

ETHNIC STUDIES

WANG GUNGWU

ONLY CONNECT!

**Sino-Malay
Encounters**



EASTERN UNIVERSITIES PRESS

W A N G G U N G W U

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Sino-Malay

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Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon.
Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted,
And human love will be seen at its height.
Live in fragments no longer.
Only connect...

-- E.M. Forster in *Howard's End*

**To my friends,
Asraf Haji Abdul Wahab (1927-1999)
Beda Lim (1925-1999)**

"Budi tuan terlalu banyak
Tetap dikenang seumur hidup"

Preface

Chinese records show that the peoples of the China coasts and the Malay archipelago have had trading relations for at least two millennia. Never, however, were Chinese and Malays in closer contact than during the past century, firstly in British Malaya and then in the independent Federation of Malaysia. This collection of essays offers accounts of some of their encounters before, during and after the British period.

The essays here begin with the 15th century. The story before that has been introduced in my study, *The Nanhai Trade* (new edition, 1998), a history of Chinese trade in the South China Sea. There were references to trading between the ancestors of modern Malays and those of southern Chinese, but there were always many other peoples involved. It was not until the 15th century that imperial China established with the rising Malay kingdom of Malacca a special relationship that lasted about thirty years. After the withdrawal of the Chinese navies from the region, Chinese merchants continued to deal with the Malay empire even after it lost Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511 and moved its capitals to Johor and the Riau-Lingga archipelago. There the Chinese continued to deal with island and riverine states whose links with a shared Malay past survived Dutch and then British incursions until the 19th century.

British dominance over the peninsular Malay states from the 1870s to 1941 laid the foundations of a new kind of Sino-Malay relationship. After the Second World War, it was mostly left to the Malay and Chinese peoples themselves to determine the conditions of their future together. This took place in a many-tiered federal state that evolved from 1948 to 1957, then from 1963 to 1965, and to yet another start after 1969. Much has been learnt during the past half century, but much more awaits to be negotiated if the two peoples are to consolidate the gains of new nationhood.

Eleven of the essays in this volume appeared in *Community and Nation* (1992), now out of print. Seven others that also deal with the

relationship between the Malay and Chinese worlds have been added. Together, I hope to interest those readers who are specially interested in the history of that set of encounters.

Wang Gungwu

20th March 2001

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CHAPTER



The Opening of Relations between China and Malacca (1403–1405)*

The early history of Malacca has provided scholars with many problems. Sir Richard Winstedt's contribution has been a careful analysis of Malay sources, including a study of the genealogies of the Malacca royal house. He has also drawn attention to the material in Tomé Pires's *Suma Oriental*, where the story of how Malacca was founded cannot be better told. The events in Palembang, in Singapore, in Muar, and then in Malacca, which probably occurred during the last two decades of the fourteenth century, show the rise to local power of Parameswara, the founder of Malacca.² As to how and when Malacca became an important international trading power, we have to turn to Chinese writings for our earliest records. The best known of these writings are Ma Huan's *Ying-yai sheng-lan* and Fei Hsin's *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*, which record the expeditions of Cheng Ho (1405–1433), and the official history of the Ming dynasty (the

* Published in J. S. Bastin and R. Roolvink (eds.), *Malaya and Indonesian Studies: Essays presented to Sir Richard Winstedt* (London, Oxford U.P., 1964).

Ming-shih), which presents a chronology of Sino-Malacca relations during the fifteenth century.³

The present study examines the question of how the Ming court came to open relations with Parameswara in the years 1403–1405 and what the nature of that relationship was. New documentary and chronological material is now available in the *Ming shih-lu* (Veritable Records of the Ming) and a careful examination of this material has thrown some light on the subject. Specially valuable is the *Yung-lo shih-lu* in 130 chüan, the Veritable Records of the reign of the Emperor Yung-lo (1402–1424), which was the source-book of the *Ming-shih* and most of the other sixteenth and seventeenth century works which touch on the subject of Malacca.⁴ The *Yung-lo shih-lu* was compiled between the years 1425 and 1430. Although it merely recorded the official relations between China and Malacca, it is the *earliest* surviving work which mentions the activities of Malacca. Also, it is the daily record of Yung-lo's reign, carefully compiled from material in the Imperial Archives. Where foreign relations were concerned, the following rule was applied: "The sending of envoys to communicate with [countries beyond] the four borders and their appointments, acceptances, presentations and rewards are all recorded. Also recorded are the missions of foreign countries and such banquets and gifts [which were given then]". This rule indicates that the material was as complete as was possible at the time.⁵

