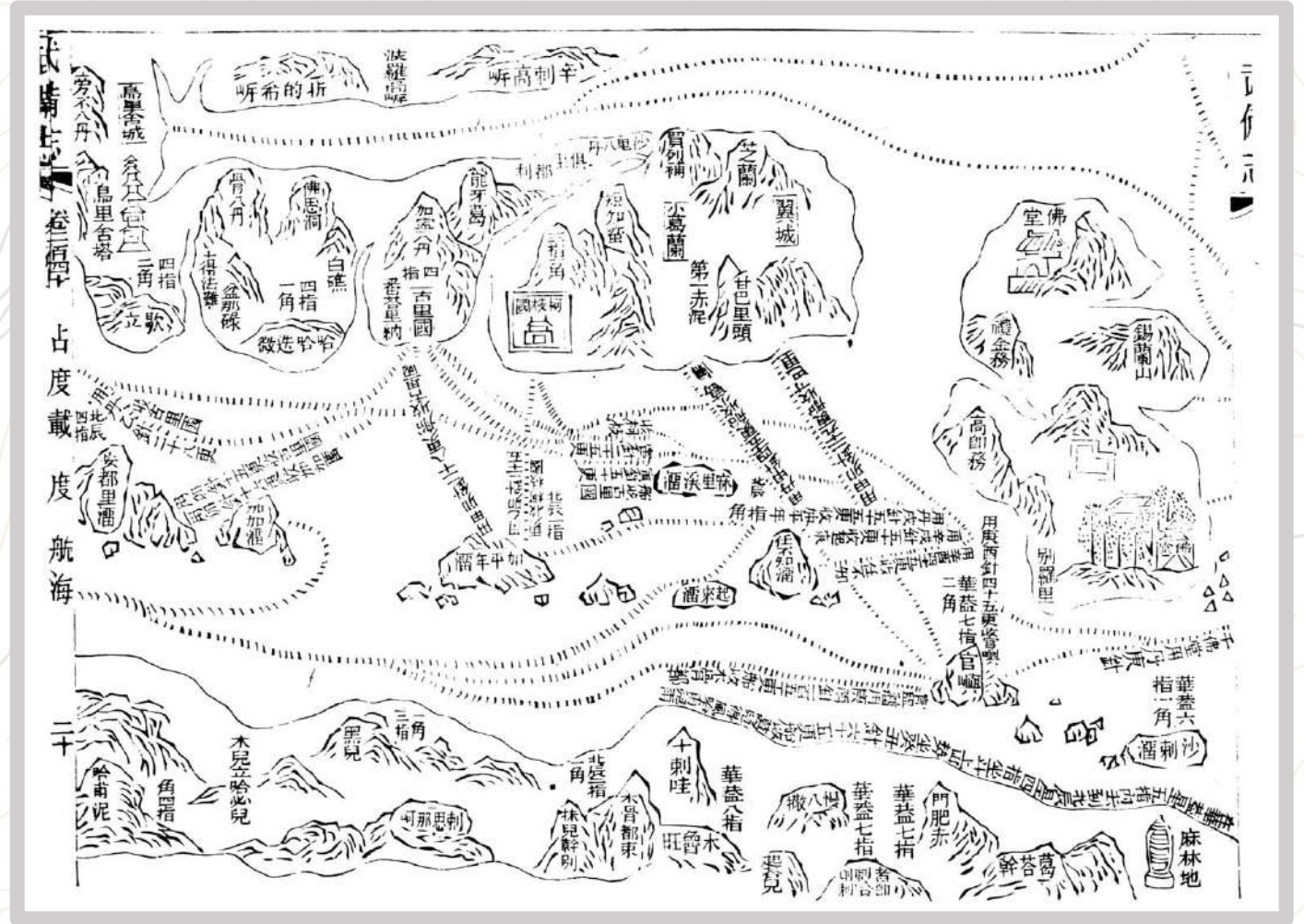


Imperial and Colonial Aspirations

in Ma Huan's Writings, "The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores," on Java



The wu bei zhi chart – a 16th century reproduction of Zheng He's sailing map (Levathes 2014: 133)

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Introduction:

