

## Early Globalism in Asia and Africa

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Postcolonial relationships between China and Africa have revived interest in understanding early interactions between the two regions. African domesticates like millet and sorghum were domesticated in Asia as early as the Shang (Yin) times (ca/ 1600-1027 BCE) while Asia domesticates like banana and rice found their way to Africa similarly early, there is, however, little archaeological evidence at this time to suggest that more direct contact between East Africa and China existed. It has often been assumed that contact at this point was more indirect, through overland trade and migration across Eurasia. In more recent times beginning from the Tang Dynasty (ca. AD 756-906), linkages between East Africa and China became more regular. The continuous occurrence of Chinese trade ceramics in dateable archaeological contexts at several key sites in East Africa from the Tang through Qing Dynasties (ca. AD 756-1908) points to long, productive relationship between China and East Africa. In contemporary times, the Peoples Republic of China is a significant partner and friend of the people of East Africa. The political economy of China and East Africa are intertwined to the point where there exists an abundant body of data to warrant scholarly scrutiny. My paper discusses ancient Chinese ceramics excavated at Kenyan historic sites and discusses the potential of the long-term collaborative research agenda on ancient and contemporary relations between China and East Africa.

## Introduction

### East Africa and the Indian Ocean Trade

Over the past five decades investigations from archaeological as well as historical sources have revealed that the cultural growth on the eastern coast of Africa is closely linked to the development of complexly organized merchant towns, receiving ship borne goods from the far corners of the world and sending forth the produce of the interior of Africa (Fleisher 2010; Horton 1996; Kusimba 1999:2; Pollard et al 2012; Sinclair et al 2012). The coastal region of east Africa played a prominent part in early global history from the very beginnings of recorded time. In prehistoric times, it was the bridge from which the first humans left the continent to venture east and populate the world. In historic times, the north, the Somali coast, offered entrepots to the caravan routes leading to the Nile valley through such legendary towns as the forbidden city of Harar. Its central reaches in Kenya and Tanzania linked the people and produce of the Great Lakes region on the Highlands with the markets on Zanzibar and the island archipelagos. In the south, ports along the Mozambique Strait trafficked inland with the plateaus of Zambezia and the mineral riches controlled by the Shona kingdoms ruled from monumental towns like Great Zimbabwe (Kusimba 1999:1; Pikiyai 2001, 2010; Sinclair et al 2012).

Up to the 1980s, the east Africa coast was strewn with the remnants of this ancient culture: the ruins of once flourishing towns with their elite mansions and mosques built in coral rag<sup>1</sup>. These prominent remains were built by ancestors of modern coastal peoples about 500

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<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of these ruins have been destroyed since the 1990s by developers, local communities, and neglect (Kusimba 1996 see also Mturi 2005, Pollard et al 2012; Schmidt and McIntosh 1996).

to 1200 years ago. Their culture was nominally Islamic, and they interacted with and were influenced by centuries of economic contact with and colonization from southern Arabia, western India, and Portugal (Hourani 1996; Pearson 1999, 2003). They interacted directly and indirectly with communities as far as Indonesia and China. Yet despite this welter of external contacts, it was a culture that remained essentially African in nature (Allen 1993; Caplan 1998; Fleisher 2003; Horton 1996; Kusimba 1999; Middleton 2001, 2004).

There is a lack of archaeological and anthropological research specifically aimed at understanding ancient transcontinental communication between Africa and Eurasia. Attempts by subaltern scholars are laudable and very much welcome but even some have scandalously omitted Africa and Africans from the conversation (Abu-Lughod 1989, 2008:186-89; Chaudhury 1985, 1990). Thankfully this is beginning to change (e.g., Hawley 2008; Pearson 1999, 2003). Africa and Asia have been linked economically and technologically for several millennia. Many of the food crops that are now staple foods in much of sub Saharan Africa were first experimented with and domesticated in Asia. Some of the African domesticates including sorghum, millet, coffee are widely consumed by contemporary Asians as staples (Possehl 1986).

Ancient connections between Africa and Asia, including China are exhibited in the numerous archaeological remains that have been recovered at many sites across the continent (e.g., Chami 1998; Chittick 1974, 1984:65-71; Fleisher 2001; Horton 1996; Horton and Middleton 2000; Pikirayi 2001). Artifacts including Indo-Pacific beads, glass, Middle East glazed pottery and jewelry, Chinese stoneware and porcelain, among others have been recovered at nearly all medium to large settlements along the Eastern and Southern African sub continent from the Tang Dynasty to the present (Bourgeulie 1998; Robertshaw et al 2003, 2006; Sinclair

et al 2012; Oka 2008; Walz 2010; Pikirayi 2010). These non African materiality bears witness to the global connections, contributions, and complexity of the Africa's past and systematically dismantles the long-held narrative that Africa was isolated from Eurasia and, with the exception of north Africa, contributed precious little to global civilization (Lughod 2008:188).

Recent and ongoing collaborative research investigation across Africa and Eurasia are unveiling new data sets that enable us to move beyond traditional uses archaeologists and historians have used exotic artifacts. In Africa, non-local pottery, including Islamic and Chinese porcelain have been employed in the: (1) determination of settlement chronologies (2) establishment Islam and Islamization, a code word for Arabian immigration; and (3) establishment of commercial and political colonies in Africa by Asians. Much of this way of interpreting ancient connections, contributions, and complexities of cultural interactions has been thoroughly discredited (Fleisher 2003; Kusimba 1999, 2006; Lavolette and Fleisher 2005; Mitchell 2005; Pearson 1998, 2003).

### **Early Global Connections: China and Africa**

Trade played a prominent role in the development of cultures throughout ancient world (Oka and Kusimba 2008). Trade linked diverse peoples and communities in a network on interactions that had a huge impact on the quality of daily life. Archaeologists and historians have documented evidence of biological, cultural, linguistic, commercial, and technical communication between Africa and Asia beginning from the early first millennium CE (e.g., Bourgeulie 1998; Ray 1998; Sedov 1998; Serjeant 2000; Steensgard 1987). The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, a third century mariner's guide presumably written in Alexandria, mentions that iron lances, hatchets, daggers, and awls made at Muza, east of Aden constituted trade items

consigned for African markets (Casson 1989). Trade items from the East African coast consigned for foreign markets in India, the Middle East, and China included marine products- tortoise shells and ambergris; animal products- ivory, rhinoceros horns and cat skins; and vegetable products- mangrove poles, wood, and timber. Turtles shells and ambergris were then in high demand in India and China. (Freeman-Grenville 1962; Horton 1996:414). Ivory, rhinoceros horns and leopard skins were exported to India, China, and the Persian Gulf (Yulvisaker 1982). Timber for building and aromatic products were needed in the Persian Gulf until relatively recently. Demand for African timber in the Gulf was high enough to be reported by Ibn Hawqal c.960 CE who wrote that houses in Siraf were built of wood from the country of the Zinj (Freeman-Grenville 1962; Martin 1979).

