

Reciprocity of Interests in Spice Route: Chinese - Malabar Shared Heritages and Cultural Legacies

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Abstract

Malabar was a strategic point for international trade and commerce, from where spices, timber and other valuable forest products were exported to various port towns of the Roman Empire, Arabia, Africa and China. This article explores Chinese traders' influence in the region before and after Zheng He, who sailed to Malabar seven times and died in Calicut in his seventh voyage. Chinese relations contributed much to Malabar and helped to develop a cultural legacy and shared heritage in many fields, specifically in the wide use of Chinese gadgets in traditional work, including potteries, traditional snake boats, fishing nets etc. I could identify three mosques with Chinese names and a protected Chinese Shrine adjacent to a mosque in Puthiyangadi, Calicut, where ceremonial tributes were observed every year in respect of the dignitary, Sheikh Sheeni (Sheikh from China). The Chinese had a number of settlements on the Malabar coast (Kozhikode Puthiyangadi, Panthalayani Kollam, Vadakara, Ezhimala, etc) and the progenies of early Chinese settlers, during my field study, explained the nostalgic family legacy of old Chinese tradition and tried clarify their similar physical appearances.

Keywords: Malabar, China, Zheng He, shared heritage, cultural legacy.

Introduction

A Nation Floating on the Water,
Bringing a Country to the Other,
With Thirty Thousand People,
Three Hundred Ships,
When it Reached Calicut Port.
(Description on Armada of Zheng He)

Malabar ports were premeditated points for Chinese traders as their second home, for being the most famous, as well secure, port-towns of the world. In that era, for the overall development of trading, a peaceful life was very important, and for that reason travellers and traders liked Malabar very much. The testimony of personalities like Marco Polo (1254-1324 CE), Ibn Battuta (1304-1377 CE), and Abd

al-Razzaq (1413-1482) provided a detailed picture on trade, travel and traditions of Malabar. Ibn Battuta, who visited Malabar in the fourteenth century, called this area 'Mulaibar' and undoubtedly depicted the security he enjoyed in Calicut area in the following words: 'I have never seen a safer road than this' (Gibb, 200:44). Ibn Battuta, who reached Calicut for fetching his ship to China, confirmed Calicut as one of the biggest ports of the world, confirming that Malabar was such an important place in that period. He, during his visit, had observed more than hundred ships at Calicut port and among them thirteen were from China. 'Thence we travelled to the city of Qaliquit (Calicut), which is one of the chief ports in Mulaibar (Malabar) and one of the largest harbours in the world. It is visited by men from China, Sumatra, Ceylon, Maldives, Yemen and Fars, and in it gather merchants from all quarters' (Ibid: 234).

Ibn Battuta noted this remarkable strength of the Malabar shoreline where Hindu King Zamorin gave much respect and consideration to local as well as foreign traders and even provided great positions in the country. He mentioned in his travelogue the names of Chiefs of Calicut and Kollam ports, Ibrahim Shaha Bandar and Ala al- Din al Awaji, respectively (Ibid: 89, 100). Then he brought out the story of famous ship owner 'Mithqal', who possessed vast wealth and many ships for trading with China and Yemen. Ibn Battuta, who stayed in Calicut for three months waiting for his ship to China, also commemorated the celebrity welcome he received in Calicut (Ibid: 235). Ibn Battuta's Calicut stories are amazingly linked with his Chinese travel, which was before the expedition of Zheng He (1371-1433). Moroccan traveller had lodged all his fellow travellers in a Chinese ship before the Friday prayer, unfortunately he had lost his crew, including his wife in a massive shipwreck which happened at Calicut port.¹ Most of the documents on Chinese history are yet to be brought to English. Chinese geographers' reports on Malabar are found in the *Tao-i chih-liieh*, the *I-yiichih* and in the *I-yiit'uchih*. Wang Ta-yiian's *Tao-i chih-liieh* provide a better picture of Calicut port exactly as "the most important harbour in the 'Western Ocean'" and as "the meeting point of all foreign merchants".² These important writings categorically prove that Chinese traders were much accustomed with Malabar.

Early Trade Relations

Indian Ocean traders widely connected many Afro-Eurasian societies since ancient times. Researches on the geographic knowledge of Indian Ocean examined pre-modern geographic and cartographic advancements in different periods of time and showcased the Indian Ocean connections of Chinese traders and travellers (Harley and Woodward, 1987). Ancient Greeks and Romans were counted as the first to document the geography of the Indian Ocean as an unbroken aquatic

unit.³ The classical resources of Strabo (c64 BCE- 24 CE) and Pliny (23 – 79 CE) had brought out activities of merchants and maritime performances (Constantine, 1896). Various ports of Malabar in the Indian Ocean rim, from this ancient time, were crossing stations between the East and the West. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* estimated to be written in 1st century CE by an anonymous author provided more details on the regional port towns of the South Indian shoreline. It was literally meant the Red Sea, but this name was used to denote larger parts of Indian Ocean comprising the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Bay of Bengal in the early Roman period. Though Chinese ports were not mentioned in these documents, Chinese silks were a known commodity of the time. The inland place Thina (China) from where the silks floss, yarn, cloths were carried by land via Bactria⁴ to Barygaza⁵ and through Ganges River back to Limyrike.⁶ Only a few merchants directly reached China, and most of the Greek traders depended on Indian ports for Chinese commodities in the early time. In later centuries the travel routes developed and Chinese trade developed directly between the Arab, African and Asian countries (Gungwu, 2003).