The first questions to be considered is when and how the Chinese court first heard of Malacca. We know that the very first reference to Malacca in the Chinese records occurs when the eunuch Yin Ch'ing was ordered by the emperor to visit Malacca in 1403. Ma Huan says later that when the Chinese first visited Malacca, its chief was paying tribute to Siam, but nowhere can we find reference to how this 'Siamese tributary state' became known to the Chinese court.⁶ With the help of the *Yung-lo shih-lu*, we can now form some idea as to how this happened.

First let us consider what the Chinese officials knew about Southeast Asia at the time of Yung-lo's accession in July 1402. We know that Yung-lo lost no time in establishing contact with foreign nations. Thirteen days after he came to the throne on 30 July 1402, he prohibited private trading overseas as his father had done before. A

month after that, he began to send missions to inform the foreign nations of his accession — first to Korea, then Tibet and Nepal, and then to the Mongol nations. As for Southeast Asia, he first sent his envoys south on 3 October.⁷ This flurry of activity may be compared with the first year of his father Emperor Hung-wu's reign in 1368–1369. But what, in fact, did Yung-lo know about Southeast Asia more than 30 years later? Emperor Hung-wu did not encourage closer relations with countries beyond Siam, especially after 1380, but, during the last years of his reign, there were new developments which throw light both on what Yung-lo and his ministers knew and why they pursued a positive policy towards Southeast Asia and the countries of the Indian Ocean.

During the last five years before Hung-wu's death in 1398, Siam sent missions annually or biannually as before, relations being perfectly normal. On the other hand, Champa sent her first mission in six years in 1397 and Java, which had not sent any missions since 1382, sent missions two years running (in fact, within six months of each other) in 1393 and 1394. These were the only nations of Southeast Asia to have relations with China and it is interesting that Java should renew relations at a time when imperial policy was hardening against the significant increase in private trading overseas as can be seen from the following facts:⁸

29 December 1393 : Mission from Java.

14 February 1394 : Officials were ordered to punish heavily those who traded privately overseas; there was also a prohibition of all use of foreign goods, especially foreign scented woods, by ordinary people.

11 May 1394 : The ceremony of presenting foreign kings and envoys of missions to the emperor and the heir apparent was simplified.

21 May 1394 : Another mission from Java.

As no mission had come from the area south of Siam since 1382, the reappearance of a Java mission in 1393 was welcomed by the

court as a way to suppress private trade and encourage state trading. Java, however, did not send any more missions after 1394, and in 1397 (30 April) the court admitted that private trading was far from discouraged when it had to order once again that unauthorized trading overseas should be prohibited. So anxious was the court to reestablish state trading on a larger scale, that when Siam sent a mission in September later that year (1397), the Siamese were asked to convey the emperor's wishes to Java that more missions be sent to China and that the Javanese king should curb his vassal state of Srivijaya and stop it from interfering with missions sent to China. The long comment on Srivijaya by the emperor himself and the long letter to the king of Siam made it clear that the court was out of touch with the situation in Java and Sumatra.⁹ The Chinese were not yet aware that Srivijaya had already fallen and that it was not Srivijaya which was preventing more missions from going to China. The more likely reason was that private trading was perfectly satisfactory on the Chinese coasts and no official contacts were considered really necessary by the nations south of Siam.