Textiles including silk and cotton were spun in Mogadishu, Pate, Manda, Zanzibar, Kilwa, Mahilaka, and other major towns and their products widely traded in Eastern Africa reaching as far as Egypt. Upon their visit to Pate, the Portuguese were sufficiently impressed by the high quality silk manufactured there (Freeman-Grenville 1962). Mining and working of iron was an important industrial activity at Malindi and other Swahili towns. The superior quality of iron products made in East Africa was impressive enough to be added on the list of African exports to India by Indian merchants who regularly visited the coast with the aid of annual monsoon winds (Horton 1996:418). Noted Arab scholar Al Masudi who visited East Africa in 912 CE left one of the most cogent descriptions of the iron industry on the coast in his *The Meadows of Gold and the Mines of Gems*. Commenting on the ongoing transoceanic trade between East Africa and Asia, he wrote:

The Zanj exported gold, silver, iron, ivory, tortoise shell, and slaves. Iron was probably the source of the largest profits. Indian merchants came to buy iron and took it back to their own country where they resold it to the manufactures of iron weapons. The Zanj of Malindi owned and worked iron mines, as did other towns, but Malindi must have been the most important. East African iron was much valued in India, partly because there was no lack of supply and partly because it was of good quality yet easy to fashion and they became masters of the skill of working. The Indians were said to make better swords than anyone else, and weapons made of the iron of Zanj were used throughout the Middle East and countries of the Indian Ocean (Freeman-Grenville 1962:20; Shinnie 1965:107)

Long distance trade was a crucial factor in the development of complex chiefdoms, states, and urban polities that emerged during the later half of the first millennium of our era to the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE. Along the East African coast, from Somalia to Mozambique, autonomous urban polities emerged. The residents who were drawn largely from the region pursued diverse but complementary vocations, which ranged hunting, agrarian, fishing, and trading. Available records indicate connections with countries to the north extending in Eurasia (Fattovich 2012). The locals engagement in local, region, and transoceanic trade appear to have served as the main catalyst for building communal and personal wealth which witnessed a steady transformation of the villages and hamlets into small towns, cities, and ultimately to city states that increasingly boasted large and diverse citizenry (see Tables 1-2). As these cities transformed into states that hosted an economic and political elite that vied for managerial control of sources of wealth, they attracted attention and strove to forge and maintain relationships and build alliances with their transoceanic and hinterland partners (Kusimba and Kusimba 2005; Kusimba et al 2005; Middleton 2001, 2004; Mitchell 2005). The cities' prosperity was affirmed and fostered by social and political stability across the region. Evidence for relational and political stabilities is found in, bonds, pacts, and treaties, usually, called blood brotherhoods in

East Africa (Herlehy 1980, 1984). Within the cities themselves, alliances sanctified through opportunistic intermarriages among the political and economic elite, who included foreign residents were the norm (Tolmacheva 1990). These relationships bound the cities residents to their neighbors in the rural hinterland and merchants across the sea were the kernel upon which African connections, contributions, and complexity depended. Continued regional and intercontinental prosperity depended upon forging and maintaining commercial and cultural dialogue amongst interacting partners (Allen 1993; Middleton 1992; Oka and Kusimba 2008; Udovitch 1970).

It is becoming apparent from genetic studies that the residents of early coastal towns and city-states were initially drawn from different linguistic and ethnic groups but in time, one language, Kiswahili, became the dominant language of choice (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2012; Nurse and Spear 1985; Hinnbusch 1993; Kusimba et al 2010, 2011). Thus, economic and social interaction amongst diverse groups who made their living from hunting, herding, farming, and trading must be credited with laying the foundation from which international trade exchange systems interlocked. Towards the last quarter of the first millennium, ca. 750 CE, Islam was introduced and gradually expanded to become the primary religion and means of elite cultural expression by the time of European contact in early 1500 CE and into the present day (Horton 1996, 2012; Horton and Middleton 2000; Kusimba 2012).

At the beginning of the second millennium CE, Eastern and Southern Africa, indeed the entire Africa continent had become a regular partner in the millennial old long distance exchanges that reached as far as the Arabian Peninsula, India, Sri Lanka, and China (Mitchell 2005; Pearson 2003; Walmsey 1970; Warmington 1974; Wilkinson 2003). By the 13<sup>th</sup> century

there had emerged a local African urban elite that financed, managed, and controlled local, regional, and transoceanic trade and communications along the East African seaboard. Innovations in ironworking aided agricultural intensification and specialization in hunting, fishing, and herding. These changes improved the quality of life and precipitated population growth, and economic prosperity for some 200 years.

In the late fifteenth century, however, Europe entered into the equations seeking to control and benefit from the millennial old trade in the Indian Ocean (Abu-Lughod 2008; Acemoglu and John 2012; Pearson 2003). The rivalry for control of Indian Ocean commerce was economically crippling for Africa and Asia and beneficial for Europe (Fergusson 2012 but see Hodgson 1992). The consequences of competition for control of transoceanic trade led to warfare which favored Europeans due to their superior naval and military power. The post-sixteenth century ushered in an era of decline and dependence while paving way for Europe's colonization of Asia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> (Blaut 1993; Gunder-Frank 1998; Oka et al 2009; Rodney 1974). Economic decline and the ceding of sociopolitical power to European nations was a region-wide phenomenon that affected Asian and African political economies. Legitimate and mutualistic regional and transoceanic trade gave way to the now-infamous ivory and slave caravans, financed by overseas merchant groups. Coastal slave raiding expeditions weakened long-standing alliances among peoples, cut off traditions of herding and farming and decimated populations. Today, the ruined walled towns of the east African coast and in the African interior suggest the magnificence of Africa's achievements and contributions to world history (see Table 2; Phillipson 2010; Pikirayi 2001).



Cultural Period	Predominant Domestic House Ground Plans	Community Settlement Patterns	Subsistence Patterns	Community Size and Structure
Period I (BC 100-AD 300)	circular	free and central-based wandering, semi-permanent sedentary to simple nuclear centered	hunting, gathering, fishing, gardening, barter	seasonal camps and semi-sedentary hamlets of single family groups and small bands
Period II (AD 300-1000)	Circular, globular, cylindrical	increasing restricted wandering and semi-permanent sedentism to simple nuclear centered	hunting, fishing, gathering, agriculture production, barter, local and some inter-regional trade	seasonal camps, small scattered sedentary villages of closely related kin
Period III (1000-1500)	globular, cylindrical rectangular	restricted wandering, semi-permanent sedentism to long and continued sedentism	hunting, fishing, gathering, intensification of agriculture production, inter-regional, and international trade	seasonal camps, semi-sedentary camps, large villages, small to medium-sized towns, and cities with diverse populations
Period IV (1500-1950)	cylindrical, rectangular	restricted wandering, semi-permanent sedentism to long and continued sedentism	hunting, fishing, gathering, intensification of agriculture production, inter-regional, and international trade	seasonal camps, semi-sedentary camps, small to large villages, towns, and cities with diverse populations

Table 1: The relation of Subsistence, Community, and Settlement Pattern to House Plan on the East African Coast (Derived from Robbins 1966:9)

<i>Class</i>	<i>Size (Hectares)</i>	<i>Features Present</i>	<i>Settlement Type</i>	<i>Number of Sites</i>	<i>Examples</i>
5	1.0	0-1 mosques, <5 tombs	Hamlet	34	Mgangani, Kinuni, Kongo, Munje, Diani, Tiwi
4	< 2.5	1-2 mosques, 5-10 tombs, 1-5 coral buildings,	village	39	Shee Umuro, Mwana Mchama, Kilepwa, Mnarani, Shirazi, Rubu, Tumbe, Galu
3	2.5-5.0	1-2 mosques, > 10 standing coral houses and town walls > 2 tombs	Small Town	19	Koyama, Ngumi, Chula, Ishakani, Kiunga, Omwe, Shee Jafari, Kitoka, Kilepwa, Jumba la Mtwana, Dondo
2	5.0-15.0	2 mosques, > 2 cemeteries, 50-100 coral houses, enclosed stone houses and open mud and coral houses	Towns	9	Merka, Munghia, BurGao, Siyu, Shanga, Manda, Mwana, Mtwapa and Vumba Kuu
1	>15	3+ mosques, 3+ cemeteries, > 100 standing coral houses, existence of wards	Cities	8	Mogadishu, Barawa Malindi, Lamu, Mombasa, Pate, Ungwana, Gede

Table 2: Classification of Coastal Sites

### **The Role of Islam in Linking China and East Africa**

The statement attributed to Prophet Mohamed, “seek knowledge even unto China” is informative in the sense that it lays the basis for understanding the importance of China in global trade in the Western Indian Ocean and Southwestern Asia in ancient times. The Memorial Mosque in Guangzhou is the first mosque in China. Build on orders of Emperor Yong Hui in 651 CE, the mosque, which still stands today, provides the earliest evidence of

formalization of Islam in China. Historically and in ancient times, there were two routes that linked China to the western Asia and Africa: an overland route through central Asia and western Asia and the sea through South China Sea and the Indian Ocean by way of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Persian Gulf (Horton 1996:307).

