is still the patron saint of sailors or mariners in some parts of Egypt. To say that a particular Sufi walked on water is a symbolic way of saying that he belonged to the Qadiriya Tariqat. The Sulu tradition stating that the Makhdum Karim was an *auliya'* or saintly person corroborates this. Incidentally, Ibn Batutta attested to the existence of a large group of Sufis in Hang-chou (Khansa) which he considered to be the largest city in the world. It had a Shaikh ul-Islam, a *qadi*, mosques and *mu'azzins*.[23] That the Makhdum Karim came to Sulu on an "iron pot" may only mean that he came on a constructed ship with iron fastenings."[24] Dr. Najeeb Saleeby calculated the coming of Karim ul-Makhdum to Sulu at around 1380. He had various reasons for this date. One of them was based on a calculation he made on the number of generations from the Makhdum to persons claiming descent from him.

On the top of Bud Agad, a few miles in the interior of Sulu island, stands the tomb of Mahadum (Makhdum) Aminullah. He is also reported to have been accompanied by Chinese companions or partners. In fact, near his tomb is another tombstone inscribed in Chinese characters. The caretakers claim that it belongs to one of his Chinese companions. (Unfortunately, neither I nor any of my companions could read Chinese and the rubbing made was quite poor. It is hoped that with peace and order in Sulu, someone qualified can go to Bud Agad and read it). The interesting thing about the tombstone of the Makhdum Aminullah is that its tenon is similar to that of Tuhan Maqbalu's, although its bow shape is not as marked. It has no inscription and appears to be of a more recent construction. It is probable that traditions about the Makhdum Karim and the Makhdum Aminullah had been confused or intertwined through the ages. A reason may be that the title of "Makhdum" (Ar. He who is served) had been taken as a proper name. Their activities, too, may have had similarities. In any case, they are buried in different islands.

Now, Sulu *tarsilas* narrate that ten years after the arrival of the Makhdum Karim, a certain Rajah Baguinda, a prince from Menangkabaw, landed in Buansa with some courtiers and soldiers, and eventually established a principality there with himself as head. ("Baguinda" here is a Menangkabaw honorific, not a proper name). He then married a local lady. This would be around the 1390s. This calculated date is quite acceptable. Some historians put 1377 as the year that the Srivijaya empire

collapsed in Sumatra. However, some of the remnants of the empire managed to survive in Palembang, where they were dealt a final blow in 1397 by soldiers and sailors of Majapahit. According to Professor Oliver Wolters, an event took place in 1397 which coincided with the final dissolution of the Srivijaya empire. A prince of Palembang, Sumatra threw off his allegiance to Java and incurred, as a consequence, a brutal invasion. One source claims that this prince, with a small following, eventually founded a principality in Melaka. Another source describes how the princely evacuation from Palembang was of such a great magnitude that "the sea seemed to be nothing but ships. So vast was the fleet that there seemed no counting. The masts of the ships were like a forest of trees; their pennons and streamers were like driving clouds and the state umbrellas of the Rajas like cirrus."[25] Referring to this incident, Professor Wolters further writes that "... the years immediately before 1400 were a disturbed time in the western archipelago, and this is another, and perhaps more likely, time when small groups of adventurers migrated to Borneo and elsewhere,"[26] It is likely, too, that one of these prince adventurers was no less than the Rajah Baguinda from Sumatra. As mentioned earlier, Srivijaya's power had started to wane as early as 1300. The fact is that the Muslim Arabs, Persians and Indians were already at the time taking over more and more of the commercial hegemony of Srivijaya. As a writer puts it, the Arabs became "the real heirs of Sri Vijaya."[27]

The Sulu *tarsilas* state that one of the very first foreign Muslims to come to Sulu was a certain Tuan Masha'ika. He must have certainly been a Muslim since the word "*masha'yikh*" is one of the plural forms of the Arabic term "*shaikh*," a term of respect. Some of the names of his children and grandchildren like Tuan Hakim, Aisha, Tuan Da'im, Shaikh Aba, Kamal ud-Din, Katib Mu'allam, Afif ud-Din, Fakr ud-Din, Abdul Wakil, Maryam, *et al*, also attest to this. The title "tuan" here is a latter variation of "tuhan." "Tuhan" in very early times referred to the Deity; but after the advent of Islam, it was relegated to refer to persons to mean something as "lord."

