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CONTENTS

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In the Middle Kingdom: A Historical Survey on the Arabs and Persians' Ventures in China, 600s–1300s

Aditya Pratama Widodo[1]

Abstracts: This paper presents a historical survey concerning the ventures made by Arabs and Persians to China, both overland and sea, between the 600s and 1300s. As major participants in international trade as well as among the most advanced and literate in the medieval period, Arab and Persian travellers, merchants, and envoys did not fail to leave important accounts in which they recorded details about the situation that allowed their perilous yet intriguing journeys to far-off China, the situation they faced in the Middle Kingdom, as well as the roles they played and the growth of their communities in China. Furthermore, as highly appreciated foreign elements, the presence and undertakings of Arabs and Persians in some important coastal trading cities in the Middle Kingdom are also mentioned in some Chinese sources. Their ventures in China are a testimony to the Arabs' and Persians' spirit of adventure and cosmopolitan nature, as well as helping to explain why they held such a vast influence and played important roles in many developments and changes in the medieval period. This research uses historical methodology, focusing on primary texts inked by numerous Arabs and Persians of different backgrounds, some official Chinese chronicles, the works of other Chinese writers, as well as some accounts left by European travellers.

Keywords: Ventures, travellers, merchants, traders, Arabs, Persians, China

Introduction: Arabs and Persians' Ventures Prior to the Tang China

Medieval world trade played a very important role in the shrinking of the world's map, bringing different parts of the world together, and the mass distribution of countless kinds and varieties of goods and ideas. It was also the major impetus for developments and changes that occurred in numerous lands and communities scattered in all four hemispheres, as well as among the most prominent factors responsible for the migration of people and animals, the spread of the world's religions, plants and even diseases. As far as contact between Arab-Persian world and China and subsequent Arabs and Persians' ventures into China are concerned, it cannot be separated from the context of trade and diplomatic relations which are a consequence of the presence of the Silk Roads, a system that not only involves the exchange of goods and services, but also the exchange of people and their culture (ideas, behavior, materials), including, among other things, technologies and religions. As the name suggests, the quintessential commodity transported through the Silk Roads was silk, which began to produced and developed by the Chinese in 2700 BCE. Thanks to the introduction of silk to the Roman Empire, the land route between the Western World and China was established in the 1st century BCE. As a matter of fact, in the subsequent centuries this land routes, as well

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as maritime routes, connected not only Rome with Chang'an, but also connecting one of the most important trading hub in West Asia at that time, Baghdad, with the capital of China.

The ventures and trades conducted by the Arabs and Persians in China during the medieval period can be properly appreciated by consulting many first-hand sources, which some of them have been translated into English. Accounts, treatises, and travelogues compiled by the Arabs and Persians of different backgrounds—such as Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), Sharaf al-Zamān Ṭāhir al-Marvazī (d. 1124), Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), Ubaidillah Ibn Khordadbeh (d. 913), Abū Zayd Ḥasan Ibn Yazīd Sīrāfī, Sulaymān the merchant, Buzurg ibn Shahriyār al-Rāmhurmuzī, and Abu 'Abdillah Muḥammad ibn Battutah (d. 1369)—are proven to be very useful sources. Meanwhile, many official Chinese chronicles, notably from the Tang era, also shed some light concerning their ventures and activities in China, not to mention the importance of the information contained in the writings of other Chinese writers, such as Yijing (d. 713) and Zhao Rugua (d. 1228). Furthermore, the writings of some European medieval travellers—Odoric of Pordenone (d. 1331), Marco Polo (d. 1324), and Giovanni de Marignolli (d. 1360)—are simply too precious to be left out, as they can also provide some relevant information concerning the Arabs and Persians undertakings in China. The last but certainly not least, more recent works written by experts on the history of China are also consulted since they often contain readings on other first-hand materials that are inaccessible to the author of this article and since they also contained excellent analysis.

At the beginning of the Common Era, it was reported that the early relationship between West Asia and China was marked by the arrival of a group of ambassadors from Daqin, which included musicians and jugglers, in China in 120. Even though, in the Chinese sources, the name Daqin refers to the Roman Empire, in this case the name Daqin actually refers to present-day Baghdad or Damascus, which at this time was one of the regions of the Roman Empire, under the name of Provincia Mesopotamia (Yule and Cordier, 1915). Apart from that, scholars argued that, in around the 2nd century, maritime trade between Egypt-Persia and India-Far East was controlled by the Arabs from the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Furthermore, it was also reported that, in the Han era, precisely between 158–167 CE, an ambassador was sent from Baghdad. Travelling by sea and then landed in Ji-Nan (now called Tonkin), this ambassador brought gifts—rhinoceros horn, elephant tusk and tortoise shell—to Emperor Huan of Han (Rugua, 1911). Although the ambassador was not officially sent by Emperor Marcus Aurelius, but departed on his own initiative and led by a Syrian merchant, a Chinese historian, Zhao Rugua (1911), called this event the earliest diplomatic contact between the Arab-Persian world and China.[2] Later, in around 164 CE, an ambassador from Daqin also introduced a treatise on astronomy to philosophers in China (Yule and Cordier, 1915),[3] and it is also estimated that Arab traders already established settlements in Guangzhou around 300 CE (Rugua, 1911).

However, before we proceed with the discussion, it is noteworthy to mention that official Chinese chronicles only began to describe a land named "Bosi" (波斯)," or Persia, during the Western Wei and Northern Zhou dynasty eras in the 6th century. In the *Zhōu Shū* (*Book of Zhou*), it is related that Persian males "cut their hair, wear a white fur hat, a full-length shirt, with the sides open at the bottom, and a scarf with a woven edge; the females

[2] However, Hourani (1975) argues that this group of ambassadors departed from Egypt, given that the gifts they presented were more likely to be the products of East Africa instead of Mediterranean Sea.
[3] Later, in the 8th century, as recorded in the *Old Book of Tang*, Daqin was called Fu Lin, which refers to the Byzantine Empire and its territories.

wear a wide shirt and a wide scarf, with their hair in a bun in front and a quilt at the back, decorated with gold and silver, with five-colour beads covering their arms" (Defen, 636). Not only does this chronicle discuss the geographical and climatic situation of the land, the customs of its people, and the sophistication of its military, but it also mentions that, sometime in the mid-6th century, the king of this land sent envoys to offer gifts to the Emperor of China. As for the country of "Dashi" (大食), i.e. Arab, it is mentioned for the first time during the Tang era in the 7th century CE, in both the *Jiu Tangshu* (*the Old Book of Tang*) and the *Xin Tangshu* (*the New Book of Tang*), and the details about the people of this land will be given later.