The Tang through Song Dynasties (618-1279 CE) witnessed six centuries of unprecedented technological, scientific, and sociopolitical advances in Asia, called the period of Asian renaissance (Abu-Lughod 2008:187; Udovitch 1970). The rise of Islam and imperial unification and consolidation of power in China, central Asia, Western Asia, and North Africa under the Caliphates based in Baghdad and Cairo, and the rise of large states and kingdoms in South Asia fostered social and political stability (Fergusson 2012). Advances in science and technology was accompanied by investment in large industrial complexes that manufactured silk, ceramics, beads, jewelry, cloth, spices, and other items for the global market heralded the first truly global economy since the fall of the Roman Empire (Vance 1970; Wilkinson 2003). Local traders and merchants, encouraged and quite possibly financed, by the political elite felt more emboldened to invest in long distance more risky business enterprises. Networks of trade created conditions for free movement of traders, merchants, scholars, and adventurers leading to bidirectional transfer of knowledge, culture, and people (Table 3).

Islam and its cultural norms were transmitted to China, central Asia, and Africa during this period. There was also a simultaneous transmission of cultural values in the opposite direction. Relations between China, Central Asia, Western Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia during the Tang Dynasty through the Song, until the Ming Revolt, were a combination of commerce, diplomacy, and gift exchange. The political elite played a crucial role in the

establishment of trade agreements. For example, between 651 to 798 CE, nearly 40 diplomats visited China. Increased trade missions Arabian and Persian traders. The convergence of politics and commerce benefited from the peaceful climate that was fostered between the two empires.

Region	Science	Technology	Economy	Politics
China	Chinese medical systems	Porcelains, Stonewares	Global Trade	Tang, Sung, Yuan Dynastic rule
Central Asia			Global Trade	
Southeast Asia			Global Trade	Srivijaya Empire
Southwest Asia	Unani	Lustre wares, Green Glazed wares	Global Trade	Abbasid in Baghdad and Mamluks in Cairo
South Asia	Ayurvedic	Crucible steel	Global Trade	Chola, Rashtrakuta, Chalukya
Africa		Crucible steel	Global Trade	Swahili, Great Zimbabwe

Table 3: Renaissance in Asia and Africa during the Tang-Sung Dynasties 618-1279 CE

Seen from a strictly anthropological lens, the Eastern and Southern Africa subcontinent was connected and was an integral component of a large network of ancient maritime trade of the Indian Ocean. This is evidence in early travel accounts by Chinese, Arab, Indian mariners and scholars. The widely cited *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* published in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE is a standard volume describing the expansive interaction spheres and the agents of this universe (Casson 1989, 1990). Much of the interactions appear to have been indirect through the agency of South Asia or Southwest Asian merchants, primarily Persian, Arabian, Indian, and quite possibly Indonesian. Although there is ample archaeological evidence of Chinese

material culture in Africa, there does not seem to have been regular direct evidence during the Roman imperial control of North Africa. The earliest known evidence for direct contact dates to the period between 202 BCE and 220 CE. The first mention of Africa in Chinese sources has been attributed to Tuan Ch'eng-Shi (died 863 CE), in the *land of Po-pa-li*, the fabled the land of Punt to Greeks or the Cinnamon Coast to Romans (Davies 2008; Keita 2002).

Although the bulk of trade objects have not survived, it suffices to say that bulk trade consisted of foodstuff and food crops including rice, honey, millet, and bananas. Other products exchanged included textiles--silk and cotton cloth, spices and aromatics, precious stones, construction materials. These include mace, nutmeg, cinnamon cloves, ambergris, rubies, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, pearls, porcelain, beads, gold, silver, cowry shells (*Cyraea moneta*), animal skins, leather, and slaves<sup>2</sup> among others (Curtin 1984; Pearson 2003:84, 86). These much sought after items are muted in the archaeological record and are not easy to account for where literary records have not survived. Instead, the most archaeologically frequently recovered remains have include jewelry, ceramics –stoneware and porcelain-, glass, beads, and coinage. For instance, Chinese trade ceramics have been recovered at virtually every urban settlement in East Africa. Most appear from the Tang-Sung transition to modern times (Table 4).

Although considerably few, the recovery of Chinese coinage from several East African settlements, including Mogadishu, Kilwa, and recently at Mambrui, dating from Song through Ming Dynasties, provides critical evidence for interactions between China and East Africa (Pankhurst 1961:268). Such evidence, especially that of coinage, points to possible diplomatic

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<sup>2</sup> African slaves were first brought to China by Arab merchants during the Tang-Sung times (Pearson 2003"85)

missions between China and Africa. The issuance and circulation of gold coinage was highly restricted and when issued, often pointed to direct diplomatic gestures from the Emperor to his counterpart. Therefore, the presence of imperial Chinese coins might provide the most direct archaeological evidence for direct contact. This dates to the much-celebrated voyages of Admiral Zheng He. Indeed the ongoing research in Mambui led by Professor Qin Dashy of Peking University and my own at Manda where coin minted between 1403 and 1424 CE have been found suggests that these were likely imperial issues made during the reign of Emperor Yong Le. Similarly porcelain from one of the royal kiln many lend credence to this perspective of diplomatic exchanges, which if proven point to an older long-standing direct relationship between China and Africa (McLachlan 2010).

Archaeological investigations on the African subcontinent and on the Western Indian Ocean, at sites such as Chaul, Palshet, Sanjan and Kelshi (Gogte 2002) have yielded material remains which point to nearly 2000 years of continuous interaction of East Africa and South Asia at least from the eighth century up to eighteenth century.

Period	Time	Archaeological Finds	Transoceanic Trade
Period V	1750-1950 CE	Indo-Pacific beads, glass bangles, Chinese blue on white, Japanese Karatsu ware, European Floral ware Islamic monochrome pottery, iron and iron slag,	Frequent regional and international trade-- Persian Gulf, India, China (decline) and Europe, Americas (expand)
Period IV	1500-1750 CE	Stylistically diverse local pottery, Indian pottery, European peasant floral wares	Regular regional and international trade- Persian Gulf, India, China, Indonesia
Period IIIb	1250-1500 CE	Stylistically diverse local pottery, spindle whorls, coins, portable stoves and lamps, chlorite schist, Islamic monochromes, Chinese Longquan and Tongan ware , Indonesian Sawankholok or Sisatchanalai jars, Indo-Pacific beads and Egyptian glass,	Regular regional and international trade with China, Southeast Asia, India, Persian Gulf
Period IIIa	1000-1250 CE	Stylistically diverse local pottery, rock crystal, spindle whorls, copper and silver coins, Islamic Sgraffiato, Chinese Qing Bai, Cizhou ware, Bronze mirrors, Indo-Pacific beads,	Regular regional and international trade with Persian Gulf, Egypt, India, and possibly China
Period IIb	600-1000 CE	Zanjian Pottery: red barnished and hagshaped cooking pots, graphite finsh and trellis patterns; Partho-Sassanian Islamic, white-glazed, Chinese green glazed stone ware, grey-green 'Yue' ware, Guangdong Coastal Green, white porcelain, white stone ware, and Egyptian glass, carnelain beads, iron and iron slag	Egypt, Persian Gulf and Indian Subcontinent
Period IIa	300- 600 CE	Azanian pottery Pottery:triangular oblique, and double zigzag patterns predominate; Sassanian Islamic, glass, and carnelian beads and Roman Amphora	Some trade
Period I	100BCE- 300 CE	Local Early Iron Age pottery, iron and Iron slag	No Evidence