It would be a beautiful story if Tuan Masha'ika (or Tuhan Masha'yikh) were the same person as Tuhan Maqbalu. But the *tarsilas* state that when Rajah Baguinda landed in Buansa, a son of Tuan Masha'ika called Tuan Hakim, and three grandsons, namely, Tuan Buda, Tuan Da'im, and Tuan Bujang were chiefs in Sulu. That is, they were alive in the 1390s. This makes the identity a bit problematical, unless Tuan Hakim is excluded from the list of those still alive in the 1390s.

The Yuan or Mongol dynasty (1278-1368) had utilized the administrative services of foreign Muslims and encouraged the trade activities of its ports in the

China Sea. It was, in general, tolerant of Islam and permitted the building of mosques, and the practice of most Islamic rituals. But, for various reasons, during the latter part of the dynasty, the Mongols ceased to favor Muslims. Thus, when the Chinese people started to revolt against the Mongols in 1367, they were generally supported by the Muslim population. From a population of about 50,000 in the 9th century, the Muslims grew, up to about 4 million in the 14th century.[28] Ming Tai-Tsu, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) which supplanted the Mongol dynasty, introduced a strong policy to sinicize the Muslims of the empire, the majority of which were descendants of Central Asian Muslilms who came as mercenary soldiers during the Mongol dynasty. The Ming dynasty was a government imbued with Confucian ideals, although some Chinese Muslim scholars tried to point out that its emperors had hidden sympathies for Islam.

It was the Ming Ch'eng Tsu (Yung Lo), the third emperor, who, after consolidating his rule, launched a total of seven naval expeditions from 1405 to 1433. The command of the fleet was given to the famous Muslim admiral Cheng Ho (Ma San-pao Kung). He was assisted by a well-known Muslim historian and interpreter, Ma Huan, as well as by other Muslim scribes. A great number of his sailors were Muslims, who were sinicized. The expeditions utilized hundreds of ships, big and small, and they involved thousands of sailors and soldiers. One of the expeditions, the sixth, reached East Africa. The last one went as far as Jeddah in the Arabian Peninsula. It was then that a small group of Chinese Muslims went to visit Makkah.[29]

Numerous reasons have been propounded by scholars on the purpose of these expeditions. A common one was that they were simply launched to elevate the prestige of the new dynasty while exercising some form of political influence over neighboring countries. At any rate, among other things, the expeditions were able to result in the following: it led the kingdom of Siam and the growing state of Melaka to have peaceful relations, while at the same time consolidating the Melakan sultanate's independence and legitimization; reduced piracy in Sumatra and nearby islands with the capture and execution of Ch'en Tsu-I, a notorious brigand, and the killing of about 5,000 of his followers; fostered trade relations between many Southeast Asian port principalities and China; and acknowledged the rule of many Muslim princes of such principalities and had, in fact, by inviting them to pay tribute to the Celestial Court, further strengthened and legitimized their rule at home. Thus were the position of Muslim rulers in Sumatra, Java, Borneo and Sulu strengthened under a Pax Sinica. Eventually, Muslim rulers of port principalities of Java were able to join forces to do away with the Majapahit Hindu Empire. Demak and Mataram rose out of the ashes of Majapahit. Melaka would soon become a flourishing trade

center as well as a theological center. Under the rule of the pious Mansur Shah (1458-1477), Muslim teachers spread out to neighboring islands. Brunei would eventually grow to become a naval power. All these were far-reaching results of the visits of Cheng Ho's fleet.

Cheng Ho's fleet was able to reestablish contacts with the descendants of Sino-Muslim troops who were sent as part of an invading force to Java in 1292, more than a hundred years earlier during the Mongol dynasty.[30] While the main fleet was in some other place, some of Cheng Ho's sailors would visit nearby ports. Sulu would be one of these. Although the Admiral himself never landed in Sulu, some of his subordinates or "envoys" did. This explains the coming of Pon Tao Kung, named Pei Pei Hsein, to Jolo, where he is said to have succumbed to malaria. Tradition says that there was a community of Chinese in Sulu who greeted and honored him as an envoy of Cheng Ho. A memorial erected by latter-day Chinese in his honor still exists in Tulay. Apart from Chinese records, Brunei sources also mention of another Chinese worthy who visited it on behalf of the Admiral. After these visits, many tribute-bearing rulers or envoys from different parts of Southeast Asia went to China, where they received gifts whose value exceeded that of the tribute. Sulu rulers were not far behind in sending such profitable tributes.