There were a number of reasons for the advancement of maritime trade channels and relations, indicating that the traders and travellers had realized the difficulties of other routes from their early experience. It was significant to overcome the mistrust of the bristly tribes and countries in the West Region to the Han Dynasty (202 BCE- 9CE) and also the geographical danger of travelling over the Pamirs⁷, known as "the Roof of the world". The father of Chinese history, Sima Qian (c145-86BCE)⁸ praised Zhang Qian (164-113BCE), an explorer at the time, who had opened up the route to the West Regions.⁹ Another reason was that the envoys returned with tributes to the Han Dynasty that strengthened the relationship between the governments of the Han Dynasty and the western world.¹⁰ Chinese traders took the lead to get rid of the overland traffic from East Asia to the West Asia under the Han Dynasty.¹¹ This is an odd reversal when today the Chinese are again constructing routes through the mountains in order to avoid the pirate-infested seas!

The Indian Ocean developed as an eventful water of maritime traffic under the Tang Dynasty (618- 907CE), and became as popular as 'the Silk Road'. This famous maritime route for trade was as important as the overland Silk Road and was predominantly called the Spice Route. Arabs also depended on Chinese ships to do business in India and China.¹² Merchant Suleiman wrote about the trade between India and China, named the Chain of History (Silsilah al - Tawarih) in 851 A.D. He narrated what he personally experienced as an Arab merchant in the ninth century, after his travel to China and India. The materials on the maritime route in Merchant Suleiman's book provided proof of

the trade between the East and the West. Merchant Suleiman wrote a book after he returned home from China and India where he did business for many years. This book recorded the route sailing east from Oman to China, starting from the Gulf, passing by the Arabian Sea, the Malabar coast, going through the Bay of Bengal, the Malacca Strait, the South China sea, and then arriving in Guangzhou.¹³

Under the Song Dynasty (960-1279CE), China's ocean-going merchant ships popularized the 'Spice Route', which was from Guangzhou, proceeding across the Indian Ocean taking advantage of the monsoon in the Indian Ocean. In this oceanic way, the time could be shortened by more than one third¹⁴. In his book *Golden Grasslands and Gem Mining*, Abu al-Hasan 'Alībn al-Husaynibn 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī (c. 896–956CE), an Arab historian and geographer who travelled to China also recorded that Chinese merchant ships regularly visited the Gulf, and could directly reach Oman, Bahrain, Basra and other places and vice versa.¹⁵

In the Indian Subcontinent, Malabar, Ma'bar (Coromandel)¹⁶ were the ports much connected with Chinese trade during the Sung dynasty between 967-1279CE. The Mao K'un map, in the Shun-fenghsiang-sung, also depicted the Indian Ocean coastal lines as important trading stations.¹⁷ The magnitude of this region was also mentioned in the copy of microfilm preserved in Cambridge.¹⁸ There are references to these ports by *Ling-waitai-ta* and the *Chu-fan chi*, who provided details on the journey to early ports like Ch'ian-chou over forty days to reach Lambri -Sumatra, where they spent the winter time and then they further travelled another month to the famous port Quilon.¹⁹ Yaqut al Hamawi (1179–1229), an Arab geologist, specifically mentioned the importance of regional port towns in his work. China was evidently very active in sailing on the Indian Ocean. The traces of Chinese vessels were seen at the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and even on the East African coast.²⁰

In 1279 CE Kublai Khan overthrew the Southern Song Dynasty and established the Great Yuan Empire. Mongols paid much attention to the establishment of the post system in various places for the protection of traffic between the East and the West. During more than one thousand years since the Han Dynasty till then, traffic both on the sea and land was always blocked due to the political turbulences. 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 populace of China - the Hui people. By the Ming Dynasty, the Hui people became a member of the multi-ethnic Chinese nation.

In the early days of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE), the government laid stress on the contacts with foreign countries. Zheng He

was the admiral, who led amazing maritime expeditions during early Ming Dynasty. During his missions, Zheng He had Ma Huan (c.1380–1460CE)²¹, Fei Xin (c.1385 –1436CE)²² and Gong Zhen ²³ with him, who knew Arabic. 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 these travellers saw, heard, experienced and understood during their mission, which would indeed be valuable for posterity.

Zheng He's Voyage to Malabar

Zheng He's expedition fleet started out from China and arrived in Malabar Coast seven times between 1405 to 1433. The first three times, he stopped at port towns of Kollam, Cochin and Calicut and in his fourth voyage, he advanced to Africa after a break in Calicut. Chinese official visits contributed much to Malabar and helped to develop cultural legacy and shared heritage in many fields, especially in the wide use of Chinese gadgets in traditional works, including potteries, traditional snake boats and fishing nets.

In Malabar, traders were given freedom to conduct their business, typically enjoying the pleasure of semi-autonomy from administrative obstruction and public compliance. This tremendous attitude of the Malabar rulers helped much to inculcate a spirit of harmony and co-existence in the trading community of Malabar. Chinese leaders like Zheng He were a symbol of harmony and they also promoted coherence among the communities. It is important that there were no clashes with the rulers or trading communities in the region, though Zheng He came with hundreds of ships and thousands of traders. The attitude of the rulers and of the traders helped much to develop such a conducive atmosphere. The economic and social institutions, which were directly involved in early Malabar trade were interpreted as primarily designed to establish the trustworthiness of business partners and agents and to commit them to cooperation. The role of Chinese traders, who took a better position in the community, was also very important in the development of an amicable relationship between various communities of Malabar.