Table 4. Distribution of Archaeological Remains at Coastal Settlements through time

Islamic and Chinese pottery Islam and its cultural norms were transmitted to China, central Asia, and Africa during this period. There was also a simultaneous transmission of cultural values in the opposite direction. Relations between China, central Asia, Western Asia, and South Asia during the Tang Dynasty were a combination of commerce, diplomacy, and gift exchange (Wilkinson 2003). Chinese records show that nearly 40 diplomats visit China between 651 to 798 CE. Trade missions by Arabian and Persian traders who primarily used the overland trade route via the Black Sea and Indian merchants who sailed through the port of Malacca exponentially increased. China had become the fulcrum upon which global trade in Asia, Africa, and Europe hinged (Abu-Lughod 2008; Chaudhury 1996; Mitchell 2005; Pearson 2005; Toussaint 1966). The convergence of politics and commerce benefited from the peaceful climate that was fostered between the two major empires—the Abbasids and China. The presence of Indo-Pacific beads produced in India (Casson 1990, 1994; Junker 2000), the occurrence of typical Indian pottery, and to some extent, portable cooking stoves in archaeological contexts on the East African Coast indicates locational and relational stability that encourages immigration between India, western Asia, and the East Africa. The region and especially the main ports of trade had become cosmopolitan centers of commerce and hosted diverse Diaspora residences and quarters (Middleton 2004; Pearson 1999, 2003).

Today the great majority of East Africans who identify themselves Swahili still live on the coast or within a few miles of it. They are Muslims and speak an Eastern Bantu language, Swahili, which has over the years borrowed and adapted Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Portuguese, and more recently English words into its vocabulary (Abdulaziz 1979; Noor and Mazrui 1996; Mazrui and Mazrui 2000). This is testimony to the transnational character of the world of the Indian



Ocean nurtured by the “peaceful coexistence” fostered between 700 and 1500 CE when a power shift in favor of Europe destroyed the millennial old global trade (Acemoglu and John 2012; Rodney 1974). Swahili social structure, domestic and religious architecture provide testament to the cultural fusion of indigenous and Diaspora value systems (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2012; LaViolette and Fleisher 2005; Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Knappert 1979; Middleton 1992, 2004). Nevertheless, these Diaspora influences did not change African peoples’ identities as some scholars have vigorously argued. Rather as Swahili scholar Mohamed Abdulaziz (1979:8) reminds us:

The Arab-Islamic component ... acted as a strong cultural stimulus to the development of this urban form of African culture. Past historians have often failed to acknowledge the African initiative in the formation of Swahili culture. To them, it would appear, every aspect of urban living represented remnants of direct Arab presence. In any given period, the Arab population element must have been very small, compared to the population of the local inhabitants. Indeed the trend on the Coast has always been the Swahilization of Arabs rather than the Arabization of the African Muslim inhabitants, in such facets of culture, and the mode of living in general. This trend has been so forceful that most Arabs on the Coast, who have settled here within the last two centuries or so, have lost their original culture and language and completely adopted Swahili culture (cited from Askew 1999:72).

Contrary to scholarship which has sought to diminish East Africa’s role in global trade, tangible archaeological evidence for regular connections is traced as far back as third century CE, when cultural artifacts including Roman era beads and ceramics Arab, Persian, Chinese and Indian jewelry, beads, cloth, and porcelain by the eight century. These artifacts show East Africa’s involvement and connection to the early global trade networks of the Mediterranean Sea,

Persian, Gulf and Indian Ocean without whose participation the sought after African products, including ivory, gold, timber, and grains would not have been possible (Curtin 1984:34; Pearson 2003:76).

### **Chinese Trade with East Africa**

The ubiquity of Chinese porcelain and other precious stones recovered in archaeological records has shaped a narrowly focused narrative for archaeology leading us to assume that porcelain was the most important item from China. Porcelain and other items are overrepresented in the archaeological because of their survivability. In reality, they constitute a very small percentage, perhaps as low as 5 percent of the entire bulk trade carried out between China and the western Indian Ocean (see Pearson 2003:85). As illustrated in Table 5 above, spices, cloth precious metals, and enslaved persons were among the principal products exchanged.

Trade ceramics, including Chinese porcelain excavated from the East African coastal sites constitutes 0.04 percent of the entire pottery assemblage. That is to say that, 4 out of every 10,000 ceramic shards recovered are trade ceramics. Trade ceramics recovered in East Africa usually include Islamic stoneware and glazed ceramics, Chinese stoneware and porcelain, Indonesian and Thai porcelain, and Indian unglazed pottery (e.g., Chittick 1984; Horton 1996; Sassoon 1975). Trade ceramics have been reported from fifth century contexts at Swahili sites such as Chibuene, Unguja Ukuu, Kilwa, Shanga, Manda, Mogadishu, and Ungwana among others. Interestingly, nearly 50 percent of trade ceramics are of Chinese origin (Oka 2008). The volume of transoceanic trade appears to have increased between the 10<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> centuries in

favor of Chinese ceramic products. The preference for Chinese porcelain over Islamic and Indian glazed pottery speaks to the superior quality of Chinese products (Oka 2008). Contact between East Africa and China from the Tang to Sung to Yuan Dynasties was primarily indirect through Persian and Arab merchants using the overland trade routes through central Asian across the Black Sea and through the South China Sea via Malacca, around the Coromandel coast, Aden and onward to East Africa through the agency of Chinese, Indian, and Arab merchants. Another equally plausible reason for trade expansion by the Yuan Dynasty beginning from the 13<sup>th</sup> century encouraged Chinese merchants to invest in long-distance trade with other regions (Pearson 2003:89).

The technical and aesthetic superiority of Chinese ceramics over their potential competitors ensured their high value among the emerging local economic and political elite. Chinese ceramics, unlike African and Islamic pottery, were made from a wide range of clay raw materials available throughout China (Vainker 1991:218). Qualitatively, Chinese clay was non-vitreous such that when fired it matured at about 1200°C, forming non-porous vessels with a long use life. In addition, the design, form, and decorative motifs employed by Chinese designers--ranging from naturalistic to landscape—had universal appeal for use in both sacred and profane contexts-- in the home entertaining and impressing ones guests and as décor in temples and mosques. These attributes, including transportability and durability ensured the global high demand and near monopoly for Chinese trade ceramics.

As already noted above, import trade in East Africa included many items from China. However, the popularity of trade ceramics to East Africa continued from the ninth to the nineteenth century (Chittick 1986: 65; Horton 1996:303; Oka 2008). This trade declined when

Europeans took control of Indian Ocean trade. The Taiping rebellion destroyed the famous Jingdezhen kilns and disrupted overland trade in China (Abu-Lughod 2008:191).

### **Chinese Trade Ceramics Found in East Africa**

All the major trade ceramic have been found in East Africa since the 800 CE. We briefly describe them below.

### **Tongguan and Qionglai Wares (Changsha Painted Wares)**

Tongguan wares are thickly potted bowls with freely painted abstract and floral motifs in green and green and brown under a yellowish or greenish-olive glaze. They are known to have been made at Tongguan kilns near Changsha in Hunan Province, some considerable distance from the coast (Hughes-Stanton and Kerr 1981:57-9). The glaze was lead-free glaze of amber and brown color. The decoration was executed in underglaze color painted onto the body. Qionglai wares made from the Qionglai kilns in Sichuan are also painted wares. Many Qionglai wares were covered with a whiter slip and glazed light green, yellow or brown. The painting was underglaze usually in brown. Both wares, primarily in the form of bowls were excavated at Manda and Shanga in ninth century contexts (Chittick 1984:66; Horton 1996:303). Elsewhere, Tongguan and Qionglai painted pottery has been reported at Laem Pho and Ko Kho Khao on the Kra Isthmus in Thailand, at Prambanan in central Java, at Mantai in Sri Lanka, and Brahminabad and Bambore, in Pakistan, and Samarra in Iraq and Aqaba in Jordan (Ho and Bronson 1987; Vainker 1991:82; Whitcomb 1989:182. The wide distribution of Changsha painted ware is a very reliable indicator of the international appeal and increasing trade between China and the rest of the world, including Africa as early as the Tang Dynasty (Horton 1996:303; Whitehouse and Williams 1975).