During Cheng Ho's visits, there were many Chinese settlements in Sumatra and Java. The Muslims there were reported as belonging to the Hanafi madhhab rite or school of law. It is said that in time, some of their mosques became shrines where Cheng Ho was being honored, a non-too-Islamic practice. Eventually, however, with an increasing loss of contact with the China mainland, as well as stronger religious influences from Arab and Indian lands, the Hanafi rite gradually gave way to the Shafi madhhab.[31] The Shafi rite came to predominate in Malay lands. Javanese teachers or missionaries to the Moluccas and Brunei missionaries all belonged to this school of law. This is one explanation why the Muslims of Sulu and Mindanao belong to this school.

The time of Cheng Ho's expeditions also coincided with that of the work of some of the so-called Saints (*auliya'*) of Java. One of them, Sunan Ngampel (Bong Swi Hong, Raden Rahmat) of Surabaya, was a leader of Chinese Muslims of Java and he led his followers to eventually become Shafis.[32] He lived during the last decades of the Majapahit empire and died around 1478. In 1447, he is reported to have married Nyi Ageng Manila, the daughter of a Muslim Chinese domiciled in Manila called Gan Eng Cu. Gan Eng Cu is said to have been the head of the Chinese community in Manila until he was transferred, through the instructions of one of Cheng Ho's subordinates, to the port of Tuban in northeastern Java in

1423 to head the Chinese Muslim community there. He was also named "Ki gede Manila" and later given the title "Tumanggung."[33] Incidentally, according to the *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Javanese Annals), Majapahit had once claimed some sort of political hegemony over Manila in the 1430s — a time coincident with Gan Eng Cu's residence there.

It may be mentioned in passing that Cheng Ho could have had an Islamic agenda of his own. In some of his trips, he brought with him not only Ma Huan, a Muslim historian, but also Hassan (Fei Hsin), the Imam of the Sian-fu Mosque in Nanking, one of the oldest mosques in China. One wonders if their visit to the first ruler of Melaka had something to do with his encouragement to become Muslim. Be that as it may, Cheng Ho had various times petitioned the Emperor on behalf of his Muslim community. He was from Yunnan Province, where many Turkic Muslim soldiers had settled earlier. Cheng Ho was the descendant of a long list of Muslims. He was seventh in the line of descent of Sai tien-chi (Sayyid Ajall) of Bukharan origin and reputed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Sayyid Ajall Shams ud-Din was instrumental in putting Yunnan under Mongol control and he was made governor of it. He was a top military leader and administrator. His sons also came to administer Yunnan. It is believed that Sayyid Ajall, like his descendant Cheng Ho, had Sufi tendencies as evidenced by the nature of their tolerance of other religious beliefs.[34]

After Admiral Cheng Ho's death in 1435, official contacts between China and the Southeast Asian sea principalities gradually declined. Nevertheless, private trade increased. What happened was that by the end of the 15th century, Confucian scholars had gained more influence over the Celestial throne and recommended strongly that relations with "barbarians" should cease, since China was a country that was self-sufficient unto itself. The advent of the Ch'ing or Manchu Dynasty in 1644 increased this isolation. Of all the dynasties that came to rule in China, that of the Manchus was the most intolerant and repressive of Islam and Muslims. Needless to say, it provoked Muslim revolts which were repressed with great cruelty.