When Zheng He came to Malabar, the Chiefs of the Ports were Muslims and they could easily communicate in Arabic. The Chinese traders and travellers who settled in the region had also kept their faith, which not only entails certain religious beliefs but also a comprehensive legal system that prescribes social, economic, and political norms for its adherents. The many commercial precepts, as happened in other important trading ports of the world, were included in traditional and transnational commercial law that prompted the characterization of the international ports (Bernstein, 2008:16). The early trading organizations and business centres focused in particular on the roles of the

ship-owners and merchant representatives.

Amazingly trading relations were the key position in all historical changes and developments that happened in the Indian Ocean coast of Malabar. If we take the opinion of Adam Smith, as in other parts of the world the human propensity in Malabar was also the same, namely to barter, and to exchange one thing for another as underlying any form of economic progress that later reached the peak of international trade and commerce (Smith, 1852:6). Trading facilitated the development of the nation and society, moreover it brought religions and cultures along with technological, demographic exchanges. Malabar trading relations with Zheng He also match with the points of P.D. Curtin, who brought out the theme of business beyond economic prosperity, depicting the trading community, thriving coastal and interior markets as an idea for the flourishing of the nation and humanity (Curtin, 1984: 12-14)

Nature of Port Towns

Zheng He frequently visited three Malabar port towns, Kollam, Cochin and Calicut, which were the prominent ports of the region. The history of trade in Malabar was notably based on the gradually expanding commerce, which reached its peak with the help of Chinese as well as Arab merchants.²⁴ Various port towns of Malabar became outstanding in different centuries for excellent working strategies of rulers towards foreign traders (Sidebotham, 2011:191). Muziris, Nelcynda, Naura and Tyndis were the early ports whose references date back from the Greco-Roman period, an era between 332- 395 CE, when Romans had control over the Red Sea coast of Egypt and the Indian Ocean circumference.

Muziris, Nelcynda, Naura and Tyndis were ancient seaport and urban centres in Limyrike (Tamilakam). The name and fame of the early ports were described in the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* and they flourished and prospered with cargo ships (Scoff, 2011:44). Muziris was called Muciri in Tamil and was mentioned in the old Sangam literature (Sastri, 1955:330-5).²⁵ An enticing description of Muziris is seen in *Akananuru*,²⁶ (poem number 149.7-11) an anthology of early Tamil poems in Ettuttokai.²⁷ Researchers profusely quoted this work in their study on the early history of India (Kulke & Rothermund, 1998:119). The Muziris port city was much praised for its beautiful vessels and was most fascinating for westerners. The *Purananuru*²⁸ also mentioned the name of Muziris as a busy and active port city from where commodities were exported to various countries and precious gold was imported. Peter Francis in his study on Asian maritime trade has also analyzed these ancient works in his book.²⁹

Nelcynda is also an ancient port town described by Pliny in his famous classical work *The Natural History* and in *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*. Nelcynda was also described by a number of authors in

different styles, like Melkunda by Ptolemy. Pliny the Elder introduced it as the port Neacyndi in his book *Naturalis Historia*. Another two famous ports were Naura and Tyndis in Limyrike. Tyndis was identified and introduced in the Kingdom of Cerobothra. Periplus also mentioned the distance between these old towns. When we consider the distance of five hundred stadia, Tyndis is modern Kadalundi, near Calicut. The distances of Nelcynda from Muziris by river and sea also specifically narrated in the text as about five hundred stadia and are stated as part of another Kingdom, called Pandian.

As exchanging ports of Chinese commodities, the port cities of this region became very prominent, because traders comfortably approached these important ports to collect Roman commodities, which were accepted through a barter system, the popular method in that era for trading transactions. The large settlement and its prosperity and richness were attained through foreign trade and commerce. Producers brought heaps of black pepper from the hills and middle managers largely stacked this in warehouses near the ports. Raoul McLaughlin, in his book, *Rome and the Distant East: Trade Routes to the Ancient Lands of Arabia, India and China*, which is based on a doctoral thesis completed at Queen's University Belfast in 2006, described these features of Indian Ocean port towns (Raoul, 2010: 48-50). Though the Roman trade declined from the 5th century AD, various port towns of the Indian Ocean rim continued to attract the attention of other nationalities, particularly the Chinese and the Arabs.

In the Malabar region the trading stations were changed from time to time for political and commercial reasons. Once it was started in Muziris, then gradually it shifted to other ports and finally they depended on Kozhikode- The big bazaar³⁰ near to the Calicut beach reverberated with multiple languages of a crowded public consisting of so many races. Nairs, Tamil Chettiars, white & black Jews, Arabs, Persians, Syrians, Christians, Chinese, Italians and many more nationalities were peacefully involved in foreign trade, communicating in different languages and dialects, often interpreted by Arab-speaking Malabaris. This diversity of people can be traced from the Cairo Genizah records, which depicted the various Jewish Merchants, the writings of Ibn Battuta, who narrated the nature and style of Muslim settlers, scholars and merchants and Ma Huan, who also narrated the religion and caste of the traders and officials at Calicut.³¹

Over time, Kozhikode advanced into a major trading centre where the Middle-Eastern and Chinese traders and travellers exchanged their products. Wang Ta-yuan³² described the pepper trade in Kozhikode in *Tao-i-Chih*. Kozhikode had developed international relations and used to send diplomats to various regions. The Zamorin entrusted envoys to the Timurid court of Mirza Shahrukh³³ at Herat³⁴ and in return their

officials reached Kozhikode. Abd al-Razzaq, who was assigned to Kozhikode between November 1442 and April 1443, brought precious presents including a horse, head-dress, and ceremonial robes.³⁵

