

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 32, no. 3 (1984) 322–324

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Texts and Documents

Sulu in a Late Ch'ing Novel—A Brief Note on a Rare Book

RODERICH PTAK

In 1959 Hsü Yün-ch'iao prepared an annotated edition of a rare novel which is based on Cheng Ho's famous expeditions to the Indian Ocean.¹ This book, which has escaped the attention of most scholars, is called *San-pao t'ai-chien hsia Hsi-yang* or *The Eunuch San-pao travels to the Western Ocean*. Its author is a certain P'eng Ho-ling of whom we have no biographical information.

P'eng's novel is divided into ten chapters. It first appeared in 1909. The original publisher was the Chiao ch'ün hsiao-shuo she or "The Novel Club dedicated to awaken the Masses." Hsü is convinced that this book was written for the purpose of promoting patriotic ideas. He points out that "The Novel Club" edited several other works of similar character.² Perhaps it should be stated here that P'eng's novel does by no means comply with real history. It has to be regarded as an imaginative account, partially based on geographical and other records, partially on invention.³

The novel tells how Cheng Ho became a eunuch leader and how the imperial fleet sailed from one country to another. Among the places visited are Sumatra, Java, Malacca, Cochin, Calicut, Aden, the Sulu Archipelago, Dhufar, the Maldives, Borneo, the Nicobar Islands, Bengal, Ceylon, Medina and Panduranga. Sur-

1. Hsü Yün-ch'iao, *San-pao t'ai-chien hsia Hsi-yang* (Kuala Lumpur: Hsing-chou shih-chieh shu-chü, 1959).

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

3. In chapter 1 of his novel P'eng claims to have seen a Cheng Ho-play. Perhaps this play was a Peking opera. For more information on the latter, see T'ao Chün-ch'i, *Ching-chü chü-mu ch'u-t'an* (Peking: Chung-kuo hsi-ch'ü ch'u-pan-she, 1963), pp. 314-15.

prisingly, Cheng Ho also travels through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea, and he returns to China via Turfan in Hsin-chiang. Although we do not know why the author chose this arrangement of events – on purpose or out of ignorance? – it is obvious that he intended to describe China's glorious past when it was the Chinese and not the "western barbarians" who controlled the oceans. These points, however, do not need to be discussed in the context of this brief note. I shall now turn to the translation of the passages on Sulu. The description of the Sulu Islands is contained in chapter 5 of P'eng's novel. The translation follows.

The people [of Sulu] seldom eat grain, they [rather] eat fish, shrimps, univalves and bivalves [when they are hungry]. The inhabitants cut their hair short and wrap [their heads] with black turbans. They boil sea-water to obtain salt, ferment sugar-cane to produce liquor and weave bamboo-fibre into cloths for their occupation.⁴ In the beginning of the Hung-wu period (1368-98), the eastern king, the western king and the divisional king of this country, each accompanied by his wife and children, came to [the Chinese] court [to pay tributes]. Among the three kings the eastern ruler is considered to be the most important one, the western ruler and the divisional ruler follow in rank.⁵ On the way back [to Sulu] the eastern king died in Te-chou. An officer was commissioned [by imperial decree] to manage the funeral and [the king's] wife and concubines were left behind to guard the grave. Three years later when the order expired, they returned home.⁶ [It was also decided that a Chinese] ambassador would be sent to

4. These lines appear in most descriptions of Sulu. They can be traced back to very early sources. See, for example, Wang Ta-yüan, *Tao-i chih-lüeh chiao-chü* in ed. and comm. Fujita Toyohashi (n.p.: Shang-yü Lo-shih, 1915; *Hsüeh-t'ang ts'ung-k'o*), 54a. Translation in W.W. Rockhill, "Notes on the Relations and Trade of China with the Eastern Archipelago and the Coasts of the Indian Ocean during the Fourteenth Century," *T'oung Pao* 16 (1915): 270-71, and E.Z. Mulder, "The Philippine Islands in the Chinese World Map of 1674," *Oriens Extremus* 25 No. 2 (1978): 226. Also cf. my article, "Sulu in Ming Drama" *Philippine Studies* 31 (1983): 232-37.