In the late 15th century and early 16th century, Muslim traders from Arab, Persian and Indian lands still came to Southeast Asia for its valued spices and other important products. They would also appear in Chinese ports, but in smaller numbers. But their centuries-old control of the spice trade was yet to meet its most severe challenge. With North Africa, Western Asia and part of the Balkans under Muslim rule and thus blocking them, the Portuguese were able to sail around Africa to get to India, where they aimed to control, or at least share, in the spice trade

there and of Southeast Asia. They defeated a Muslim fleet at Diu in 1509 and pirated Muslim trading vessels in a systematic manner. In 1511, they captured Melaka and thus made a bid to control the whole spice trade in the area. Muslim leaders were forced to patronize other ports, especially those in Sumatra. Brunei started to become more of an important trading and shipping center. But other events were also combining to lead to the inevitable, more of what Arab and other Muslims would call as something from "above the winds." Internecine wars between Muslim states, plagues, reduction in population, and the general decline in their productive powers in agriculture and handicrafts resulted in a great reduction in their capacity to both import and export. Their loss of sea power in the Indian Ocean diverted the spice trade more directly to Europe. Neither the Arabs, Persians or Indians had the power to match the bigger and stronger Western ships or the greater European capital and credit.[35]

The 16th and 17th centuries ushered the coming of European imperialism and colonization to Southeast Asia. Most of the Malay lands fell under Western rule. A few Muslim traders and teachers still managed to come. But they were viewed with deep resentment and suspicion by the European colonials. The protection and spread of Islam now fell on the shoulders of the Malay people themselves, who had come to cherish the religion of the old Muslim traders and teachers. Islam would stoke pre-nationalistic elements. In the later 16th century, Brunei preachers were evident in Luzon and Mindanao. Javanese teachers would sail to the Moluccas on missionary activities. But, at any rate, the northeast movement or expansion of Islam from the Indonesian islands to the Philippines, to complete a geographical process, was blocked by the Spaniards. But this is another story, another chapter in the history of Islam among the Malays of Southeast Asia.

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Notes

[1]Chua Ju-Kua, *His Wok on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, entitled Chu-fan'chi. Tr. Friedrich Hirth and W.W. Rockhill. St. Petersburg, 1912. p. 4 and p. 14; and Roland Braddell, "Notes on

Ancient Times in Malaya," *JMBRAS*, Vol. XX, Part II, December 1947. pp. 8-10.

[2]Sayyid Qudratullah Fatimi, "The Role of China in the Spread of Islam in South East Asia," First International Conference of South East Asian Historians. Singapore, January 1961. Mimeograph copy. Pp. 2-3. For additional information on these Companions of the Prophet, see *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Siral Rasul Allah*. Introduction and Notes by A. Guillaume. Oxford University Press. Pp. 146-148, pp. 167-169, and pp. 526-529.

[3]Sayyid Qudratullah Fatimi, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 4.

[5]Chau Ju-Kua, *op. cit.*, p. 15. See also Lo Hsiang-Lin, "Islam in Canton in the Sung Period," *Symposium on Historical, Archaeological and Linguistic Studies on Southern China, South-East Asia and the Hongkong Region*. Eds. F.S. Drake and Wolfram Eberhard. Papers presented at a meeting held in September 1961 as part of the Golden Jubilee Congress of the University of Hongkong, Hongkong 1967, p. 177.

[6]Wang Gungwu, "The Nanhai Trade: A Study of the Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea," *JMBRAS*, Vol. XXXI, Part II, No. 182, p. 107.

[7]Sayyid Qudratullah Fatimi, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[8]For a biography of Huang Ch'ao, see *Biography of Huang Ch'ao*. Translated and Annotated by Howard S. Levy. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961. Arab accounts by Abu Zaid and Mas'udi are found in *ibid.*, pp. 109-121. Also cf. G.R. Tibbets, "Early Muslim Traders in South-East Asia," *JMBRAS*, Vol. XXX, Part I, No. 177. 1957. p. 19.

[9]G.R. Tibbets, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 31 and 43.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 36.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 36.

[12]Fatimi, Sayyid Qudratullah. *Islam Comes to Malaysia*. Singapore, 1963. pp. 66-67.

[13]Dasheng, Chen. *Islamic Inscriptions in Quanzhou (Zaitun)*. Tr. Chen Enming. Yinchuan: Ningxia from the Arabic text edited by C. Defremery and B.R. Sanguinetti. Vol. 4. The Hakluyt Society, London. 1994. p. 894.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. xiv.

[15]Gibb, H.A.R. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta (A.D. 1325-1354)*. Translated with revisions and notes from the Arabic text edited by C. Defremery and B.R. Sanguinetti. Vol. 4. The Hakluyt Society, London. 1994. p. 894.