Among the later Malabar ports, Ponnani³⁶ was one of the strategic ports utilised by Zamorin. Beypore³⁷ and Chaliyam were also port towns that developed and flourished on both sides of the river Chaliyar.³⁸ These strategic port cities were places where Zheng He's ships attracted traders and Chinese merchants spent months to collect commodities. They also repaired their merchant ships called Chunks³⁹ in the traditional workshops of the region, where artisans were experts in building wooden ships, called *Dhows or Urus*.⁴⁰

The Chinese rose dramatically owing to the visits by Zheng He in the 14th & 15th century strong and cordial diplomatic relations were maintained between Calicut⁴¹ and Ming China. Early in the 15th century Calicut was visited by Nicolo de Conti,⁴² whose narrator, Poggio Bracciolini⁴³, described the city as a 'maritime city'.⁴⁴ According to Das Gupta, Arabs had better control over the sea lines of Malabar, for this was a connecting line between the east and the west, especially given the good presence of Chinese merchants in the region (Gupta, 1982:411). Chinese traders, who were also integral part in the growth and development of Malabar ports, contributed much to the development of Calicut. The foreign presence and influence were much visible in Malabar region in general, and particularly in Calicut (Barbosa, 1921:74-5). As far as Chinese traders are concerned, Ku-hi-fo was the most important maritime town of Malabar region (Sastri, 1939: 295). Ludovico Varthema⁴⁵ has explained this scenario in the following words: "There were fifteen thousand foreign traders in Calicut port".⁴⁶

Silk Street of Calicut, the North-west quarter, was the designated trading area, where the Chinese community had also set up their business ventures. Kozhikode was built as a model city based on Hindu Vastu Shastra. The derivation of the name Kozhikode, sheds light on the pattern of a structured city. This is clear from the existing old structures of the city, especially the Thali Temple and the Brahmin settlement around it, the traditional temple pond, the old mosques of Kuttichira etc. The Silk Street of Calicut got its name from the Chinese silk traders who had merchandised silk in that particular zone. The Chinese had their worshipping place in Calicut and various settlements inside, as well as in the outskirts of the city, including half status progeny.⁴⁷

In the first sighting of the Ming fleet lead by Zheng He, this was like a country floating on the water. When it reached the city, it was just bringing a nation to another with 30,000 people and hundreds of ships. The Armada of Zheng He had amazingly expanded across miles of the Indian Ocean. China and India together accounted for more than half of the world's volume in the time of Zheng He's naval expedition. In

the east, Chinese records regarding the frequency and composition of diplomatic and trade missions from Malabar provide important evidence for the trans-oceanic spice trade. These sources also highlight the role of maritime Southeast Asia as trans-shipment point and trading partner for Malabar Merchants. Catalogues of foreign places and trade goods, such as the *Chu-fan-shi* by Chau-Ju-Kua, the customs inspector at Quanzhou, add to this picture. Other sources indicate that Malabar merchants had also imported various products from other countries, for example rice from the Coromandel coast, horses and frankincense from Arabia and Persia, fine spices like cloves, nutmeg and mace from Southeast Asia, and ceramics, silks and other textiles from China.⁴⁸ Most of these items were re-exported from Malabar, except rice, because it was the major item consumed by inhabitants of the region. This trans-shipment brought much fame and money to Malabar along with the goodwill that the place surely acquired for collecting any items as an international market. The huge scope of trans-shipping enjoyed by merchants made Malabar one of the notable places with number prominent port towns and a wide variety of merchandise.⁴⁹ Indian Ocean trade relations with Chinese extended over a long period of 1500 years from the Han Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty. Though there were trading relations between Malabar and China from an early time, this relation got gorgeous colours after the consecutive voyages of Zheng He to Malabar.

Cultural Legacy and Shared Heritage

There are a number of cultural legacies, which are still respectfully maintained as shared heritages of Chinese Malabar relations. Chinese fishing nets are popular in Malabar and were introduced by Chinese during various expeditions to Malabar region. Chinese fishing nets, called Cheena-Vala in the vernacular are popular and are seen well-displayed in mid-air upright in line in tourist areas of the state. Chinese fishing nets are shore-operated lift nets, which normally abide by land installations for fishing. In the evening scene usually nets are silhouetted against the sunset. Chinese nets and their beautiful evening pictures are wonderfully depicted in tourism billboards and commercials of Modern Kerala. This shows how Chinese-shared heritages are connected with Malabar and are merged with the beauty and legacy of the shoreline. The Chinese nets from Malabar coastline are traditionally made of teakwood and bamboo poles, based on the principle of balance. The net operations are based on counterweights, generally stones about 30 cm in diameter, tied to ropes of different lengths, which support the smooth and worthwhile functioning. These attractive structures are strategically fixed on the shore projecting to the river or backwater. Often supplementary traditional lights fixed on the teak posts are suspended above the net to attract fish. More than

four fishermen engage in the operation of the fishing nets. Because it is set up in a special way, the whole weight of the one person walking on the main plank will be enough to cause the equipment to be pulled down into the water. Using this special net, normal fishing time will be in the early morning and evening before sunset. The net is sloped fully into the water and then raised carefully by tugging on the ropes. The wonderful balancing of the net, unity and togetherness in keeping the rhythm of the workers are fascinating to viewers.