### **Grey-green ware of Yue type,**

Yue ware occurred in different colors from a matt / gray-green glaze on a grayish-white body. Color variation ranging from yellow-green to gray green to the rare jade may be attributed to different sources of clay, firing conditions, and kilns. Although the precise regions of production are not reliably known, the diversity in color points to multiple kilns involvement, primarily those in Fujian, Guangdong, and Zhejiang (Horton 1996:303; Tregear 1976:47). The Chinese regarded green porcelain, which resembled jade, as being very superior to whiter porcelain, which was popular abroad. The natural forms including plants and clouds, which typify the decorative motifs of early Yue ware was incised by hand under the glaze. Later Yue wares have bird designs added to their repertoire. The popularity of Yue ware both in China and overseas is apparent in the second part of the Tang Dynasty (618-906 AD) and through the period of the Five Dynasties (906-960AD). Yue ware, primarily bowls, have been found at Manda and Shanga and dated to ca. 750-920 CE (Chittick 1984:66; Horton 1988:311, 1996:303). Elsewhere outside China, these wares have been reported in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Brahminabad in Pakistan, Siraf in Iran, Samarra in Iraq, and Fustat in Egypt (Adhyatman 1983; Carswell and Prickett 1980; Tampoe 1989:64; Vainker 1991:72; Whitehouse 1968).

### **White Stoneware (Ding Ware)**

Usually associated with Dingyao and Fujian kiln industrial complexes, white stonewares are dated to the after 900 CE (Horton 1986:209, 1996:309; Hughes and-Stanton and Kerr 1981:72). They are composed of cream-colored paste with a white glaze similar to white porcelain, above, but more thickly potted (Chittick 1984:67). Decorations consist of faint vertical ribs on the body of the vessel. The forms are all open bowls with foot rings, which are

slightly outward flaring (Horton 1996:309). They appear at Shanga in tenth century contexts and are used “beyond the twelfth century-- at the time when the Ding kilns had converted to the production of true white porcelain” (Horton 1996:309). The examples from Manda are ascribed to the tenth-eleventh date (Chittick 1984:67).

### **White Wares (Qingbai Glazed Ware),**

White porcelain or Qingbai are characterized by the absence of slip between the body and the glaze. Traditionally, the slip is widely used by potters to mask imperfections in the body and to provide a smooth surface for glazing. Typical white porcelain vessels were primarily made from the exceptionally pure clays of Gongxian and Xing famous for their unusually low iron and titanium content. This accounted for the whiteness and their popularity both in China and abroad. However, like all other vessels Qingbai glazed white wares were produced at different industrial complexes including those in Fujian, Jiangxi, Jingdezhen, and Dehua. Qingbai vessels have been recovered at Manda in unstratified contexts and assigned to 850-950 AD contexts (Chittick 1984:66) and at Shanga in the period spanning the twelfth and mid thirteenth century (Horton 1996:309). White porcelain has also been reported at several other sites and was imported into East Africa until the thirteenth century (e.g., Abungu 1990; Wilding 1980). Elsewhere large quantities of Gongxian and Xing wares have been found at Siraf in the Persian Gulf and Samarra in Iraq (Vainker 1991:67; Whitehouse 1968:17).

### **Longquan Greenware (Celadons)**

Longquan greenware, also known as celadon are characterized by light grey paste, very hard, with air bubbles, and slightly granular texture. The bowls usually have a pale grey ‘sugary’

fabric. The glazes range through shades of greens and grays to pure dark while the fabric thickness ranges from 3 to 12 millimeters. Most Longquan vessels tend to be single colored and were decorated with impressed or incised lines or molded forms. Although production at Longquan kilns in Southern Zhejiang began in the Five Dynasty period (906-960AD) and intensified during the Song period (960-1279 AD), it was only during the Yuan period that Longquan wares became wildly popular outside China. In fact once established, demand for Longquan products rivaled and out competed local Islamic, Indian, and African ceramics (Tampoe 1989:65). The earliest examples in East Africa date only to the eleventh to early twelfth century (Horton 1996:307). The ubiquity of Longquan at archaeological sites in late thirteenth to early fourteenth century contexts attests to their popularity as export ware and points to incontrovertible evidence for mass production. James Kirkman recovered large amounts of Longquan wares from Ungwana, Gede, Ishakani, Kilepwa, and Mnarani (Kirkman 1954, 1963, 1966, 1974).

Two groups of these wares have been identified in East Africa. The first group consists of a white body, green glaze, and incised decorative motifs. The second group is the coarse type with a dark grayish body with a light greenish glaze. The foot-ring of coarse celadon is usually unglazed (Chittick 1974:309). Their popularity transcended their beauty and utility both to their consumers. To the Chinese, the celadon impressed with a lotus signified purity since the lotus is the seat of Buddha. To the Muslim Arabs and Swahili, celadons were highly valued because of their presumed ability to crack if they came in contact with poison (Sassoon 1975). This characteristic made them especially popular with the economic and political elite

who often feared that once in their life, a close member of the family would attempt to end their life prematurely in order to inherit their wealth or political office.

### **Blue-on-white Porcelain**

Blue-on-white porcelains were developed during the Yuan Dynasty (ca. 1279-1368 CE) at the Jiangxi kilns (Hughes-Stanton and Kerr 1981:242-7). This porcelain was a high-fired porcelain with an under glaze decoration in blue on a white background. This decorative style was achieved by first painting blue designs using cobalt directly on the unfired clay then blowing a transparent glaze on the piece and firing it in the kiln at temperatures in the range of 1350°C. Blue-on-white wares were so popular because any design could be painted on them. The Chinese Blue-on-white were the commonest imported wares after the fourteenth century during the Ming Dynasty (Horton 1996:310; Kusimba 1993). The Chinese potters were very flexible and made designs in response to market demands. Some of the common designs were dragons, primarily three clawed dragons, rhinoceros horn cups (for happiness), feather fans (zhong-li-quan's emblem--a Taoist god and discoverer of the secret of immortality), sacred incense burners, flaming pearls (for faith), the endless knot (a Buddhist symbol for long life), classic scrolls, diaper or diamond patterns, lotus panels (or false gadroons), vertical leaf patterns, chrysanthemums, a variety of unidentifiable flowers, and others. The list of possible designs was endless. Once the Chinese potters mastered the technique of achieving cobalt blue locally the demand for these wares soared. Before 1300 CE the Chinese imported pure cobalt from the Middle East, hence the name cobalt blue.

Not surprisingly, both Muslim and European potters made imitations of blue-on-white and after the destruction of the pottery factories of Jingdezhen European, Arab, Persian, Indian,



Japanese, and Thai potters had mastered the technique well enough to establish pottery factors that made Chinese imitation porcelain to satisfy the global demand of Chinese porcelain (Chittick 1974:310; Oka et al 2010).

### **Transitional Pottery**

Transitional Pottery was made between 1673 and 1683 from the time of emperor Wanli (1573-1620 to the early days of Kangxi (Vainker 1991:226). Transitional bowls with the yin-yang symbols first appeared during the Transitional Period. The Yin-yang symbols represents the duality of nature and the balance between male and female. They are recognized by the eight horizontal lines between the yin-yang representing natural forces--heaven, wind, earth, fire, water, vapor, thunder, and mountains (Sassoon 1975). Designs with dancing boys as well as naturalistic representations of the Three Friends, the pine, prunes, and bamboo, were added to the traditional trade ceramics out of China during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Transitional pottery recovered at Swahili coast sites has included bowls and dishes with formal floral patterns in blue and white on the inside and single colored glazes outside.