This brief summary shows that in 1397 the court knew little of the political changes south of Siam. It is possible, however, that the emperor was enlightened about the situation by the Siamese mission the next year in April 1398, but nothing was apparently done about this, as the emperor had fallen ill 12 days before the mission was presented and died two months later.¹⁰

As no records of Emperor Chien-wen's reign (1398–1402) have survived,¹¹ we can only assume that Yung-lo's knowledge of Southeast Asia was limited to that available to his father in 1398. His own views might well have been similar to those of his father nine months before his death in September 1397, which I quote below:

At the beginning of our reign, the various nations had relations with China. Their envoys were unending and the merchants found this convenient. [my italics] There were nations like Annam, Champa, Cambodia, Siam, Java, Ryukyu, Srivijaya, Brunei, Pahang, Pai-hua [?], Samudra, Hsi-yang [Chola?] and Pang-ha-la [Bengal?], a total of 30 nations. [But] when Hu Wei-yung planned his treachery, Srivijaya joined in the intrigue and deceived our envoys to go there. The king of

Java heard about this and warned Srivijaya to send [the envoys] back with ceremony. Since then, envoys and merchants have been obstructed. Thus the feelings of the various kings have not been made known [to us]. Only Annam, Champa, Cambodia, Siam and Ryukyu have been coming continually since their first missions.¹²

Compare this with Yung-lo's instructions to the Ministry of Rites concerning the envoys sent out on 3 October 1402:

In the time of T'ai-tsu Kao Huang-ti [his father], the various nations who sent missions were all treated with good faith. Those who brought their native products to trade were all allowed to do so. When any of them did not know what to avoid and mistakenly broke the regulations, they were treated leniently in order to win over distant peoples. Now that the world is as one family, it is proper to show to all that we do not discriminate against anyone. The nations who sincerely wish to come with tribute may all do so. You are to inform them about this so that they clearly know my will.¹³

It is not surprising then that the Chinese envoys were sent to the countries which had already established contact during Emperor Hung-wu's reign, including Samudra and India.

Below is a table of the main events of 1402–1403 connected with the extension of Chinese relations overseas.

Table I. October 1402–October 1403¹⁴

1402

3 October	Sent envoys to Siam, Java, Ryukyu, Japan, Hsi-yang (Chola?), Samudra and Champa.
-----------	--

1403

25 February	Fêted the envoys of Siam.
27 February	Sent envoys with gifts to the king of Siam.
1 July	Sent envoys to Siam.
9 August	Received Champa mission.
25 August	Sent envoys separately to Siam, Champa, and Cambodia; sent Wen Liang-fu to Java, Hsi-yang (Chola?), and Samudra.
29 August	Established Bureau of Maritime Trade.
21 September	Received Java mission.
26 September	Fêted Java mission "and others" (?)

Table I. October 1402–October 1403¹⁴ (*Cont'd*)

1 October	Sent eunuch Ma Pin to Java, and also to Hsi-yang (Chola?) and Samudra.
6 October	Siam mission presented with gifts.
10 October	Sent eunuch envoy to Siam.
1403	
22 October	Yung-lo comments on Muslim traders from Hsi-yang (?) coming with a Chinese mission which returned from Siam.
28 October	Sent eunuch Yin Ch'ing to Malacca, Cochin, and other places.

Siam and Champa appear to have responded quickly to the invitation to send missions to China. As for Java, a mission did not arrive until Wen Liang-fu had already been appointed to go to Java, Samudra, and India. But after the Java mission was received and fêted, a new set of envoys under Ma Pin was appointed to visit the same places.

There are several interesting points here which are relevant to this study. As can be seen in the table, three missions are recorded as having been sent up the Straits of Malacca before Yin Ch'ing was ordered to go to Malacca itself. With all three, there was no mention of Malacca and there is no reason to believe that the court had heard of Malacca before 1 October 1403. If the first mission of October 1402 had heard of Malacca on their way to Samudra, they could not have got back in time to tell their news before Yin Ch'ing was sent out in October 1403.¹⁵ And the other two were ordered to go only a short while before Yin Ch'ing was sent out. If the Chinese had had prior knowledge of Malacca, it is curious that Ma Pin should have been sent to Samudra and India without stopping at Malacca and be followed four weeks later by a new mission sent to Malacca and Cochin.