There were Chinese people in the army of Zamorin and some of the ships used by admiral Kunhali were similar to the Chinese ships, which could lead sudden attacks against the Portuguese on the east coast as a retaliation to their atrocities. These ships carried out a daring raid against captured Portuguese Ceylon, and attacked a large convoy straggler discouraging trial. The Chinese were part of the community and they wholeheartedly had expressed willingness to help the Zamorin by extending their naval supports. Chinese also worked in the Army of the Zamorin and sacrificed their lives for the protection of the Malabar coast and to maintain peace in the seafaring activities. When admiral Kunhali IV was captured, the Chinese soldier's dedication created bewilderment in the King Zamorin and Portuguese, which was a unique incident of love and affection in the maritime history of Malabar. This is the story of Chinale, who was rescued from the enslavement of the Portuguese by Kunhali and given all freedom. But the Portuguese considered him as a fanatic for keeping courtesy to Kunhali. It was a sign of the bond between the Chinese and other trading communities before the Portuguese invasion.⁵⁰ The shared heritage is very much obvious in the structure of traditional boats, especially snake boats used for traditional competitions. Some of these boats got the semi structure of a dragon craft and the traditional boat race Vallam Kali⁵¹, which is still observed at the time of Onam, the official festival of Kerala. Chinese traders were part of the community of Malabar, where they could develop a mixed culture incorporating their traditional values. The descendents of these centuries old generations were identified in Panthalayani Kollam and Vadakara.⁵² A number of Chinese mosques in Calicut and nearby towns are preserved and maintained by the locals without altering the Chinese names. *Cheenedathu Palli* of Calicut and *Cheenam Veedu Palli* of Vadakara, *Cheenapalli* of Panthalayani Kollam are some of the evidences for the shared heritage of the Chinese Muslim communities in the region.⁵³ Chinese traders had received much respect in the Calicut region. The Chinese had been invited to the swearing-in ceremonies and other special occasions of conferring various statuses, grades and privileges to competent personalities and authorities by the Calicut King. A number of ceremonies were held under the kingdom for the coronation of various chiefs in

position as well as coordination of small local power positions in the kingdom. *Udaval Anakkal*⁵⁴ is a ceremony to bestow power to junior representatives of the royal family of *Nadiyirippu Swarupam*,⁵⁵ which had a number of *Sthanam*⁵⁶ to assign duties and obligations to royal members considering their status and positions. This was a very important function which directly bestowed portfolios over the juniors of the ruling family in key positions. *Valum Pudavayum*⁵⁷ was the name of another coronation ceremony in the country and *Talekkettu*⁵⁸ and *Peruvili*⁵⁹ and *Kuttuvilakku*⁶⁰ were famous investiture ceremonies held under the Calicut kingdom of Zamorin, where Chinese traders and settlers were also invited. It is found that Zheng He was asked to dispense an imperial mandate, which can be taken as one of the early models of foreign representation in the formal investiture ceremonies of Kozhikode King (Dreyer, 2017).

During the return journey official representatives of Kozhikode and other states accompanied the Chinese fleet with royal presents to Nanking in 1407 (Ibid). The representatives from the second voyage carried out the official investiture of the King Zamorin. A plaque of memoire was formally founded in Kozhikode to venerate the coronation. The Zamorin was bestowed with Chinese entitlement and souvenirs. That fleet stayed from December 1408 to April 1409. The third (1409–1411) and fourth (1413–1415) expeditions also visited Kozhikode. A number of tribute delegations in 1421, 1423 and 1433, among others, were dispatched by the Kozhikode rulers to Nanking and Peking. Presents from Kozhikode included horses, special cloths and black pepper. Some representatives of the Kozhikode court reached the Ming court in the years 1403–1433. Various dynasties kept good bilateral relations and a number of official diplomats and emissaries were sent from China to Malabar and in return from various Malabar kingdoms to Chinese Rulers.⁶¹ The Zamorin had also given better gifts to the Emperor of China through Zheng He. It was specially made by royal weavers and was specially ordered by royal craftsmen. A particular gift was made using fifty ounces of gold into hair-like fine threads, and weaved them into ribbons to make a gold girdle embedded with pearls and precious stones of all sort of colours,⁶² and then sent his envoy to present the gold girdle to the Ming emperor as tribute. Zheng He was also deputed by the Chinese emperor to handover a shipload of remarkable presents. Brocades of several types were presented to some of the Kozhikode envoys.⁶³

Contribution to Historiography

Zheng He's cultural legacy was also notably reflected in the historiography of Malabar through the pen of Ma Huan (1380-1460), who narrated the nature of business, ways of dealing with foreign traders,

good account on the chief of the port and other prominent personalities.⁶⁴ Zheng He's contribution is also obvious in the historiography of Malabar, especially regarding trans-national trading and the cultural relations. In Malabar international trading was the process of exchange shaped by the social and political systems of different civilizations and their attitudes towards one another (Chaudhuri, 1985:222). The contribution of Chinese travellers and traders are unique and we need more studies in the field with experts from Chinese language backgrounds. Good examples for early trading systems and community relations are available in the writings of Ma Huan, who described the role of community leaders through his narrations that the king had entrusted the charge of assessing the imported goods in the port to the Muslim Chief of the port along with a Chetti Merchant. They both cross-checked the account book in the official bureau, especially to evaluate and analyze the goods that came to Calicut port. He wrote that if a treasure ship reached the port, it was left entirely to these two men to supervise the transactions. And a higher officer, the commander of the ships, would negotiate a certain day for fixation of prices. The Muslim Chief of the port and the Chetti Merchant together would then fix the rate of the silk items and discuss the variants one by one, when it had been fixed. Then they normally prepared an agreement stating the amount of the commodity and the agreement was then retained by these two personalities.⁶⁵ This is the report on the chief of the port, ⁶⁶ and thereupon they collected tax and sent it to the authority. Ma Huan describes that the Muslim Chief of the port was entrusted with the official duty by the king. This was also an incident which showcased the harmonious atmosphere of the Calicut port, showing the responsibility of the Muslim chief of the port to keep the situation comfortable with a better outlook of intercultural coexistence in an internationally acclaimed multi-religious community. Ma Huan also stated the political role of Malabar Muslims that the king had two great Muslim Chiefs, who used to administrate the affairs of the country.⁶⁷