In the early years of the Common Era, diplomatic missions from Arab and Persia to China were commonly taken overland routes (Leslie, 1986). The information concerning medieval land routes connecting Arabia and Persia with China provided by an Iraqi historian cum geographer, Abū al-Ḥasan ʻAlī al-Masʻūdī (896–956), and a Persian scholar, Sharaf al-Zamān Ṭāhir al-Marvazī (1056–1124), perhaps not only adequately lists places passed by diplomatic mission and some merchant caravans in the 9th to 12th centuries CE, but in antiquity as well. In his *Murūj al-Dhahab wa-Maʿādin al-Jawhar* (*Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*), al-Masʻūdī relates that, in an overland journey, before finally reaching China, one who departs from the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula must first cross the desert that stretches along the coast of the Red Sea to Iraq, and then proceed the journey to Sham (Syria), Faris (Persia), Khorasan, and Sogdiana. In Sogdiana, one has to go through a pass in the valley of Mount en-Nushadir (?). During the day, one must not stop for long when passing through the valley, which is 64–80 km long, since the presence of salamonia smoke can affect brain function, yield hot air, as well as spewing fire in the summer, hence can be fatal for travellers. Meanwhile, in winter, this route would be easy for people and animals to pass through, thanks to the snow falls that extinguish the heat (al-Masʻūdī, 1841; Hourani, 1975, p. 9). Al-Marvazī, in *Kitāb Ṭabāʾiʿ al-Ḥayawān al-Baḥrī wa-al-Barrī* (*Nature of Animals*), added that, in ancient times, Sogdia (also known as Transoxiana), with Samarkand as its capital, belonged to the Kingdom of China. Before reaching the capital of China, at his time was Y.NJŪR [Kaifeng], from Samarkand one must first pass Kashghar, Yarkand, Khotan, K.rwyā (Keriya), Sājū (Dunhuang), Qām-jū (Ganzhou, in present-day Gansu Province), and Kocho (Gaochang) (al-Marvazī, 1942).

On the other hand, since the early days of the Common Era, merchants normally took the maritime route—and this route became more and more commonly travelled as early as 1023 CE by both diplomatic and commercial missions that headed to Guangzhou (Leslie, 1986). This argument was supported by the account of an Egyptian merchant, Cosmas Indicopleustes, who estimated that, as early as the 6th century, Arab and Persian ships bound for Tsinistan (China) departed from al-Ubullah (Hourani, 1975). Meanwhile, an Arab scholar, Ibn Habib (d. 860) mentioned that, in the 6th and 7th centuries CE, Dibba, in Musandam Peninsula, was frequented by merchants from India and China (Agius, 2008). Similarly, Arab historian Abu Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarir ibn Yazid al-Tabari (839–923) mentions in his *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (*The History of at-Tabari*) that, during his time, al-Ubullah also served as a port of call "for ships from China and from less distant places" (*al-Ṭabarī*, 1992, p. 168). Therefore, all statements above imply that direct shipping between China and Arabia has already existed as early as the 6th century CE. Al-Masʻūdī's account corroborated these information, that the Arabs and Persians often departed from Basrah, Ubullah, Oman, or Siraf, and thenceforth they must sail across seven seas in order to get to the Middle Kingdom: the Faris Sea (Gulf of Persia), the Ladiwa Sea (Lacadive Sea), the Harkond Sea (Bay of

Bengal), the Kilah Bar Sea (Melaka Strait), the Kardebinj/Kerda Sea (Singapore Strait), the es-Sinf Sea (Champa Sea, now called the Gulf of Thailand), and finally the Saihu Sea (China Sea) (al-Mas'ūdī, 1841).

Given that the situations in the seas at certain times were determined by certain zodiacs (or star constellations), Arab-Persian ships that eager to make voyages to China had to pass through these seas at the right time and successively, according to the prevailing zodiac. One can start their journey from Arab-Persian ports first to the Faris Sea which is usually begin to calm down when the sun enters the sign of Gemini (21 May to 20 June), then continue their voyage across the subsequent six seas, and it could take around six months (including stopover time) (al-Mas'ūdī, 1841). When the sea has calmed, Arab-Persian ships could ride the southwest monsoon winds all the way to China between July and September. As a matter of fact, the name "monsoon" itself (from the Arabic word, *mausim*) is a testimony to Arabs' sophisticated knowledge about sea travel, and that Arabian mariners were among the earliest to have the knowledge about this particular wind, and already knew how to harness it even before the 2nd century BCE, preceding the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians (Agius, 2008).

A Persian geographer, Ubaidillah Ibn Khordadbeh (820–912), lists a number of provinces and towns that were traversed on the voyage to the East. Western Asian merchants' ships or travellers often departed from Basrah, Obollah (al-Ubullah—originally called Apologus and Farj al-Hind, a town located on the edge of the mouth of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, which ends in the Persian Gulf), Siraf, and even Aden. The following are some of the important countries and towns passed on the voyage from teh Gulf of Persia to China: Karek (Kharg Island), Kish, Hormuz, Debal, Sindh (now Pakistan), Koul (Kollam), Sendân (?), Mely (Malabar), Sarandib (Ceylon), Likbalous (Nicobar Island), Kalah (Kedah), Djabah and Chelahet (Strait of Singapore), Mabit (?), Koyoumah (Tioman?), Komar (Cambodia), Senf (Champa), el-Wakîn (Tonkin?), before finally reaching Khanfou (Canton, now Guangzhou). From Khanfou, one can also sail to Djanfou (Fuzhou) and Kantou (?) and find all kinds of fruits and vegetables, wheat, barley, rice, and sugar cane (Ibn Khordadbeh, 1865).