### **Dehua Wares**

Dehua wares are a creamy white wares commonly referred to as blanc-de-chine or Chinese white were made in Dehua, in Fujian Province. Blanc-de-Chine were made during the Qing Dynasty following the re-opening of porcelain factories in the reign of Kangxi in 1683. Artifacts recovered in contexts have mostly been small objects and figurines (Sassoon 1975).

### **Yang-Ts'ai, the Foreign Colors: Rose Porcelains of the Qing Dynasty**

Yang-ts'ai or foreign colors is often regarded by many authorities cite as one of the finest porcelain made during the Qing Dynasty. The French were impressed by this fine porcelain and christened it *famille rose*, or the pink family. This was successfully achieved by combining fine particles of gold with tin to produce a dull-pink enamel polychrome. Yang-Ts'ai, wares appear in East African during the reigns of Yongzheng (1723-1735) and Qianlong (1736-1795). Plain white wares, quite similar to the celadons, in blue borders patterned with under glaze-incised lines were also imported to East African during this period. Many were recovered at Fort Jesus (Kirkman 1974).

### **Uses of Imported Ceramics in East Africa**

Archaeologists in East Africa have use Chinese trade ceramics to: (1) characterize the nature and intensity of Indian Ocean trade and China's role in this commerce; (2) determine regional relative site chronologies, settlement patterns, and class and wealth distinctions; and (3) understand technology transfer and influence on cultural practice. Due to their non-destructive character, Chinese trade ceramics constitute the clearest archaeological evidence for contact between East Asia and African. Trade ceramics has enabled archaeologists to determine relative site chronologies as well as dates of early contacts and connections (Kirkman 1974:87). As noted above, international trade in East Africa included many items from China, in particular silk, jade, and porcelain. Trade in the Indian Ocean declined following the Taiping Rebellion, which ended with the destruction of the Jingdezhen kilns, had a huge impact on both overland and Oceanic trade. However, the popularity of trade ceramics and other Chinese products in Africa has continued up to the present day.

Data drawn from ethnography and archaeology continues to reveal the relatively early engagement of coastal communities including hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, farmers, and townsfolk in regional trade, which included transoceanic trade (Kusimba 1993, 2008; Kusimba et al 2005; Kusimba et al in Press; Oka 2008, Oka et al 2008). Chinese trade ceramics was among the principle imports and were universally popular and in high demand in the region. Trade ceramics were displayed in elite homes, in Mosques, and on tombs to memorialize the dead. Thus in addition to serving utilitarian functions, trade ceramics were symbols of prestige and status among the coast East African peoples.

Region	Local Merchants	Foreign Merchants
The East African Coast	Swahili (as brokers connecting interior with overseas markets)	Hadhrami, Yemeni, & Gujarat
Red Sea--Aden	Arabs	Gujarati,
Mediterranean--Egypt	Mamluk Arabs	Jewish Karimi
Arabian Sea--Sohar	Ibadi Muslims of Oman	Jewish Karimi
Persian Gulf--Hormuz	Persians	European, Hindus, Arabs
Gujarati--Cambay	Hindus and Jains	Persians, Arabs, Bengali
Cormandel Coast	Marakkayars, Bengali,	Persians
Melaka	Malay	Muslims, Hindu, Chinese

Table 5

### **Trade Ceramics as Symbols of Power, Status and Prestige.**

The Swahili elite home was sometimes built with niches, called *vidaka*, in which valued family objects were displayed. *Vidaka* were usually located in the inner sections of the home (Figure xx). These objects included expensive Chinese plates, bowls, and jars, Islamic bronze jars, plates, and other exotic items. Like other communities, the Swahili regarded the success and status of a family in the size of its household and stone house, the beauty of the home, and the value of the contents. Since the Swahili were

matrilocal, the daughters often inherited their parent's homes. Families then used their daughter's wedding ceremony to publicly display wealth through gift exchange. Public display of wealth in the form of Chinese trade ceramics, silk, jewelry and other expensive items served to enhance family status, prestige, and standing

### **Use in Water cisterns**

Water shortage was a perennial concern for urban residents in East Africa. The Swahili constructed large water cisterns to collect rain water. Communal as well as extended family wells were supplied water to the resident populations. Cisterns provided cooling in the houses during the hot and dry seasons. Although the cisterns were a partial solution to the water shortage their construction provided a health risk. Because of their non porous and non corrosive qualities, the Swahili found Chinese porcelains to be finely suited for placing under the water cisterns primarily to gauge the cleanliness of water and to provide shelter for the small fishes so that when the cisterns were drained to be cleaned, the fishes would be collected on the plates or bowls to avoid suffocation. The white and blue-and-white porcelains made it easier to detect dirty water, even in the usually poorly lit windowless interior rooms of the Swahili homes.

### **Use to memorialize Ancestors**

There is an old tradition of placing Chinese porcelain on the tombs to memorialize ancestors on the East African coast. The Swahili highly regard for Chinese porcelain transcended its durability, beauty, and function. Among the Swahili also, tombs memorialized ancestors to ensure continuity of the bond between ancestors and their descendants (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2012; Wilson and Allen 1982). Well-

constructed and maintained tombs symbolized family or clan success and good standing in the community. Two general styles of tombs were built by the Swahili--those with pillars and those without pillars. According to Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany, pillar tombs were built for men while those without belonged to women. Only tombs of women were decorated with Chinese porcelain. This was both to show the identity of the entombed as well as the wealth of the family (Figures xx). Thus, although Islam forbade burial with property, the Swahili seem to have found a way of connecting with and honoring ancestors without dishonoring the Holy Qur'an.

### **Trade Ceramics as Evidence for Early Contact with China**

The available archaeological evidence shows little evidence for direct contact between China and Africa before the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE). However, as the pre-Ming records show, both regions were maintained indirect contact (e.g. Duyvendak 1949). Chinese imperial voyages increased during the Yuan Dynasty as trade with Central and Western Asia increased. However, historians hail expeditions through the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean to East Africa 1417 and 1419 led by Admiral Zheng He (his fifth voyage) as the standard. During this East African voyage, the admiral visited the East African coast cities of Malindi in Kenya and Barawa and Muqdishu in Somalia. In an earlier visit to China, the ambassador of Malindi had presented to Emperor Yongle (1403-1425), the third Ming emperor, among other gifts a *tsu-la* (giraffe in Chinese?). Impeccable records regarding the voyages undertaken by Zheng He and his lieutenants were kept (Kusimba 1999:1).

In spite of this, some records of Zheng He's voyages are recorded in books written by his lieutenants who recount the ports, towns, cities, peoples, cultures, and products of places they visited. For example, Kung Chen published Record of the Barbarian Countries in the Western Ocean (1434), Fei Hsin wrote Triumphant Visions of the Starry Raft (1436), Ma Huan wrote The Triumphant Visions of the Boundless Oceans (1451). The fourth book was The Record of Tribute-Paying Western Countries (1520) was a compendium of compass directions and mariners chart incorporating the maritime knowledge acquired by Zheng He's expeditions. Fei Hsing's description of the east coast of Africa is instructive:

The country is situated in a remote corner of the west. The inhabitants live in solitary and dispersed villages. The walls are piled-up bricks and the houses are masoned in high blocks. The customs are very simple. They grow neither herbs nor trees. Men and women wear their hair in rolls; when they go out they wear a linen hood. The mountains are uncultivated and the land is wide; it rains very rarely. There are deep wells worked by means of cogwheels. Fish are caught in the sea with nets. The products of the country are lions, gold-spotted leopards, and camel birds [ostriches], which are six or seven feet tall. The dragon saliva [ambergris], incense, and golden amber. As merchandise are used vermilion, colored silks, gold, silver, porcelains, pepper, colored satins, rice, and other cereals (Mirsky 1964:256)

Many of the urban centers along the east African coast reach their zenith in the fourteenth century and begin to decline soon afterwards. Zheng He's visit to east Africa coincides with the prolonged drought and hopelessness that eventually consumed the Swahili towns and cities including Shanga, Manda, Ungwana, Mwana, Gede, Mnarani, Kilepwa, Jumba la mtwana, Mtwapa and others. This may explain why the Chinese sea men found at Mogadishu quarrelsome inhabitants prone to archery practice and who fed fish to their camels, horses, cattle, and sheep (Mirsky 1964:256).