Zheng He's Sad Demise

It was amazing that Zheng He reached with marvellous fleet of three hundred ships, almost thirty thousand people, their personal baggage, official commodities and supplies. He made seven frequent voyages that touched upon Quilon, Cochin and Calicut between 1405 and 1433. Multi-lateral trade prospered and formal relations between the Ming dynasty and several Indian, Middle Eastern and South East Asian countries were established. As mentioned, Zheng He during the seventh voyage died at Calicut in the year 1433. Chinese scholars believe that Zheng He's dead body was buried in the sea near Calicut. When we consider his high position, close diplomatic relation and long term connection with the Calicut King, the dead body should have been

brought to the land. There is no other possibility when we consider the bond Zheng He maintained with the king of Calicut. The second reason to believe that there was a burial in the land of Calicut is that under the Shafi denomination of Islamic law, the body has to be brought to the shore, if there is any possibility to carry it safely back.⁶⁸

I could identify the mosque, Cheenedathu Palli⁶⁹ in the Puthiyangadi area of Calicut, with the tomb of the great Chinese leader and scholar, called Sheikh Seeni.⁷⁰ The caretaker of the mosque reconfirmed that it was a much-respected tomb from time immemorial and people from all walks of life irrespective of their religion and caste came to pay their respect. But nobody knows the exact name of the person buried in this tomb, but they call him Sheikh Seeni. Still the committee preserves the tomb respectfully and observes very big yearly ritualistic respect on him, attended by hundreds of people from all walks of life.

I was wondering who called this special name to the tomb and searched for the derivation. Finally I got a reply from the editor of the souvenir, which was published in conjunction with the inaugural day of the renovated tomb and the adjacent mosque that he just provided the Arabic name for the Sheikh from China. The secretary of the mosque revealed the secrets of the developmental activities around the shrine, which means that they receive necessary money from the holy shrine to run the madrasa and the mosque. Once it was just five thousand Rupees, then the religious school catered to a larger group of students and the expenses of the mosque went higher, but the revenue from the shrine also favourably rocketed.

I got a wonderful chance to do research in the particular site along with two Chinese scholars, Haiyun Maa, a Chinese historian from Frostburg State University, USA, and Shaojin Chai, from Ministry of Culture, United Arab Emirates. The mosque committee supported very much the project to uncover the erected holy canopy of the tomb. No inscriptions were left over the tomb stone underneath of the respectfully erected wooden structure, which was covered neatly with beautifully decorated cloths. The official committee members of the mosque along with the Imam helped us very much during this search. The other three mosques with Chinese names also provided a clear picture on the early Chinese settlements in the region. There are families, who were direct progenies of the intercultural marriages with Chinese trading communities in the region. The Chinese had a number of settlements in Malabar coastal region⁷² and some their learned new generations could explain the nostalgic cultural legacy of centuries old Chinese tradition. More archaeological excavations should be done in the region to unearth the old Chinese shared heritages and archaeological remains from the land.

Conclusion

During this research, I could consult many Chinese scholars, well versed in their vernacular and proficient in Chinese history. The fieldwork and exploration in various parts of the Malabar region also provided a better outlook on Chinese relations, hegemony and heritage. Zheng He's expedition manifestly contributed much to the intercultural coexistence of Malabar helping to develop cultural legacy and shared heritage in many fields, especially in the wide use of Chinese gadgets in traditional works, including ceramics, porcelains, pots, earthenware, traditional snake boats and fishing nets.

Under the semi-autonomous administrative structure of Calicut, the remarkable cultures of harmony and coexistence were strengthened with wholehearted support of the trading communities. Zheng He himself was a symbol of harmony, who promoted consistency and unity among the societies in the neighbourhood and there were seldom clashes between trading societies in the Malabar region. The cultural legacies and shared heritages of Chinese Malabar relations are still a popular theme in Malabar. Even Chinese people are enthusiastic to learn about the attention that Malabar rendered in preserving this wonderful heritage and transferring basic workable knowledge of traditional items in the era of technological advancement. Chinese people of the Calicut Army, the ships similar to Chinese ships, the matching structure of traditional boats, snake boats of conventional competitions, Chinese nets, and especially Chinese mosques were part of a remarkable integration in the distant past. The Chinese cultural legacy was also notably reflected in the historiography of Malabar through the pen of Ma Huan, who showcased the harmonious ambiance of Malabar port towns and peoples' responsibility of intercultural coexistence. It is stunning to realize how the Chinese became part of the integrated community and the country without keeping much trace of their belief and vernacular, save the traditions and interrelated popular cultures. In transnational cultures the relations extended beyond language and religion, traces of cultural heritage were lingering on the lineage, and the inherited memory of the living descendants of these early traders contributed to highly composite community.