Another informative account of the voyages from Arabia-Persia to China was drawn by a 9th century CE Arab merchant, Sulaymān al-Tājir. In *Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa'l-Hind* (*Accounts of China and India*), he relates that, aside from Ubullah, Chinese ships also load their cargo—merchandises from Basra, Oman, and other parts of the Arab world—in Siraf. This information was also confirmed by al-Mas'udi, that "Chinese vessels used to come to Oman, Siraf, to the coasts of Faris, and el-Bahrein, to el-Obollah, and el-Basrah," and that Arab-Persian vessels that departed from these ports can also be found in China (al-Mas'ūdī, 1841, p. 328). According to Sulaymān, ships that departed from Basrah usually call at Siraf to load some goods, then sail to Muscat, and sometimes to Shisr (both located in Oman), to load freshwater and food supplies (cattles). From Oman, the ships make a stop at Kaucammali (Kollam) to reload their freshwater supplies before crossing the Sea of Harkand (Bay of Bengal) and reaching Lajabalus (Nicobar Island); from there, they continue the voyage to Calabar (Kedah). From Calabar, the ships sail to Betuna (Tioman?), then to Kadrange (Panduranga?), Senf (Champa), and Sandarfulat (Cham Islands), where they can find plenty of freshwater. From Sandarfulat, the ships set sails to Sanji Sea (South China Sea), then on the "the Gates of China" (?) before finally throwing their anchor in Canfu (Guangzhou) (Renaudot, 1733, pp. 8–11).

Arabs and Persians' Ventures in Tang and Song China

In general, the trade relations between Arab-Persian and China in the medieval period were prompted by the strong demands in Arab-Persian markets on some Eastern products: silk, porcelain, sandalwood, and blackpepper. In turn, these products, which can be found in China, were exchanged with Arabian products, such as incense and resins, horses, ivory, cotton textiles, metal goods, and arms (Chaudhuri, 1985). After being hampered due to disruptions caused by Perso-Roman wars and intrusions from the Tibetans and Turkic peoples in Central Asia in the 6th to earlier part of the 7th centuries CE, the Silk Roads were revived in the latter part of the 7th century CE, connecting West Asia, Central Asia, and China once again. Among the evidences of the revival of this relationship is the arrival of ambassadors from Fu Lin (Byzantine Empire) in China, in 643 CE, to appear before Emperor Taizong of Tang and presented to him precious stones (Yule and Cordier, 1915; Agius, 2008). When, in the 7th century CE, the Byzantine Empire lost its control over Arabia and Persia, the Rashidun caliphate replaced its role as a superpower in West Asia and managed to bring significant improvements to the economic environment in the region (Chaudhuri, 1985).

As already mentioned in previous section, official Chinese source such as *Zhōu Shū* has relates the existence of Bosi as early as the 6th century CE. Apart from its reference as a geographical entity located 15,300 miles west of Chang'an and inhabited by people of distinctive customs (Defen, 636), Bosi is also an exonym of Chinese and was used by the Chinese to refer to Persian sailors and traders who used to bring precious perfumes from West Asia and various medicinal plants that were very important for the Chinese pharmacopoeia (Guan, 2016). Shortly thereafter, while visiting Guangzhou, the Buddhist priest Yijing referred to Persians (both Magi and Muslims, including Persian Muslims who spoke Arabic (Hourani, 1975) as "*Po-sse*" or "*Bosi*" and in mid-671 CE he also encountered a ship's captain of Persian origin, who was about to take him to Sumatra (Yijing, 1896). In the 7th century CE, the existence of a certain community called the Dashi people, was recorded in Chinese sources for the first time. Dashi refers to the subjects of the Abbasid Caliphate, people from various countries, kingdoms, and khanates. The term Dashi is not a native Chinese term, but derives from the Persian word *Ta-zik*, "man from the Tayy (Banu Tayy) tribe" (Hourani, 1975, p. 66). Meanwhile, the Nestorian Bishop Jesujabus (650–660) referred to the followers of the Prophet Muhammad as "*Tayi*." Interestingly, in his letter to the Persian Metropolitan Simeon, Jesujabus wrote the following words in Latin: "These Tayis, or Arabs—to whom God bestowed world dominion through severe trials—are with us, as you know; but they do not attack Christianity, but praise our faith, honour the priests and God's saints, and contribute benefits to churches and monasteries" (Bretschneider, 1871, p. 6).

In the *Xin Tangshu* (*New Book of Tang*) the Dashi are illustrated as people with big noses and black beards, carrying a silver knife tucked into a silver belt. They do not drink wine and do not know songs. The women are white and wear a veil when traveling. This chronicle also records that on the seventh day the ruler mandated to his people that "'Those who die at the hands of the enemy will rise in heaven.' Therefore, these Arabs were accustomed to fighting bravely" (Xiu and Qi, 1060; Bretschneider, 1871, pp. 6–7; Chaffee, 2018, p. 20). Furthermore, it is reported that, in 651 CE, a Dashi ruler called Ham mi mo mo ni ("Mi mo mo ni" in *Jiu Tangshu*, both refer to *amir al-mu'minin*, probably Uthman ibn Affan) sent an ambassador to China to deliver gifts for the first time. Later, Rugua confirmed this and stated that before the reign of P'ou ni mo huan (Marwan dynasty, Muawiyah Caliphate) the ambassadors were referred to as white-robed Dashi, which indicated their adherence to Sunnism, whereas after A-p 'o-lo-pa (Apu Lopa in *Jiu Tangshu*, refers to Abu

al-Abbas, Abbasid Caliphate) came to power they were called black-robed Dashi, which indicates their adherence to Shiism (Xiu and Qi, 1060; see also, Xu, 945; Rugua, 1911; Bretschneider, 1871).

It was also reported in the *Xin Tangshu* about a visit of a Dashi messenger who, landed in 713 CE, bringing horses and beautiful belts as gifts. On this occasion, the envoy from Dashi refused to offer kowtow (homage) before Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, but he was spared from the death penalty since the emperor understood that the envoy came from a different cultural background (Xiu and Qi, 1060; Xu, 945). Interestingly, al-Ṭabarī recounts another visit by an Arab contingent, which took place in around 714 CE. The contingent of either ten or twelve men was led by Hubayrah ibn al-Mushamraj al-Kilabī and was sent by the governor of Khurasan, Qutaybah ibn Muslim al-Bahilī, to negotiate with the king of China after the latter conquered Kashghar and was about to invade China. This fearless group of fine men was "well equipped with weapons, fine silks, embroidered garments, soft, delicate white clothing, sandals, and perfume." Mounting fine horses to China, this contingent was ready to put their lives on the line in delivering a message to Emperor Xuanzhong as Qutaybah "has sworn an oath that he will not depart until he treads your land, seals your kings, and is given tax." As a response, the king of China gave them some dishes of gold with soil in them, silk and gold, four Chinese young men of noble backgrounds, and some fine gifts to be delivered to Qutaybah. Not long after Qutaybah "accepted the tax, sealed the young men and returned them, and trod on the soil" and cancelled his plan on China (at-Ṭabarī, 1990, pp. 222–230), he launched an ill-fated rebellion against the new caliph of Umayyad and was slained in August 715 CE. Gibb (1923) holds that the missions reported in the *Xin Tangshu* and al-Ṭabarī's were actually the same mission, and it was intended to promote commercial relations between the Umayyad and China rather than as a warning of an impending military invasion.

