

CHINESE MUSLIM COMPANIONS OF ARAB MUSLIM MISSIONARIES

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Dr. Cesar A. Majul has pointed out the frequent references in the *tarsilas* (*salsilas*) or genealogical accounts to Chinese in association with or accompanying the Arab Muslim missionaries. He said that "It is *probable* (italics supplied) that the first missionaries in Sulu came from the Arab settlements in China."¹

Gowing expressed it more picturesquely by saying that "Makhdum landed in Sulu not on an Arab *dhow* but on a Chinese junk."² In association with the superior Chinese shipping on the one hand, and a credit system with itinerant merchants in the Philippines during the 12th and 13th centuries on the other hand, Chinese traders had actually supplanted Arab traders.³ Thus, the new Arab Muslim missionaries no longer had access to the Arab trader's knowledge of the area. It is understandable that Chinese traders familiar with Sulu were sought out to serve as guides. Moreover, the Mongol regime (Yuan dynasty, 1278-1368) in China allowed only the Chinese traders who had become Muslims to travel in Southeast Asia.⁴

There is a long tradition among the Chinese residents in Jolo that the first Chinese (Cantonese) settlement in the Philippines was in Jolo. Saleeby (1908) gives the demographic perspective on Jolo of early times:⁵ ". . .while Manila and Cebu were still small and insignificant settlements Jolo had reached the proportions of a city and was, without exception, the richest and foremost settlement in the Philippine Islands. Jolo, with the exception of Brunei, had no rival in northeast Malaysia.

prior to the seventeenth century." This description raises the question, how and when the first settlement came about? Unfortunately, according to Wu Ching Hong (personal conversation), there is no known Chinese source documenting either the Chinese arrival in Jolo or Chinese Muslims serving as companions of early Arab Muslim missionaries.⁶

Chau Ju-Kua⁷ (1225) in his *Chu Tan Chib* (Records of Barbarous Native Tribes) did not mention any Chinese companions of Arab Muslim missionaries, though he touched on colonies of Arab Muslim traders. What is known and documented so far may be quoted from Wu Ching-Hong's translation⁸ of Wang Ta-yuan's 1349 description of Sulu, entitled *Tao I Chih Lio*. The focus of Wang's document was on the trade goods of that time, the development of the system of "farming out goods on credit"⁹ in exchange for products from neighboring islands.¹⁰ It was only later that this wholesale-retail system led to the founding of Chinese trading houses, and eventually to Chinese colonies of merchants and artisans.

While it is true that known Chinese sources do not document the relationship of Chinese Muslims accompanying the Arab Muslim missionaries to Sulu, it is clear from the *tarsilas* that such companions were there. Thus, it may be reasonably conjectured from Chinese historical events that the earliest Chinese residents in Sulu traveled there during the 1350s and the 1360s even though the first *prominent* Arab Muslim missionary, Makhdum, did not arrive until around 1380.¹¹ Wu also notes that it was during the Yuan dynasty that the Chinese established the new route "directly from the Fukien coast" (or from Canton) to the Philippines, instead of the old route via Borneo or other points west.¹² The terms "Tung-Yang" (East Ocean) and "Si-Yang" (West Ocean) also appeared then, differentiating from the general term, "Nan-Yang" (South Ocean).¹³

When the Mongol Yuan dynasty in China was forced out in 1368 or 1369, the Ming dynasty that followed it made strong efforts from 1371 to monopolize the external trade. "Only the ships of the countries paying tribute to the Chinese Empire were allowed to enter Chinese ports."¹⁴ Thus, any Chinese Muslim who accompanied Arab Muslim missionaries during "the late Yuan dynasty" must have gone to Sulu during the last few decades of that dynasty. Chinese dated

historical events may also assist scholars in approximating what happened, in lieu of documentation not yet known.

Since Chinese traders had supplanted Arab traders in Sulu, it is understandable that later Arab Muslim missionaries sought out Chinese Muslim traders as companion guides some years before the arrival of the more prominent Arab Muslim missionaries, Makhdum (1380) and Abubakr (1450). Evidently, the Chinese Muslims were traders primarily, not serving as missionaries. Yet credit belongs to those first Chinese companions who helped to pioneer, at the same time not detracting in any way from the Arab Muslim missionaries, nor from the still later Malay Muslim missionaries.

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NOTES

1. Cesar A. Majul, "Theories of the Introduction and Expansion of Islam in Malaysia," *Silliman Journal*, XI:4:362

2. Peter Gowing, "Kris and Crescent: Dar-ul Islam in the Philippines, *Studies in Islam*. However, in reference to the term, "dhow" Wu Ching-Hong, "A Study of References to the Philippines in Chinese Sources from Earliest Times to the Ming Dynasty," *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, XXIV: 1-2: 117.

3. Hubert Reynolds, "Why Chinese Traders Approached the Philippines Late—and from the South," from *Studies in Philippine Anthropology*, Mario D. Zamora, ed. Quezon City: Alemar. 1967. pp. 463-479.

4. Wang Gungwu, *A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese*. Singapore: Eastern University Press Ltd. 1959.

5. Najeeb M. Saleeby, *The History of Sulu, Manila, 1908*, reprinted by the *Filipiniana Book Guild, Inc.*, Manila. 1963. Vol. IV, p. 20.

6. It has been confirmed by Tan Yeok-Seong that early Chinese settlements in Southeast Asia were peopled by Chinese Muslims and that "Religion and trade went hand in hand. ("Chinese Element in the Islamization of Southeast Asia, unpublished paper, Singapore, p. 10).

7. Chau Ju-Kua's work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the 12th and 13th centuries, entitled, *Chu-Fan-Chu*, translated from the Chinese and annotated by Friedrich Hirth and W.W. Rockhill. Taipei: Cheng-wen Publishing Co. 1967. pp. 14ff.

8. Wu Ching-Hong, p. 110. For insightful translations of these Chinese sources, see also William Henry Scott, *Prehispanic Source Materials for the Study of Philippine History*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press. 1969. pp. 69ff.

9. Reynolds, *op. cit.*

10. Cesar A. Majul, "Chinese Relationship with the Sultanate of Sulu" in *The Chinese in the Philippines 1570-1770*, Alfonso Felix Jr., ed. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1966. Vol. I, p. 143.

11. Datumanong Di. A. Sarangani, "Islamic Penetration in Mindanao and Sulu," *Mindanao Journal*, 1:1:51.

12. Wu Ching-Hong, p. 116

13. Wu Ching-Hong, p. 150.

14. Ts'ao Yung-ho (1962), quoted by Chang Hsieh (1970) from *ung Hsi Yang K'ao Investigations of the Eastern and Western Oceans*, 1618, Vol. V, Gideon C. T. Hsu, transl. (1970), in *The Annals of Philippine Chinese Historical Association*, inaugural issue, March 1970, Manila, p. 145.