Notes

1. Some paintings are available depicting the shipwreck at Calicut, based on the direct narrations of Ibn Battuta.
2. Tao-i chih-liiehchiao-shih, by Wang Ta-yiian, ed. by Su Chi-ch'ing (Peking, 1981; Chung-waichiao-t'ung shih-chits'ung-k'an), pp. 325-330; Hsi-yulu, by Yeh-lii Ch'u-ts'ai, ed. by Hsiang Ta, and I-yiichih, by Chou Chih-chung, ed. by Lu Chin-ling, two texts in one vol. (Peking, 1981; Chung-waichiao-t'ung shih-chi ts'ung-k'an), pp. 23-24.
3. Graham Shioley, translated, Pseudo Skylax's Periplus: the Circumnavigation of the inhabited World: Text, Translation, and commentary, Exeter,

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England: Bristol Phoenix Press 2011.

4. Bactria was a place in Central Asia, north of the Hindu Kush mountain range and south of the Amu Darya river, the area of modern-day Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
5. It is the Greek name of Bharuch, formerly known as Broach, or Bhrugukachchh a city at the mouth of the river Narmada in Gujarat.
6. An ancient name of the Malabar Coast mentioned in the ancient Greco-Roman texts. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* describes Limyrike from Naura (Narath- Kannur) and Tyndis (Kadalundi). Ptolemy noted the beginning in Tyndis near Calicut.
7. Pamir is known as mountain range in Himalayas.
8. He is a Chinese historian of the early Han Dynasty and considered as the father of Chinese historiography.
9. Sima Qian, Historical Records, Biography of Zhang Qian.
10. The Chronicles of the Later Han Dynasty, Biography of the West Regions. Vol.118.
11. Fan Ye, The History of Late Han Dynasty is a classic of block-printed edition, finished in 28th year of Jiajing Reign, Ming Dynasty(1549), noted by Li Xian (in Tang Dynasty and recorded by Sima Biao).
12. Su, New history of the Tang Dynasty: Records of the geography. G.& Zhang, J. & Qiu, Y, 2011.
13. Sulaiman al Tajir, Akhbar al-Sin wa-al Hind - M Sauvaget (ed), Paris: Belles Letters 1948.
14. The History of Song Dynasty, written by TuoTuo (Yuan Dynasty)etc., was carved by Ming Nanjing and revised by Ming Qingdi.
15. Mas'ūdī, Abu'ul-Hasan'Alī Ibn al-Husayn Ibn'Alī al-". *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1970, *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*, an English translation of the *Muruj al-dhahab* by Aloys Sprenger, London 1841
16. The land of the Chola King, which later became famous for being much nearer to the South East Asian area.
17. The Mao K'un map is in ch. 240 of Wupeichih. Calicut is shown on p. 10215 (20a) there. For the bibliographical data, see under WPC in the list of references to Calicut (after n. 6 in text). For the Shun-fenghsiang-sung, see Hsiang Ta. (ed.), *Liang chung hai-taochen-ching* (Peking, 1982; *Chung-waichiao-t'ung shih-chi ts'ung-k'an*), esp. pp. 41, 78-81
18. Anonymous, Microfilm at Cambridge, 24b. For a description of the I-yiit'u-chih, see A. C. Moule, "An introduction to the I Yu T'uChih or 'Pictures and Descriptions of Strange Nations' in the Wade Collection at Cambridge," *Toung Pao* 27 (1930), pp. 179-188.
19. See Friedrich Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the twelfth and thirteenth Centuries*, entitled *Chu-fan-chi*' (rpt. Taipei, 1970), p. 89
20. Yaqut al Hamawi is well known for his encyclopaedic book, *Mu'jam al-Buldan*, Dictionary of Countries, which he started writing in 1224 and

finished in 1228, one year before he died.

21. Ma Huan, also known as Zongdao, pen name Mountain-woodcutter, was a Chinese traveller and writer who accompanied Admiral Zheng to Malabar.
22. FeiXin is famous as the author of the book *Xinhua (Description of the Starry Raft*; preface dated 1436), which recorded his 4 voyages to the southern seas
23. Gong Zhen was a translator and writer travelled with the admiral Zheng He and worked. He composed *Xiyang FanguoZhi (The Annals of Foreign Nations in the Western Ocean)* in 1434.
24. G. Haurani, *Arab Seafaring in Indian Ocean in Ancient and early medi-aeval time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 83.
25. Sangam period is the period in the history of ancient southern India (known as the Tamilakam) spanning from 300 BCE and 300 CE. This collection contains 2381 poems composed by 473 poets, some 102 of whom remain anonymous.
26. Akananuru is a classical Tamil poetic work from the seventh book in the anthology of Sangam literature namely Ettuthokai. It comprises 400 *Akam* (subjective) poems dealing with love and separation.
27. Ettuthokai means ‘The Eight Anthologies’, which is the oldest Classical Tamil poetic work, part of the Pathinenmaelkanakku anthology series of the Sangam Literature.
28. The Purananuru is a work of Tamil poetry from the *Ettuttokai*, one of the eighteen *melkanakkunoolgal*. It is a treatise on kingship, which refers to the various activities of a king and the nature of expected behaviour like what a king should be, how he should act, how he should treat his subjects and how he should show generosity and mercy towards the people.
29. Peter Francis. *Asia’s Maritime Bead Trade: 300 B.C. to the Present* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2002) 120 .
30. Traditional Valiyangadi of Calicut, which had the special trading area for various merchant communities from all around the world.
31. Goitein, S.D., and M. Friedman, eds. and trans., *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza (“India Book”)* Brill, Leiden, 2008. Ma Huan’s *yingyai Sheng-lan*, the overall survey of Ocean shores. Cambridge, 1970.
32. Wang Dayuan was a traveller from Quanzhou, China during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty in 1328–1339. He sailed through the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia, South Asia, north Africa and East Africa.
33. Shah Rukh was the fourth and youngest son of Central Asian emperor Timur.
34. Third largest city of Afghanistan and capital of Herat Province.
35. Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi, *Dastan-I safa-I Hindustan washarh-I ‘ajaib-I an*, Tashkent 1960; Muzaffar Alam, Sanjay Subrahmanyam. “Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800”. Cambridge University Press, 2007