The news concerning the emergence of Islam must have been spread to China as early as the 7th century CE, as the *Jiu Tangshu* recorded that during the rule of Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty in the Dashi country, to be precise among the Pot Ni Xi Shen (Bani Hashim) of the Gu Liezhong (the Quraysh), there was a man named Maha Mo (Prophet Muhammad), who was "brave, strong, and wise, and was established as leader. He conquered the east and west, opened up a land of three thousand miles" (Xu, 945). Although some scholars estimate that in the 7th century CE, the foreign settlements in Guangzhou grew larger, it is possible that Islam made its way into the city between 581 CE and 626 CE (Rugua, 1911; Yule and Cordier, 1915). Interestingly, legends and traditions claim that a mosque named Huaisheng was built in around 628–629 CE in Guangzhou, and attribute its founding to Prophet Muhammad's maternal uncle, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, who allegedly visited China to pay tribute. While there is no reliable evidence of this and it seems unlikely that Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ founded the mosque, art historian Nancy Steinhardt argues that it is possible that "Guangzhou was the first Chinese city to have a mosque, and that a mosque, perhaps Guangzhou's earliest, existed on the site of Huaishengsi in the Tang dynasty" (Steinhardt, 2018, p. 60). However, other experts hold that this mosque was constructed in the Song era, probably by the rich Pu family (Leslie, 1986; Wan, 2016; Chaffee, 2018). Additionally, arguably there are evidences of the presence of Muslim villages in Quanzhou and Yangzhou, and in the Tang era, many Muslims settled in northwest China. Later, in the 11th century CE, the position of Quanzhou—which the Arabs called Zaytun—as an emporium equaled that of Guangzhou (Wan, 2016; Rossabi, 1981; Bretschneider, 1871).

During the Tang era, Arabs and Persians were also referred to as "*shang-hu*," while the shops they owned were called *hu-dian*. As reported by Chinese scholar, Sima Guang (1019–1086), "some of whom had been living [in China] for more than 40 years, and all had

their wives and sons here. They made their profits from mortgages on their land and properties and enjoyed peaceful lives here." However, intermarriage between foreign merchants and Chinese women also took place in the 7th century CE, since there was an edict issued by the Chinese emperor to prohibit the alien merchants (now called *fan-shang*) from bringing their Chinese concubines back to their home countries (Wan, 2016). The presence of Muslims, probably Arabs and/or Persians, in Guangzhou during the early Tang era is also recorded in the 15th century CE account, *Annals of Guangdong*, as people who

> .... worshipped Heaven (Tien) and had no statues, idols, or images in their temple.... They do not eat pork nor drink wine, and regard as impure the flesh of every animal not slain by themselves. They are known at the present time by the name of Hui Hui.... They have a temple called the Temple of Holy Remembrance (old Huaisheng mosque?[4]), which was built at the commencement of the Tang dynasty.... These strangers go every day to their temple to perform their religious ceremonies. Having asked and obtained from the Emperor an authorisation to reside at Canton, they built magnificent houses of an architecture different from that of our country. They were very rich and governed by a chief chosen by themselves. By their good fortune they became so numerous and influential that they were able to maltreat the Chinese with impunity (Broomhall, 1910, pp. 71–72).

During the rule of Xuanzhong of Tang, an Islamic worship complex called Tanmingshi was built. While the foundations of this complex were built in the third month of 742 CE and completed on the twentieth day of the eighth month of the same year, this building was reconstructed in 1392 CE and was renamed the Great Mosque of Xian. Later, a Chinese writer named Zhu Yu mentioned the existence of *fan-fang* in Guangzhou, as "the districts where the alien people from various countries live." These "aliens" were no other than Muslims, and reportedly the *fan-fang* came into being in Guangzhou in around 830 CE (Wan, 2016). Not only in Mainland China, in 748 CE, a Chinese priest named Kan Shin (Kien Zhen) reported the existence of a very large Persian village on Hainan Island (Junjiro in Yule and Cordier, 1915). Aside from Arab merchants, there were Arab soldiers in China, they were sent by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur, in 756 CE, in order to assist in the suppression of the An Lushan rebellion. While this rebellion played a detrimental role, which resulted in the political instability and decline of overland trade routes, to a certain degree this event also nurtured the establishment of the Arab overseas community as many of those Arab soldiers eventually settled in China and married Chinese women since the law against intermarriage in China was not always upheld at that time (Leslie, 1986).

However, as the Arab-Persian communities grew in number and importance and became well-established in China, the political tension between the Chinese empire and the Arab caliphates, Umayyad and Abbasid, worsened and reached its climax in two military engagements, Battle of Aksu (717 CE) and Battle of Talas (751 CE). As the result of territorial expansions of these two great empires, the former battle saw the defeat of the Arabs and their subsequent expulsion from Transoxiana, while in the latter battle a Chinese army led by Gao Xianzhi "was severely defeated" by the Arabs in Talas (Pu, 961). With their defeat in the Battle of Talas and the devastating effect of An Lushan rebellion, the Tang China

[4] "Huaisheng" mosque means Remembrance of the Prophet's Mosque (Wan, 2016, p. 14) or Cherishing the Saints Mosque (Chaffee, 2018).

apparently lost their grip over Central Asia. During these turbulent times, another commotion arose in China in 758 CE (the first year of Qianyuan) when some Arabs and Persians attacked Guangzhou by looting shops and burning houses and then fled through the sea (Xiu and Qi, 1060; Xu, 945; Bretschneider, 1871; Hourani, 1975). Another tragedy occurred in 760 CE, during the course of An Lushan rebellion, when a Tang military commander arrived in Yangzhou, plundered the properties of local inhabitants, and massacred several thousand of Arab and Persian merchants (*shang-hu*) (Lei, 2017). After these incidents, it seems that the two countries managed to maintain good relations and sent emissaries to each other, even though Guangzhou was closed until 792 CE; and there is no evidence that direct trade between the two has resumed.