5. The names of these rulers are usually given as Pa-tu-ko Pa-ta-(or: ha-) la (the eastern king), Pa-tu-ko Pa-su-li (the western king) and Pa-tu-ko Pa-la-pu (the divisional king). The usual transcription is Paduka Pahala, – Pasuli and – Prabu. Hsü Yün-ch'iao, *San-pao*, p. 19, note 4, uses the transcription "Peduka Putera, – Persuri and – Peradu." In some sources the names differ. See, for example, Chang Ting-yu, et. al. *Ming Shih* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1974), p. 2264; *Ming shih-lu*, ed. Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan li-shih yü-yen yen-chu-so (Nankang, 1966), vol. 13, pp. 2021, 2023, 2025, vol. 14, pp. 2224, 2264; Ho Ch'iao-yuan *Ming shan tsang* (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen ch'u-pan-she, 1971), vol. 20, p. 6187; Hsü Hsüeh-chü *Kuo-ch'ao tien-hui* (Taipei: T'ai-wan Hsüeh-sheng shi-chü, 1965; *Chung-kuo shih-hsuehts'ung-shu*, 6), vol. 4, p. 1959. For translations see Mulder, "The Philippine Islands," p. 228, and W. P. Groeneveld, *Notes on the Malay Archipelago and Malacca Compiled from Chinese Sources* (Batavia: W. Bruining, 1876), p. 104.

6. The king's death is mentioned in most sources. The longest account is in Yen

appoint [the ruler's] eldest son as the [new] king of Sulu.⁷ When the time had come, Cheng Ho acted as the appointing officer. Moreover, he had to confirm [the positions of] the western king and the divisional king by an imperial order.⁸ Upon his arrival in their country, the [new] king went to the suburbs one hundred miles away [from his residence] to receive [Cheng Ho with full honours]. [For this occasion the king] wrapped his head with a white turban and tied beautiful silken cloths around his waist. With bare feet he rode on a yellow calf, and protected by the swords and shields [of his guards] to the front and back, he presented himself with pomp and ceremony.⁹

The climate of [this] country is warm, the five kinds of grain are always ripe,¹⁰ and the people live happily. When Cheng Ho first arrived there, he proclaimed the [emperor's] gracious orders and presented the divisional ruler and the western ruler with a silver seal each. After the two kings had bowed and expressed their gratefulness, each of them commissioned important officials to accompany [Cheng Ho on his return voyage] and to pay tribute [to the Chinese court]. Then Cheng Ho left Sulu.

其國人鮮粒食，以魚蝦螺蛤充飢。居民短髮
 纏皂緜，黃海爲鹽，釀蔗爲酒，織竹布爲業。洪
 武初其國東王、西王、峒王，各率妻子來朝。三王
 以東王爲尊，西峒二王次之。歸次德州，東王卒，
 命有司營葬，留其妃妾守墓，令畢三年還國，遣使
 封其長子爲蘇祿國王。至是，鄭和爲冊封使，並
 錫西峒二王命。初至其國，王郊迎百里外，以白羅
 頭，腰束錦綺，跣足騎黃犢，前後刀盾擁護，儀仗
 赫然。國中氣候溫煖，五穀常熟，民樂嬉嬉。鄭和
 既至，宣朝廷恩命，奉上銀印二顆，一給峒王，一
 給西王。二王拜謝畢，各遣重臣隨行入貢。鄭和乃
 別離蘇祿，……

A page of P'eng's novel

Ts'ung-chien *Shu-yü chou tzu lu* (Peking: Ku-kung po-wu-kuan t'u-shu-kuan, 1930), vol. 3, ch. 9, 4a-5b.

7. The name of the eldest son is usually given as Tu-ma-han (or-ho),

8. It is highly unlikely that the real Cheng Ho was involved in this mission. See my article in *Philippine Studies*, p. 238, note 37. "Hsi" ("to grant," etc.) here is "to confirm."

9. "I-chang" also refers to the insignia of a monarch.

10. Similar statements also occur in most other descriptions of Sulu. "The five kinds of grain" comprise hemp, two types of millet, wheat, barley, etc.