This last mission would also indicate that the court did not hear of Malacca from either the Siamese envoys early in 1403 or the Javanese envoys in September. This is not surprising as neither Siam nor Java would have willingly admitted that a new center had arisen outside their direct control. Even the later Siamese mission of October 1403 could hardly be expected to tell the Chinese about the importance

of a place which they considered as one of their tributary states. What then induced the court to appoint Yin Ch'ing 27 days after Ma Pin was sent to Java and 18 days after another eunuch envoy was sent to Siam? *Yung-lo shih-lu* says that six days before Yin Ch'ing was ordered to go, the emperor commented on the earlier arrival of Muslim traders from Siam. The comment reads as follows:

Lately the Muslim Haji and others from the "Western Ocean" were at Siam when our mission arrived and they followed the mission back to the court. Such distant foreigners who know respect for China are indeed praiseworthy. Now that they are being sent home, the Ministry of Rites should give them the credentials to ensure that the officials on their way will not obstruct them. From now on all foreign nations who wish to come to China may be allowed to do so.¹⁶

This was followed three weeks later (14 November) by the emperor's refusal to tax Muslim traders for selling pepper. The entry in the *Yung-lo shih-lu* reads:

The Muslim Haji Ma-ha-mo Ch'i-ni and others from the country of Hsi-yang La-ni [?] came to the court with a tribute of native goods. Because they traded the pepper which they brought with the people, the authorities asked that this trade be taxed. The emperor replied, "The commercial tax is for the purpose of discouraging people from pursuing trade as a profession and surely not for profit to the state. Now the foreigners have come from afar out of admiration for us and we want to cut into their profits. We can only get very little [revenue] while this will completely degrade our principles". The request was rejected.¹⁷

It seems clear that the Muslim traders from Hsi-yang La-ni were those whom the emperor had referred to earlier as having come with the Chinese mission to Siam. Now between the first and the second comment by the emperor on these traders, Yin Ch'ing was ordered to go to Malacca, Cochin, and "other nations". The juxtaposition of dates as outlined above gives us an interesting clue to the source of the court's knowledge of Malacca. It could have been these Muslims who were responsible for informing the court of the new center of Malacca

and even for persuading the court that it would be worth while to send a mission there.

The intriguing question is, who were these Muslim traders and what could have been their interest in Malacca? They are described as having come from Hsi-yang, which was a name thought to have been used in early references as an abridged form for Hsi-yang So-li or Chola of the Western Ocean.¹⁸ But during Yung-lo's reign and in various later sources, Hsi-yang was also used as a general term for the Indian Ocean. Neither Ma Huan nor Fei Hsin mentions Chola (either as So-li or as Hsi-yang), while Ma Huan seems to have used So-li to describe south Indians in general, and both writers used Hsi-yang for the Indian Ocean.¹⁹ We know also that Yin Ch'ing was instructed to go to Cochin and that he returned in October 1405 with a mission from the ruler of Calicut (see Table II). There is again no mention of Chola. We cannot therefore say that the "Hsi-yang" Muslim traders who came via Siam or the Muslim traders of "Hsi-yang La-ni" were from Chola, but there is no doubt that they were from South India, probably from the Malabar coast, where overseas trade was dominated by Muslims.²⁰

The question as to what their interests could have been in Malacca is much more difficult to answer. The fact that they came from Siam with the Chinese mission was unusual, or it would not have received imperial comment. It suggests that they persuaded the Chinese missions to bring them. This also suggests that they had difficulties in reaching China in other ways, or that the Siamese were not helpful in supplying them with cheap Chinese goods. The Chinese market for pepper was obviously also an added attraction. As these south Indian Muslims traded in Siam, they would have been aware of the trading conditions in the Siamese tributary states on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula and realized the potentialities of the newly developed and, for the Indian traders, more convenient center of Malacca.²¹ After all, the Malacca ruler welcomed Indian traders, and if more Chinese goods were brought there, a profitable trade could be established. It is likely that they thought the Chinese should be told of the commercial possibilities of Malacca. This explanation of the strange decision to send Yin Ch'ing to Malacca on 28 October 1403 would fit the few facts we have.