By the 9th century, further accounts about Arabs and Persians' ventures in China was recorded by a Persian traveller named Abū Zayd Ḥasan Ibn Yazīd Sīrāfī, or commonly known as Abū Zayd Sīrāfī, who visited China around 851 CE, via overland route. Ibn Yazīd Sīrāfī mentioned that there was chaos in China in 878 CE, which disrupted trade between Siraf and China. The chaos was none other than the rebellion launched by a figure he called Baichu (Huang Chao). Al-Mas'ūdī relates this event at length, from beginning to end, and calls the leader of this rebellion Baishu Shirr. This rebellion also struck Guangzhou, one of the most important cities in China. The rebellion was so brutal that around 120,000–200,000 Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Parsis (Magi) were massacred. Arab-Persian and Chinese trade was greatly disrupted because the rebels cut down many mulberry trees and other trees important for cultivating silkworms (Renaudot, 1733; al-Mas'ūdī, 1841; Xiu and Qi., 1060). Apart from the news from Suleyman and Ibn Yazid Sirafi, there is also a story about a merchant named Ibn Wahab of Basra—who claimed to be a relative of the Prophet Muhammad—who landed in Khaniku (Guangzhou) then visited Cumdan (Nanjing) in 872 CE and was welcomed by the Emperor of China, had a dialogue with him, then returned to Iraq bringing many gifts from the emperor (Renaudot, 1733; al-Mas'ūdī, 1841).

Apparently, al-Mas'udi refers to the same figure (Ibn Wahab) when he recounts the venture of a man named Ibn Habbar, of the Quraysh tribe, to Khaniku and Hamdan (Nanjing) at around the same time when the Zanj leaders launched their attack (Zanj Revolt, 869–883 CE). Departed from Siraf, Ibn Habbar made several stops at some places in India before proceeding with his voyage, by aboarded several vessels, until he landed in China (al-Mas'ūdī, 1841). Furthermore, al-Mas'udi also relates a story about an unnamed merchant from Khurasan who left his home in Samarkand, Khorasan, to trade in China around the latter half of the 10th century CE. Departing from Basrah, then to Oman, this merchant briefly called at Kolah (Kedah), and from there he aboarded a Chinese vessel to Khaniku (Guangzhou). In this city, the merchant was greeted by an eunuch sent by the Chinese Emperor. However, a feud broke out between the merchant and the eunuch, and the former was imprisoned and forced to hand over his merchandise by the latter. Feeling wronged, the merchant braved himself to appear before the Chinese Emperor at his palace in Anku (Nanjing) pleading for justice to be upheld and an investigation to be conducted. Thus, the eunuch was proven guilty of seizing the merchant's possessions, and he was condemned to guard the burial complex of the kings for life, a punishment "harder than death." As for the fate of this merchant, it is related that he returned to Iraq with gifts given by the King of China (al-Mas'ūdī, 1841).

While it is true that trade between Arab-Persia and China was diminished in the 10th century CE due to dynastic struggles in Baghdad, interestingly, around this period a Persian traveller, Buzurg ibn Shahriyār al-Rāmhurmuzī (900–950 CE), shed a comment in his famous *'Ajā'ib al-Hind* (*Marvels of the Indies*) that reaching China then return home safely to Arabia

and not perish on the way in itself is a truly magnificent and unprecedented feat. About this perilous venture to China, he only knew one person who had made seven voyages thither, Captain Abhara. Departed from Siraf, this Persian captain conducted a commercial voyage to China. Al-Rāmhurmuzī also recounts the successful yet sad story of a Jew named Isḥāq who returned home to Oman after conducting some businesses in China, in the course of thirty years, on his own ship, which was laden with "a million dinars worth of musk as well as silks and porcelain of equal value, and quite as much again in jewellery and stones, not counting a whole heap of marvelous objects of Chinese workmanship." Unfortunately, his successful venture prompted many corrupted officials and rulers in Oman to extort and eventually murder him (Al-Rāmhurmuzī, 1928). Another well-known migration that took place in the 10th century CE is that of Ma Yize, who left his hometown of Lumu (Anatolia) and arrived in China in 968 CE to serve as court astronomers (Benite, 2005). Aside from that, as noted by Rugua, in the Song era there were successive arrivals of Dashi ambassadors from 968 CE to 1094 CE (Rugua, 1911). Later, this information was confirmed and complemented, that during the Song era, between 968 CE and 1168 CE, there were recorded 49 visits by ambassadors from the Abbasid dynasty to the Chinese court or, in other words, there was one visit every four years (Wan, 2016).

In general, it is safe to say that, in the 9th and 10th centuries CE, the trade ties between China and Islamic Caliphate in West Asia, which was connected by maritime routes, began to thrive even further. These trade relations were probably the result of the presence of strong political power in Arab-Persia, such as the Umayyad and the Abassid Caliphate, while China was ruled by the Tang dynasty (Hourani, 1974, pp. 61–62). In the 9th century CE, Suleyman recounted his venture to China that, after having landed in Hang chou fu (Hangzhou) in Zhejiang Province, he visited another city called Canfu (Guangzhou), the first port of call in China for traders from Arabia and Persia, as well as one of the most important entrepots in Arab and Chinese trade. In Canfu there was a qadi whose job was to serve the Muslim community living there. This *qadi* was appointed by the Chinese Emperor (Renaudot, 1733; Yule and Cordier, 1915). While Sulaymān's news was confirmed by Ibn Battuta several centuries later, in several Chinese sources it is also stated that, in the future, qadis can also be found in other Dashi villages, such as those in Quanzhou, Hangzhou, and others. Additionally, a modern scholar estimated that the population of Muslims in China was only around 50,000 in the 9th century CE (Chang, 1988). However, as far as Persians are concerned, Muslims were not the only religious group existed in China, as the *Song Shi* (the *Book of Song*) clearly mentioned that, during the Song era, in Gaochang there was a Mani temple and the Persian monks held their own dharma (Xuan *et al*., 1345).