[16]For details of this rebellion, see Chang Hsing-lang, "The Rebellion of the Persian Garrison in Ch'uan-chou (A.D. 1357-1366)." *Monumenta Serica*, 3(1938), pp. 611-627; and Maejima Shinji, "The Muslims in Chu'uan-chou at the End of the Yuan Dynasty." *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, 32(1974), pp. 47-71.

[17]Dasheng, Chen. *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

[18]Good photos of the tombstone before its vandalization were kindly provided by William "Bill" Beyer.

[19]The title "Tuhan" was in very early times used for the Deity. Later on it was used for high-ranking officials or officers of state. Some princes used it. A prominent Muslim lady buried in Java also carried this title. In the tombstone of Maqbalu, the term had often been wrongly read as "Timhar" since the letter "n" had been read as "r."

[20]Dasheng, Chen. *op. cit.*

[21]Comparing Maqbalu's tombstone with many of the extant tombstones in Quanzhou (Ch'uan-chou), especially figures 32, 33, 37 and 48 in Chen Dasheng's text, striking similarities are clearly seen. To be mentioned further is that whereas the date of Maqbalu's tomb is 1310 C.E. (710 A.H.), figure 32 is 1290 C.E. (689 A.H.), figure 33 is 1299 C.E. (698 A.H.), figure 37 is 1302 C.E. (702 A.H.) and figure 48 is 1325 C.E. (725 A.H.). All five headstones are contemporaneous.

[22]Cf.E. Ashtor, "The Karimi Merchants," *JRAS*, 1956. Parts I and 2. pp. 45-56.

[23]Gibb, H.A.R., *op. cit.*, p. 902.

[24]J.V. Mills, "Arab and Chinese Navigators in Malaysian Waters in about

A.D. 1500." *JMBRAS*, Vol. XLVII, part 2, Dec. 1974, No. 226. p. 10.

[25]Wolters, Oliver. *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History*. Asia Major Library, Lund Humphries, London. 1970. p. 76.

[26]*Ibid.*, p. 190.

[27]Moorhead, Francis Joseph. *A History of Malaya and her Neighbors*. London 1957. Vol. I, p. 123.

[28]Haji Yusuf Chang, "The Ming Empire: Patron of Islam in China and Southeast-West Asia," *JMBRAS*, Vol. LXI, Part 2, Dec. 1988, p. 1.

[29]There are numerous works on the Cheng Ho expeditions. An interesting one is by Haji Yusuf Chang, which strongly suggests that Cheng Ho was a pious Muslim with an Islamic agenda in his naval trips. See his *op. cit.*, pp. 25-39. It might be of interest to note that in 1417, Cheng Ho left a memorial in the Muslim cemetery at Ch'uan-chou (Quanzhou). For more information on Cheng Ho, see William Willets, "The Maritime Adventures of Grand Eunuch Ho," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. V, No. 2, Sept. 1964. p. 26; and Su Chung-Jen, "Places in South-East Asia, the Middle East and Africa visited by Cheng Ho and his Companions (A.D. 1405-1433)," *Symposium on Historical, Archaeological and Linguistic Studies on Southern China, South-East Asia and the Hongkong Region*. pp. 198-211.

[30]Haji Yusuf Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[31]Graaf, H.J. de and Pigeaud, Th. G. Th., *Chinese Muslims in Java in the 15th and 16th centuries*. Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, No. 12, 1984. pp. 78-79 and p. 175.

[32]*Ibid.*, pp. 79-80 and p. 175.

[33]*Ibid.*, p. 15, p. 17, p. 19, pp. 59-60, p. 74 and p. 148.

[34]On Ajall's life, see Morris Rossabi, "The Muslims in the Early Yuan Dynasty," *China Under Mongol Rule*. Ed. John D. Langlois, Jr. Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 287-291. For Cheng Ho's and Sayyid Ajall's Sufi tendencies cf. Sayyid Qudratullah Fatimi, "The role of China in the Spread of Islam in South East Asia," *op. cit.*, p. 31 and p. 33.

[35]Charles Issawi, "The Decline of Middle Eastern Trade (1100-1850)," *Islam and the Trade of Asia*. Ed. D.S. Richards. Oxford 1970, p. 266.