The above discussion attempts to determine if Yin Ch'ing's voyage was brought about by Muslim merchants of South India. It leads us also to consider whether Yin Ch'ing's was the only mission, of the four sent out since Yung-lo's accession, to go to the new trading center of Malacca. We know nothing about the mission sent to Samudra and Hsi-yang in October 1402, not even when it returned to China.²² The following table for the year 1405, however, indicates that the two other missions of 1403 did go to India and return to China in 1405. It also shows the connexion between the return of these missions and Yin Ch'ing's and the sharp increase in activity concerning maritime relations, including the first Cheng Ho voyage.

Table II. July–November 1405²³

11 July	Sent Cheng Ho to various nations of the Western Ocean.
18 July	Ordered the construction of 1,180 ships at Chekiang and other centers.
25 July	Promoted four officers for their part in the mission to the Western Ocean.
7 August	Siam mission received.
10 August	Champa and Cambodia missions received.
12 August	Sent envoys to Cambodia.
7 September	Repaired the Hui-T'ung Kuan to accommodate the large numbers of foreign missions.
23 September	Fêted the envoys of Hsi-yang (?), Java, and Palembang.
24 September	Expanded the facilities of the Bureau of Maritime Trade at Fukien, Kwangtung, and Chekiang, because of the increase in foreign missions.
3 October	Samudra, Malacca, and Calicut missions (came with Yin Ch'ing) received.
8 October	Gifts presented to Siamese envoys and Muslim traders.
15 October	Java missions received, together with missions from three states neighboring Java.
18 October	Promoted Wen Liang-fu (envoy of August 1403) who returned from 'the various foreign nations of the Southwest (Ocean)'.
21 October	Fêted the envoys of Hsi-yang Ku-li (Calicut), Samudra, Java, and other nations.

Table II. July–November 1405²³

27 October	Sent envoys to Fan-su-er (Pansur or Barus), Mi-nang-ko-po (Minangkabau), Luzon, Ma-yeh-weng (Billiton), Lambri, and So-lo (or P'o-lo for Brunei?). ²⁴
6 November	Fêted envoys of Hsi-yang Ku-li (Calicut), Samudra, Malacca, Java, and others.
7 November	Promoted to two officers for serving in a mission to Java.
11 November	Presented Malacca with an inscription for the State Mountain, composed personally by Emperor Yung-lo.

Although there is no actual record of the return of both the missions of Wen Liang-fu and Ma Pin of 1403, the promotion of four officers on 25 July 1405 suggests that these missions returned some time before this and Cheng Ho's orders to go to the Hsi-yang might have followed news of their return. But it will be noted that no mission was presented before 23 September, when Hsi-yang "envoys" were entertained with those of Java and Palembang. This was followed 10 days later, on 3 October, by the audience given to the Samudra, Malacca, and Cochin envoys. The Samudra envoys were specifically mentioned as having come with Yin Ch'ing's mission although it was Wen Liang-fu and Ma Pin who were sent to Samudra and not Yin Ch'ing. This, and the long delay from July to September, raises the question whether the three missions of 1403 went to India as separate missions and returned separately. The fact that the first two are nowhere recorded as having returned leads me to believe that the three missions returned together and might well have traveled together from the start.

The following reconstruction of the voyages would fit the dates we have. The three missions of 1403 set out together, visited Java and Palembang, and then went on to Malacca, Samudra, and Calicut and returned together. They arrived at the south coast of China in the middle of 1405, and, leaving both the Chinese and foreign envoys at Canton, the naval vessels sailed up the coast to T'ai-ts'ang at the mouth of the Yangtse. The envoys then proceeded overland in a leisurely manner, as was the custom, to Nanking. The foreign envoys might have arrived in two batches and been presented to the emperor in order of arrival. This would explain