Meanwhile, al-Marvazī (1056–1124) reported that in China, presumably in the early 11th century CE, there were Alid Muslims who were the descendants of Talibid Alids who fled from Umayyad persecution and took refuge in China. In their new home, under the patronage of the "Lord of China", these Alid Muslims acted as middlemen between the Chinese and other merchants and caravans, and "they lived in peace and security, begot children, and multiplied. They learned Chinese and the languages of the other peoples who visit them" (al-Marvazī, 1942, p. 17). As far as Arab-Persian trade in 12th-century CE China is concerned, in the early 1130s CE, an Arab wealthy merchant from Brunei, Pu-ya-li (Abū ʻAlī), came to Guangzhou to trade and presented "two hundred and nine large elephant tusks, thirty-five big rhinoceros horns." So important he was that a high-ranking official named Zeng Li married his younger sister to Pu-ya-li, and that when the latter got robbed in 1134 CE, Emperor Gaozong of Song even personally decreed the demotion of the magistrate on duty and commanded that the robbers must be caught within a month (Wang, 2018, pp. 208–

209). Moreover, Lin Zhiqi (1112 CE–1176 CE) mentions a Dashi man named Pu-xia-xin who proposed the construction of a cemetery for foreign merchants in Zaitun (Quanzhou). This building was located "on the hillside to the east of the city," and was "covered with a roof, enclosed by a wall, and safely locked." The construction of this cemetery was later carried out by a rich merchant from Sriwijaya of Dashi origin, Shi Nuowei, and finished in 1163 CE. In around 1009 CE, another medieval mosque in China was built in Quanzhou, Shengyou Mosque (or al-Ashab); and, in around 1310 CE, this mosque was repaired by Muhammad Quds from Shiraz (Rugua, 1911, pp. 117–119; Chaffee, 2006, p. 408; Wan, 2020, pp. 17–18).

Another famous medieval mosque in Quanzhou would be Qingjing mosque. Located in southern Quanzhou, the construction of this mosque was sponsored by Najib Muzhir al-Din from Siraf, and finished in 1131 CE. Meanwhile, it is also recorded that, in the 12th century CE, Guangzhou there were several thousand graves facing west (Mecca) (Chaffee, 2018; Chaffe, 2006). It is also reported that there are many inscriptions in the gravestones in Quanzhou that date back to the Song era. These inscriptions include the names of the person buried, verses from the Qur'an, and even the date of death, which are given according to the Islamic lunar calendar and the Chinese calendar. Although most of the inscriptions are written using Arabic script, based on the names and titles inscribed on those tombstones, it can be confirmed that the deceased came from Arabia, Persia, and Central Asia. The earliest tombstone can be dated back to 1171 CE, and belongs to the grave of Husayn ibn Muhammad Khalati from Armenia, who died in Quanzhou. Another example are tombstones that belonged to the grave of Khwaja Shimal al-Din, probably was a Persian who died in June 1310 CE. However, many gravestones were later re-used as building materials. From the names inscribed on the tombstones, it is evident that foreign merchants also brought along their wives to stay in Quanzhou (Stocker-Parnian, 2010; Bisterbosch, 2016).

At the end of the Song era, a Chinese scholar, Zhou Qufei, remarked in *Lingwai Daida* (written in 1178) that "among all the alien countries who possess the richest kinds of, and the most treasurable value of, goods, no other country may surpass Dashi," and possibly Dashi Muslims were the largest foreign population in China. In addition, Zhou Qufei also stated that, in his time, most of the trade in the South China Sea was handled by merchants from Arabia, Persia, and other countries. The route taken by the Arab traders was as follows: from the Arab-Persian ports they sailed to Kollam using small ships, then there they transferred their goods to large ships (*sanbuq* or *sunbuq*) and then sailed to San-fo-ts'i (Sriwijaya), from there they headed to China (Rugua, 1911; Wan, 2016).[5] Not only offered lengthy descriptions pertaining to the situation prevailed in Dashi's land as well as the culture and customs of their society, Zhao Rugua also mentioned the merchandises often bought by these followers of a Buddha named "Ma-hia-wu" (Prophet Muhammad) to China in the 12th century CE are: "pearls, ivory, rhinoceros horns, frankincense, ambergris, putchuck, cloves, nutmegs, benzoin (*an-si kiang*), aloes, myrrh, dragon's-blood, asafoetida, wu-na-tsi (castoreum), borax, opaque and transparent glass, *ch'o-ku* shell (?), coral, cat's-eyes (?), gardenia flowers, rose-water, nutgalls, yellow wax, soft gold brocades, camel's-hair cloth, *tou-lo* cottonades and foreign satins" (Rugua, 1911, p. 116).

Furthermore, it is important to note that, during the Song era, many Arab merchants, some of them bore the family name "Pu"—which is commonly believed to be the transliteration of "Abu," which means 'father of' in Arabic and usually refers to Muslims—

[5] *Sanbuq* or *sunbuq* is a versatile medieval craft of people of Hijaz. This vessel is known to have sailed in Indian Ocean, and as far as China, as early as 10th century. For a detailed discussion about this vessel, see Agius (2008, pp. 310–316).

lived in either Sriwijaya or Champa. During this time, either Sriwijaya or Champa, in particular, played an important role as a major hub for trade between the Arab world and China. Meanwhile, in 986 CE, a man named Pu Lo-er came to China and brought along his family of 100 souls from Champa (Leslie, 1986; Rugua, 1911). The Pu family's Southeast Asian connection was corroborated by the *Song Shi (Book of Song)*, in which it is mentioned that the entourage that accompanied the envoys Pu Sina, Mahamo, and Pu Luo, when they paid a visit to the court of China during the early years of Song Taizong's rule (970's), was comprised of individuals of "dark eyes and dark bodies, and are called Kunlun slaves" (Xuan *et al.*, 1345)—these Kunluns are taught to be the adherents of Buddhism from Southeast Asia (Heejung, 2015).

By the 12th century CE, some Chinese coastal cities witnessed the further glory of Arab Pu families, the "white foreigners" who controlled the foreign trade, built and lived extravagantly in luxury houses. Some of those wealthy Muslim merchants not only advocated and funded the construction of the Light Tower of Guangzhou (Guangta of Huaisheng Mosque?) to help the navigation of foreign ships, but also other public buildings such as the city wall. In the mid-13th century CE, a wealthy Arab merchant named Pu Kaizong even built two bridges in Jinjiang, Quanzhou, while Pu Shougeng built a tower in northeast Quanzhou "to look out the seaboats" (Wang, 2018, p. 211; Steinhardt, 2018, pp. 60–61). Moreover, some scholars also attributed the establishment of Huaisheng mosque to the rich Pu family (Leslie, 1986; Wan, 2016; Chaffee, 2018). It is important to note that the *Song Shi* also recorded numerous missions sent from different Arab lands and gift exchanges between Dashi envoys—many of them bore the name "Pu" and had family members who stayed in China—and the Emperor of China. The splendorous receptions and ceremonies arranged by the emperor of China for these envoys may also indicate healthy relationships between Arabs and Chinese during the Song era (Xuan *et al.*, 1345).