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36. It is believed as port Tyndis, introduced by the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*. The port is situated at the mouth of Bharathappuzha, which is also famous as Nila River and is bounded by the Arabian Sea on the west.
37. Beypore, an ancient port town, now part of the Kozhikode district of Kerala, is famous for traditional wooden ships building.
38. Chaliyar is the fourth longest river in Kerala with 169 kilometre length.
39. This also called Junk, the typical traditional Chinese sailing ship. The term is derived from the Chinese word Chuan, which means boat.
40. Uru is an ancient merchant ship with traditional wooden design.
41. Chinese called this as Kuli and the name KaliKut was derived from the name 'Koyil Kota'. Koyil means 'Royal Palace' and 'Kota' means Fort.
42. Niccolò de' Conti (1395–1469) was a Venetian merchant and explorer, who travelled to Malabar and Southeast Asia, and possibly to Southern China, during the early 15th century.
43. Poggio Bracciolini (1380– 1459) is one of the more interesting of the early Italian humanists and historians.
44. R.H. Major (ed.) *India in Fifteenth Century*, London: 1857) part II, 20.
45. Ludovico di Varthema (c.1470 – 1517), was an Italian traveller, who had spent time in Calicut, where came across two Italians - Varthema gives their names as Pier'Antonio and Gian'Maria, and identifies them as Milanese, who were military engineers that the Zamorin had hired to cast European-style artillery to fight the Portuguese. Varthema had witnessed the naval battle of Cannanore between Zamorin's fleet and the Portuguese fleet of Lourenço de Almeida, which he describes in some detail. Shortly after, Varthema was hired by the Portuguese in Cannanore to help the Portuguese authorities enforce their strict new shipping restrictions on the Malabar.
46. Lodovico de Varthema, John Winter Jones, Richard Carnac Temple, *Itinerary of Ludovico Di Varthema of Bologna from 1502 to 1508*. (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1997) See also Lodovico de Varthema; Edited by George Percy Badger Translated by John Winter Jones., *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix, in Persia, India, and Ethiopia, A.D. 1503 to 1508* (London: the Hakluyt Society, London in 1863)
47. I could meet and interview families from Kozhikode district, who relentlessly claimed Chinese lineage and family traditions, showing their basic appearance like body structure, shape of the eyes, nose etc
48. W.B. Greenlee, trans., *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India* (London: Hakluyt 1938), 82.
49. R.S. Lopez, "The Trade of Medieval Europe: the South", in M.M. Postan and E. Miller, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 2: Trade and Industry in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 1987), 349
50. Francois Pyrard, Pierre de Bergeron, Jerome Bignon, the voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, Moluccas, and

Brazil Issue 80 Volume 2 Part 2. Whiting and Co, London 1890. Tien Hsia Monthly, Sun YatSen Institute, Volume 9, page 456. 1939.

51. It is called 'Boat Play' and observed as festival of the land.
52. I could interview some of the families who keep the Chinese structure in Nature.
53. The author had visited these mosques and examined the existing structures and tries to find the people with Chinese structure in the locality.
54. Literary means sharpening the sword.
55. In the era when Chera King divided kingdom into different sovereigns, The Eranad Udaiyavar a provincial governor, established a sovereign kingdom based on Nediyiruppu which was titled 'Nediyiruppu Swaroopam'. The king, entitle 'Mootha Eradi of Nediyiruppu, controlled the Eranad area parts of the present Malappuram district for centuries from Nediyiruppu, which was capital for this kingdom.
56. Official positions under the kingdom.
57. Conferring of the sword and ceremonial dress.
58. The ceremony in which the coronation of naval chieftains of Zamorin was held.
59. Entitling names related to the power and position in the kingdom
60. *kuttuvilakku* was ceremonial swearing-in conducted by Zamorin of Calicut.
61. Huang Da-Show, "An outline of China's contact with South India in the early fifteenth century," in R. E. Asher (ed.)
62. Traditional Ponnada, which is still garlanded as a respect and appreciation
63. Chan, Hok-lam (1998). "The Chien-wen, Yung-lo, Hung-hsi, and Hsüan-te reigns, 1399-1435". *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 7: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
64. John King Fairbank, Denis Crispin Twitchett, Frederick W. Mote. *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 7, Part 1. Cambridge University Press, 1978. pp 233-36, Ma Huan's Ying-yai Sheng-lan: 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores' [1433]. Translated and Edited by J. V. G. Mills. Cambridge University Press for the Hakluyt Society (1970).
65. J. V. G. Mills (tr.). Ma Huan: The overall survey of the ocean's shores' (1433), translated from the Chinese text edited by FengCh'eng-chün. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). 140
66. This means Shaha Bandar of the port.
67. Mills, trans, Ma Huan, 141
68. Sheikh Zainudheen Maqdhum 11, *Fathul Mueen*, Manuscripts, 221,
69. This literally means Chinese Mosque.
70. Sheikh from China
71. Panthalayani Kollam, Vadakara , Kozhikode Puthiyangadi, etc.

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