According to Sheikh Nabhany whom I interviewed in 1994, the relations between the east African coast and China during the preindustrial period transcends commercial contact through trade ceramics:

There is a small community of Swahili peoples called Washanga because they hail from the small village of Shanga from where a ninth century mosque structure was excavated. There is a Swahili legend that Washanga are descended from Chinese sailors who got wrecked along the coast of Shanga. The previous name for that village was Kwa Bakari. The story runs thus: On one of their voyages, a Chinese junk got wrecked along the coast of Shanga. The crew swam across and were rescued by the local inhabitants. Knowing that they would not be able to make the return voyage, these Chinese people asked for and were granted permission to settle on the island but outside the main village. For subsistence, these people used to fish and sell the fish to the town's people in exchange for rice, sorghum and other cereals. It so happened that one day when all the Chinese fishermen were at sea fishing, the village was attacked by some marauding forces (name not given) that killed everybody in the village leaving very few women, children, and the elderly. When the Chinese fishermen returned in the evening not having any idea what had happened, they were very surprised to find the entire town in smoke with dead bodies strewn all over the place. The Chinese fishermen took the responsibility of tending the wounded and rebuilding the town. They also married some of the widowed women and raised families with them. The Swahili word for surprise is *Kushangaa*. I understand the name for Kwa Bakari changed to Shanga from that day on (Nabhany pers. comm. August 1994).

Since these conversations there have been news reports of genetic identification of Chinese ancestry in residents of Siyu claiming descent from sailors from the fleet of Zheng He (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Kenya, 2005; Kusimba et al 2010).

Transoceanic travel between China and distant lands of the Indian Ocean are reported as early as the Xin dynasty (9-25 CE). In the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), sea travel between China and the Western countries had increased. A Chinese scholar, who died in 864 CE, described the town of Berbera, on the East African coast during this period.

At the end of the twelfth century, the Chinese shipwrights had perfected the sternpost rudder and hulls divided into watertight compartments. A single ship could carry more than one hundred men, store on board a year's supply of grain. According to Odoric of Pordenone who visited China during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368 CE), some of the largest ships could carry seven hundred people comfortably. The North African traveler Ibn Batuta journeyed on one ship carrying one thousand people on board (Mirsky 1964:242). Consequently, it is not surprising that Chinese sailors, especially Muslim traders from Hunan, sailed to the East African coast before and during the Ming Dynasty.

### **Looking Forward: Understanding Ancient and Contemporary Connections Between China and East Africa**

Current studies of ancient civilizations recognize the role of regional and interregional interaction processes in the development and sustenance of urbanism. Although global trade and immigration were inherent in the origins of most towns and cities, archaeologists recognized, and perhaps, improperly attributed their material traces to non-local often foreigner initiatives. In 2011, researchers from Sun Yat-Sen University-China, the Field Museum-USA, and Pwani University College -Kenya launched a long-term collaborative research agenda with the goal of investigating ancient and contemporary relationships between China and East Africa. Previous and ongoing archaeological investigations at ancient city-states along the East African Coast show that preindustrial urbanism in East Africa arose, was sustained and eventually declined following its relationship and connections to wider regional and



interregional interaction spheres. These included the African hinterland and the wider Indian Ocean trading networks.

Over the next decade scholars and students from these institutions will conduct long-term research in Kenya and in China. The proposed collaborative project aims to examine ancient and contemporary economic, cultural, and political networks between East Africa and China. The proposed research contributes to a larger international research initiative by several researchers and institutions that is aimed at understanding the emergence of ancient exchange systems in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea regions (Junker 1990). As discussed earlier, evidence for contact and connections between Africa and Asia was bi-directional: African domesticates like millet and sorghum were domesticated in Asia as early as the Shang (Yin) times while Asia domesticates like banana and rice found their way to Africa similarly early. There is, however, little archaeological evidence at this time to suggest that more direct contact between East Africa and China existed. We assume that contact at this point was more indirect, through overland trade and migration across Eurasia.

In more recent times beginning from the Tang Dynasty (ca. 756-906 CE), linkages between East Africa and China became more regular. The continuous occurrence of Chinese trade ceramics in dateable archaeological contexts at several key sites in East Africa from the Tang through Qing Dynasties (ca. 756-1908 CE) points to long, productive relationship between China and East Africa. In contemporary times, the Peoples Republic of China is a significant partner and friend of the people of East Africa. The political economy of China and Africa are now so intertwined to the point where there exists an abundant body of data to warrant scholarly scrutiny (The Newsletter 2012).

Hence our research agenda will:

- (1) Conduct extensive archaeological excavations, analysis, and publication primarily data from four key archaeological sites in Kenya. These sites include Manda (ca.700-1450 [i.e., Tang-Yong-le Dynasties]), Gede (ca. 1200-1500 [i.e., Song-Cheng-hua Dynasties]), Siyu 1400-present [i.e., Ming—Yong-le-- Dynasty-Republic]), and Takwa (ca. 1600-1800 [i.e., Ming—Wan-li-Qing Dynasties]).
- (2) Conduct extensive field surveys and analysis of museum collections in Kenya and China in an effort to uncover important provenience data showing where in China, artifacts recovered at these sites originated. These data will enable us to understand the nature of relationships that existed within China, between the regional economic and political power structures, the distribution of the various industrial kiln complexes, the organization of trade and commerce both in China and abroad, and the nature and means through which economic and other relations were developed, carried out, and maintained.
- (3) Undertake extensive archival research in Chinese, Kenyan, and Western institutions to uncover previously underreported evidence of direct contact between China and Africa. There is a need to go beyond the celebrity status of the Admiral Zheng He whose diplomatic mission to Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Africa (ca. 1405-1433) is often portrayed in terms of China's lost opportunity but instead see it for what it achieved. For example, How and what ways did Zheng He voyages reshape Asia and Africa? How did trade and commerce change after the fifteenth century? How and in What ways did ports of trade through which Zheng He passed thrive as hubs of trading networks that extended across Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and East Africa thrive and how were they connected to China?

- (4) Conduct excavations burial locales, collect genetic data from the human skeletal remains in order to test the following hypotheses that:
- (a) Early Swahili populations, while primarily of African origin, were much more diverse composition than commonly supposed;
  - (b) Some non-African migration to the coast did occur before the 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - (c) Swahili stone towns were ethnically diverse
- (5) Undertake research that will lead to an understanding and placing in context the impact of ancient and contemporary contributions of China in science and technology. For example, while revisionist historians of technology are quick to criticize China's present leadership in science and technology, they fail to acknowledge the superior contributions that Chinese scientists and technician have made to global history and the human condition (....). More specifically, we will study ancient and contemporary Chinese naval engineering and its impact on commerce in the Indian Ocean. How and in what ways did the superior naval knowledge of China influence other regions? How were Swahili shipwrights influenced by Chinese super junk, the supertankers of their time?
- (6) We wish to understand the role and efforts of the state in forging and maintaining relationships, which enabled commerce and other cultural exchanges to succeed or fail. In this sense, we will seek through both archival records and archaeological data to understand ownership and licensing of shipwrights and bulk products. The study of archaeological materials recovered stratigraphically on land and underwater sites and accounts of diplomatic missions will address these questions.