Arabs and Persians' Ventures in Yuan China

China's maritime trade networks expanded even further during the Yuan era (1271 CE–1368 CE), especially as early as the 1280s CE. One of the major impetuses was the feud between the Yuan dynasty and the Mongol princes in Central Asia, which forced trade routes to be diverted from land routes to maritime routes. As a result, Quanzhou once again became an international trade centre and often frequented by merchants from the Muslim World (Biran, 2015). It was also reported that, apart from landing in Quanzhou or Changzou, many Muslim traders then stopped in Yangzhou. Located in Quanzhou is the Xianhe Mosque, one of the oldest grand mosques in coastal China. The mosque was founded in 1275 CE by Puhading (or Buhaoding), who claimed to be the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (Dillon, 1999), and this man was also buried near the mosque.

During the Yuan era, there were two known groups of Muslims, those who came from Arab-Persia and Central Asia. The first group being Muslims who voluntarily came to China, which primarily consisted of merchants, tax collectors, and financial officers. The second group were Muslims who were forced by the Mongols to reside in China, and most of them were craftsmen, architects, and other skilled laborers. Apart from that, Muslim armourers, and enslaved women and children were also brought to China, who were employed as servants of the Mongol aristocrats. They were assigned as tax collectors and administrators since the Yuan rulers considered them more loyal than the Han Chinese subjects. While Semu (Central Asian) soldiers were also recruited to man Kublai Khan's multiethnic army, *tanmachi*, and assigned as border guards, Muslim craftsmen reportedly

built mosques in Kublai's summer capital at Sangdu (Xanadu), and that they resided in Dadu (Khanbaliq) (Rossabi, 1981; Dillon, 1999). Muslim migration and settlement in southwestern China were mainly attracted by the trade, due to its strategic location on the trade routes with Burma and India as well as its commercial prosperity.

As far as Muslim settlement in southeastern China are concerned, it was also attracted by trade, just like in the previous era. In fact, at the end of Song's rule, the renowned superintendent of maritime trade at Quanzhou, Pu Shougeng, decided to support the Yuan dynasty in late 1276 CE and provided the Mongols with a navy. As a reward, Kublai Khan appointed him as supervisor of trade in Guangdong and Fujian province. It is also reported that Muslims formed one-third of the thirty superintendents of trading ships in Fujian at that time. In this regard, in Quanzhou, Kublai Khan also allowed the presence of officials such as sheikh al-Islam and qadi from the Muslim community—similar thing also occurred in various cities in southeastern China. Kublai Khan even ordered the establishment of imperial hospitals staffed by Muslim doctors. Meanwhile, in Fuzhou and Guangzhou, Kublai Khan also appointed Muslims as local government officials (Leslie, 1986; Qiqing, 1994; Tan, 2009; Biran, 2015; Rossabi, 1981).

Muslim villages in the early years of the Yuan era—including those in Kanchou (now Ganzhou), Suzhou, and Yenan—had their own markets, hospitals, and mosques, with the Kanchou mosque built by Muslims in 1274 CE. Furthermore, there were no restrictions on Muslims to speak their mother tongue or practice their religion (Rossabi, 1981; Qiqing, 1994; Tan, 2009). However, from the late 1270s CE to the late 1280s CE, Kublai's attitude towards Muslims in general changed. Seemingly dismayed by their growing influence, the Khan began to issue anti-Muslim policies, including prohibiting the Islamic slaughter of sheep, the violation of which was punishable by death. Not long afterward, the Khan also forbade Muslims to have circumcisions, and even assassinated a Muslim finance minister named Ahmad due to the latter's alleged treason. Realising that his policy actually made Muslim traders reluctant to call on China's ports, he later softened and finally cancelled his anti-Muslim policy (Polo, 1907; Leslie, 1986; Dardess, 1994; Rossabi, 1981).

Another important visit was made in around 1322 CE and 1328 CE by an Italian monk named Odoric from Pordenone to China. During his visit to Manzi (South China) he witnessed around two thousand large cities, which were much larger than the large cities that existed in Italy at the time. In Manzi, he visited Censcalan (Guangzhou), which was three times the size of Venice. This coastal city held a special importance in Chinese trade because not only it often frequented by traders from the south, but it was also the first port of call in China for Arab and Persian traders, who called it Khanfu, after their long journey from their homeland. He also visited Zaitun (Quanzhou), which was twice the size of Bologna, where basic goods were abundant and at cheap prices, and was also often frequented by Arab and Persian traders (Yule and Cordier, 1913). Probably, at the time of his travels, China was ruled by Yusun Temur, a khan who had ordered the pouring of state money to build several mosques in Shaanxi Province as well as freed ulama from forced labor. During his reign, Muslim traders also made abundant profits. However, like Kublai, his kindness towards Muslims was based on political considerations (Qiqing, 1994).

At the end of the Yuan era, precisely in 1345 CE, a traveller from the Maghrib, Abū ʻAbdullah Muḥammad ibn Battuta (1304 CE–1369 CE), landed in Zaitun. In his rihlah account, *Tuḥfat an-Nuẓẓār fī Gharāʾib al-Amṣār wa ʿAjāʾib al-Asfār* (*A Gift to Those Who Contemplates the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling)*, Ibn Battuta described Zaitun (Quanzhou) as a large and important city, having a port that was one of the largest, if not the largest in the world, which was filled with hundreds of junks. Ibn Battuta also

recounts that when Muslim merchants arrived in China, they could choose to live with other Muslim merchants who had already settled there or live in *funduq* (a kind of caravanserai). In China, Muslim merchants could take concubines, purchase female slaves, and even marry the daughters of local residents. He also stated that, in Zaitun, the Muslim community lived in a village. In this city he was welcomed by an emir from India. There were also several important people who visited him, such as Tāj al-Dīn of Ardabil, and sheikh al-Islam named Kamāl al-Dīn ʻAbdallah of Isfahan. In addition, several important merchants also visited Ibn Battuta, among them was Sharāf al-Dīn of Tabriz, who had lent him money when Ibn Battuta was in India.

In Quanzhou, Ibn Battuta also mentioned the existence of a poor house owned by a pious sheikh named Burhān al-Dīn of Kazerun (Ibn Battuta, 1962). It turned out that this certain Burhān al-Dīn also served as the imam of Qingjing Mosque in 1350 CE (Chaffee, 2006). The existence of Muslim merchants in Manzi (South China) was also witnessed by a Florentine traveller, Giovanni de Marignolli (1290 CE–1360 CE), when he came to this city around 1346 CE, nearly at the same time as Ibn Battuta's visit. In this province, which he said had "30,000 cities," he stopped in Campsay (Hangzhou) and Zaytun (Quanzhou). Illustrating Zaytun as "a wondrous seaport and a city of incredible size," de Marignolli also discovered the existence of a bath and a *fondaco* (from Arabic, *funduq*) in this city. As a Franciscan missionary, he was proud to relate that he had succeeded in establishing two bells at the heart of a Saracen (Muslim) quarter in this city (de Marignolli, 1914).

Subsequently, Ibn Battuta called on Sin Kalan (Guangzhou), a city that, according to him, was one of the largest and had the finest bazaars in the world. In this city, there was a Muslim village complete with a mosque, hospice, and bazaar, complete with religious officials such as qadi and sheikh al-Islam. The next city visited by Ibn Battuta was Qanjanfu (Fuzhou). As in previous cities, at Qanjanfu, Ibn Battuta was welcomed by the qadi, sheikh al-Islam, as well as Muslim merchants. This city has multi-layered city walls, while Muslims live within the third layer of city walls with their sheikh, Ẓāhir al-Dīn al-Qurlanī. And, in this city, Ibn Battuta was also happy because he met his fellow countryman, Mawlānā Qiwām al-Dīn of Ceuta (Ibn Battuta, 1962). After visiting Qanjanfu, Ibn Battuta continued his journey to al-Khansa (Hangzhou) which, according to him, was the largest city on earth, like six cities within one city wall. In this city, Ibn Battuta was welcomed by the *qadi* and sheikh al-Islam named Afkhar al-Dīn. It is said that this qadi was an important merchant descended from ʻUthmān ibn ʻAffān, he fell in love with a woman and settled in this city. In al-Khansa, Ibn Battuta visited a beautiful Muslim village, complete with a courtyard, a mosque and its muezzin, and also a beautiful and blessed house for the poor called "Ottoman." The number of Muslim population in this city was very large, and in this city one can also find Sufi bands (Ibn Battuta, 1962, pp. 900–902).

At the end of his visit to China, Ibn Battuta relates that the Chinese Qan (khan) at that time, Pashay (according to Gibb, this name refers to Toghon Temür), went to fight the rebellion raised by his cousin named Firuz. The rebellion erupted in an area called Khita (Cathay, North China). Subsequently, the "Qan" died while fleeing northward, and Firuz seized his throne. However, Gibb (in Ibn Battuta) believes that there was no real figure named Firuz who became a khan of the Yuan dynasty, so it is unclear who this figure was. Whatever the case, according to historical records, it is evident that Toghon Temür was the last khan of the Yuan dynasty, hence the defeat of this "Qan" at the hands of the "rebels" marked the end of the power of the Yuan dynasty. Apparently, the event that Ibn Battuta calls a "rebellion" was a part of a peasant rebellion which commonly known as the Hongjin Qiyi (Red Turban) Rebellion in North China (Ibn Battuta, 1962), which emergence was closely associated with

the political instability that prevailed prior to the fall of the sovereignty of the Yuan dynasty—which also gave birth to numerous bands of bandits who undermined peace and gave rise to malaise in certain places in China.

The end of Yuan rule in China also witnessed another significant insurgence, the Ispah rebellion, which was orchestrated by the Shiites of Persian origins in Quanzhou. This ill-fated rebellion was harshly subdued by Toghon Temür's force, in which many Muslims of Persian and Semu origins were massacred, many mosques were destroyed; meanwhile, the survivors simply migrated to other cities and assimilated with local population. However, the most devastating political movement for the Mongols at this time was the Red Turban Rebellion, of which one of the most important leaders was Zhu Yuanzhang, who on 24 January 1368 CE, after overthrowing the Yuan dynasty, founded and became the first emperor of the Ming dynasty and proclaimed himself as Hongwu Emperor—in historical records, he is more often referred to as Taizu of the Ming (Ibn Battuta, 1962; Dardess, 1994). During his rule, Taizu adopted an "isolationalist" approach, which deeply affected China's policy on maritime trade. In 1371 CE, Taizu forbade all private maritime activities, including overseas trade. Therefore, trade with China should only be conducted on a small scale and under the state's rigorous control. He even discouraged foreign rulers from sending trade-motivated tribute missions (Schottenhammer, 2023). Without a doubt, his policy stifled Arab-Persian trade in China once again, although reportedly Taizu is also known to have composed the Baizizian (Hundred-Word Eulogy), in which he praises Prophet Muhammad, and perhaps it also reflects his veneration for the Prophet and Islam (Chang, 1988; Sen, 2009; Ma and Newlon, 2023).

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is evident that the Arabs and Persians have been actively enganged in, thus making them one of the most valuable elements in, Chinese trade since the beginning of the Common Era. They undertook perilous journeys from their home in West Asia, and were highly appreciated in China as either ambassadors or traders who supplied the Middle Kingdom with countless commodities. Not only resided in China, many of them also intermingled, acculturated, and even assimilated with the local population. Some Arab-Persian families held considerable influences and powers, made significant contributions to society and the city, and thus became the priviledged element. Although Arabs and Persians' relations with China and its population are normally marked by peaceful coexistence and cooperation, there were times when their relations turned sour and even led to larger, devastating conflicts. However, trade relations between West Asia and China came to a halt with the rise of the Ming dynasty due to a restriction imposed by its first emperor, Taizu. This restriction was only effective for a relatively short period of time, for his successor eventually abandoned this policy in the early 15th century CE, but the discussion about this lies beyond the scope of this paper. Finally, it is also evident that accounts left by Arab and Persian travellers, traders, and ambassadors are very valuable sources since they can reveal the situation they faced in their venture into medieval China.

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