Finally, we will develop new research initiatives aimed at understanding the nature and relations between contemporary China and East Africa. Diaspora communities are an important part of the study of migration and the global flows of culture, ideas, materials, money, and information that make up the globalizing world. Studies of Diaspora communities of Africans in China can examine how more than 300,000 Africans in China are participating in global flows of information and creating networks. These African laborers and entrepreneurs are maintaining connections to family and business colleagues through the sending of remittances and the development of businesses and investments. A study of these migrant workers and businessmen would examine what types of investment behaviors African immigrants are developing in China, their partnerships and relationships with Chinese companies, and examine the social networks that Africans are building among Chinese and the impact of remittances in African home countries. It would also assess the broader cultural impact of the Africa-China connection.

### **A Summing Up**

Ancient trade between East Africa and China was a complex affair that involved many communities and took several routes. On the one hand, Africa's commodities in high demand in Ancient China included ivory, ambergris, gold, rhinoceros horns, sandalwood (Freeman-Grenville 1962b: 21; Horton 1996:418). On the other hand, Africans were interested in ceramics and silk from China. Consumption of African and Chinese productions was bidirectional and appears to have begun during the Tang period and continued to the contemporary times. Archaeological evidence drawn largely from early Swahili settlements including Manda, which dates to the fifth century and Shanga to the eighth century show that

trade between Africa and China is traced to the beginnings of these settlements and was sustained throughout.

From the Tang through the Yuan Dynasties, it would appear that the volume of trade between East Africa and China was slightly lower compared to that from Southwest Asia and South Asia. Distance factors into the equation but also the fact that much of the trade between the two regions was for the most part conducted indirectly. As we have seen, there were two principle routes of trade; the overland caravan through central Asia and southwest Asia via the Persian Gulf and India Ocean and the direct maritime route through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean via Sri Lanka along the West Indian Seaboard to East Africa via Aden (Pearson 2003). English archaeologist Mark Horton (1996:418) has suggested that:

During the eighth and ninth centuries, contact with China was through the Gulf ports, probably specifically, Siraf. One of the reasons why the Gulf merchants were interested in high-value commodities from East Africa may have been because of their potential in China, where they could be used to obtain manufactured goods such as silk and ceramics.

The sacking of Guangzhou in 878 provided an opportunity for expansion and extension of maritime trade. The growth of settlements like Mantai and Galle in Sri Lanka and Chaul, Khambat, and Gujarat along the west coast of India into major ports of trade provides testimony to expansion of maritime trade and the growing economic and political power of Chinese, Hindu and Muslim merchants (Carswell and Prickett 1980; Oka 2007; Oka et al 2009; Perera 1951). Indeed along with Chinese ceramics and silks reaching Africa at this time was also Indo Pacific beads, pottery, cloth, jewelry, and foodstuffs. These found their way into East

Africa through the agency of Hindu and Muslim Indian merchants. Thus the arrival of significant quantities of whitewares made in Fujian, mainly Ding, qingbai, and molded whitewares, the sue of Chinese and Indian coins, the close similarity of Chinese greenwares recovered at ports like Homs, Syria; Chaul, India; Shanga, Manda, and Mtwapa, Kenya; and Kilwa (Horton 1996:418; Whitehouse 1976:146), Tanzania points to the major advances that China had made in technology and which, though indirect linked the tow regions global commercial networks.

To conclude, current scholarship on relationship between China and the outside world have tended to overemphasize the negative elements of China's early prominence. Historians have viewed the tensions during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE) between differing political philosophies as a monumental failure that may have changed the course of history. For example, Confucian scholar bureaucrats opposed to China's foreign diplomatic missions have been blamed for destroying the archival records pertaining to Zheng He's voyages abroad. Threatened by the expanding power of the eunuchs in the imperial court, they saw to it that Zheng He's ships were burned after his last voyage and are alleged to have made every effort to "systematically destroy all official records of the voyages." To what extend were their motives purely political and/or self-serving? How and in what ways did their efforts affect succeeding leadership? How does one explain the presence of Chinese exports including ceramics, jewelry, and cloth, especially silk, outside China despite the official imperial policy of lack of engagement with foreigners?

Scholars have argued that the so-called "Ming Gap" (ca. 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries), was a period of intensive state regulation: foreign goods into and out of Chinese ports were limited

and heavily taxed. In Southeast Asia, archaeologists have documented sharp decline in the proportion of Chinese ceramics found in shipwrecks and terrestrial sites from that period (....). In contrast to East Africa, such documentation has yet to be verified. To what extent did overregulation of seaward trade affect commerce between China and the rest of the world? What role did smuggling, black marketeering, and corruption play in redirecting trade between China and the rest of the world? One of our goals is to explore possible avenues through which trade may have continued, especially overland trade between China and West Asia. We will also carefully analyze ceramics to distinguish between articles from royal kilns from those of commercial kilns. The presence of imperial ceramics would suggest that diplomatic relationships between China and the rest of the world continued despite the official policy to the contrary. In China itself, we will be investing efforts in finding out whether there were other ports beyond the officially recognized ones, where clandestine international maritime trade could have continued to be conducted.

The proposed collaborative research builds on long-term research carried out by myself Mr. Ibrahim Busolo in Kenya and Professor Tiequan Zhu in China. The project will contribute to existing scholarship theoretically and methodologically. The proposed research goals will provide numerous opportunities for the training of Chinese, Kenya, and American students. Besides, the project collaborative stance means that we will be able to study and address these questions from many perspectives: scientific and cultural.

Second, methodologically, the project will employ state-of-art and science methodologies including—laser ablation-inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS), x-ray fluorescence (XRF), and scanning electron microscopy-energy dispersive

spectroscopy (SEM-EDS) that are housed at Sun Yat-Sen University. We will utilize a rich and expanding body of scholarly research on ancient and contemporary global trade modern statistical methodologies, included social network analysis to understand how networks of interaction emerged and their impact on ancient and contemporary political and social economies.

The project will greatly contribute to our understanding of China and its relationships with other world regions and the interconnectedness Africans and Asians in history. Trade is an important human institution: it promotes friendship, knowledge- transfer, fosters interdependence, and tolerance. Our proposed project provides a unique context in which to study trade and the economic, political, and social relationships it encompasses. The proposed archaeological sites where these studies will be carried out bear witness to the relationship between China and East Africa. They also show that this relationship was, primarily, peaceful exchanges between and among consenting trading partners. They were not interactions that were of a colonial nature like later European and Arab interactions with Africa and Asia. Lessons learned from this study will be most relevant for understand current relationships between China and Africa.



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5. While Asia will retain its status as the most populous region, Africa is catching up. Today, Africa's population is one-quarter the size of Asia's. 6. By 2100, Africa will have a population that is just 10% smaller than Asia's. 7. Nigeria will move from being the world's seventh most-populous country today to its third most-populous country in 2100 (behind only India and China). 8. And while Nigeria is the only African nation among the top 10 today, it will be one of five in 2100. Source: Data by UN Population Division; data analysis by The Globalist Research Center. "China, Africa, and Globalization: The 'China Alternative' is an Asia Paper published by the Institute for Security and Development Policy. The Asia Papers Series is the Occasional Paper series of the Institute's Asia Program, and addresses topical and timely subjects. The Institute is based in Stockholm, Sweden, and cooperates closely with research centers worldwide. China's surge of interest and activities in Africa in the early years of the 21st century drew much international attention. Academic, journalist, and policy studies abound focused on China's new foreign policy venture, including an emphasis upon China's search for energy and other commodity resources.