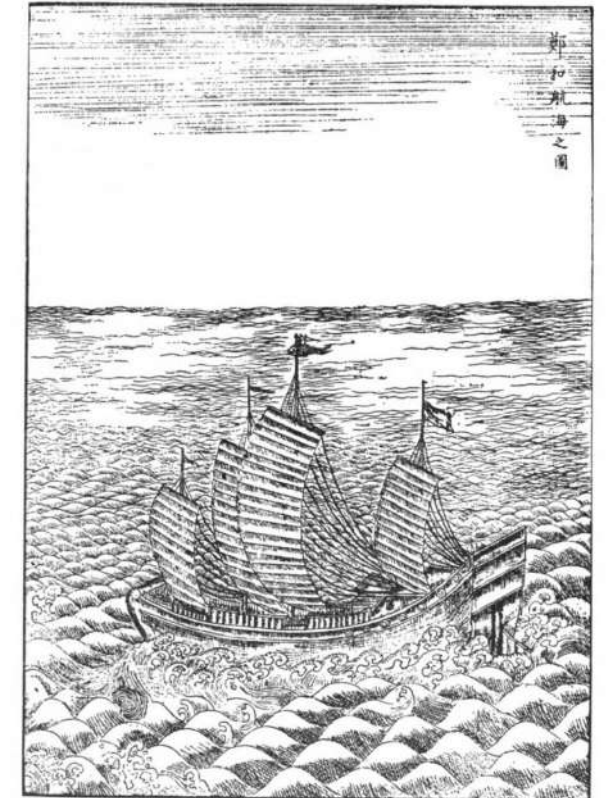
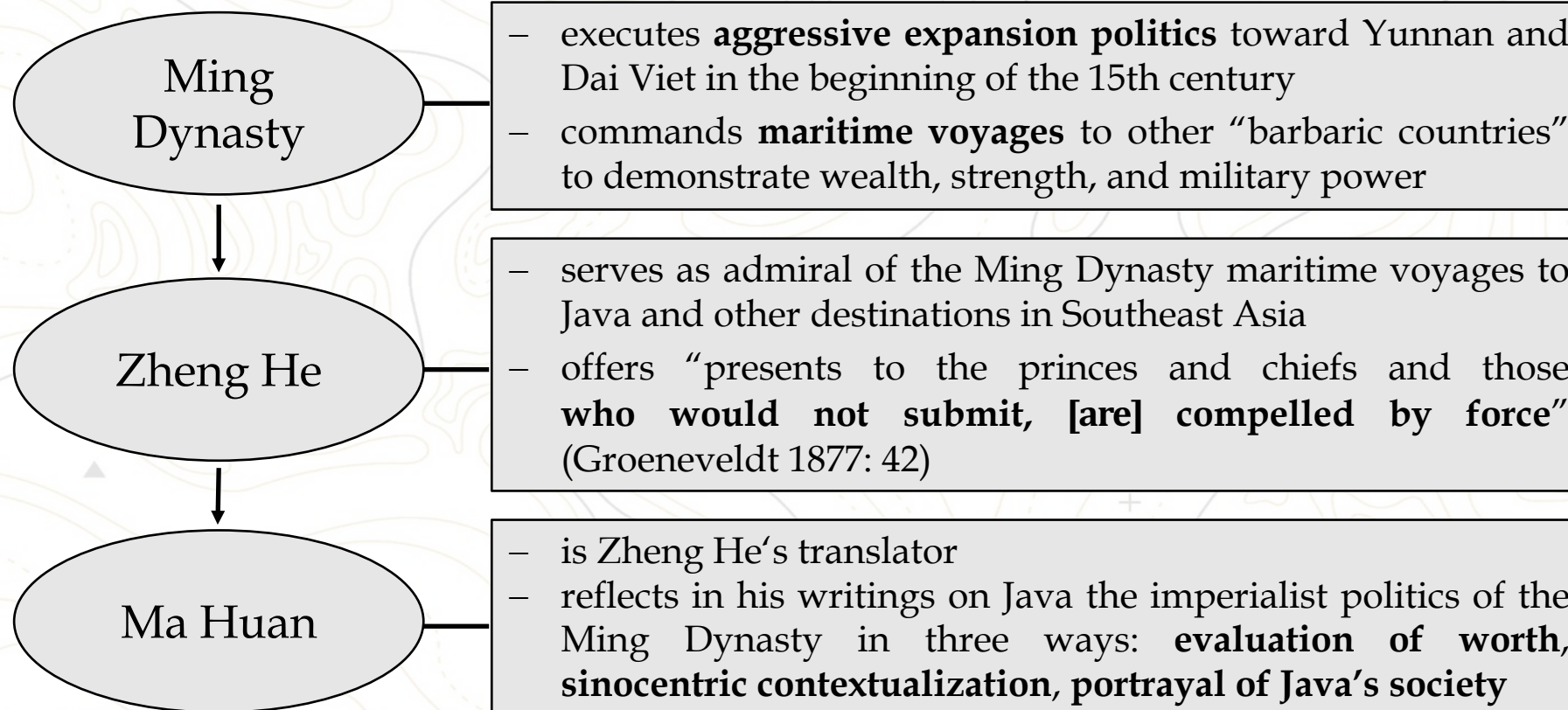
Are Zheng He's voyages an indication of **colonialism and imperialism on Java before the Dutch?**

Method:

Source Analysis of Ma Huan's writings, "The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores" (1451), as an account of the voyages to Java.

Theory:

Imperialism as "the practice, the theory, and the attitude of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; '**colonialism**' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (Said 1994: 9).



Sketch of Zheng He's ship (Mills 1970:30)

1. Evaluation of Worth:

- Ma Huan catalogues many valuable goods of Javanese agriculture; the Ming Dynasty uses such “exotic” goods to demonstrate imperial strength and greatness
- He also records what goods the Javanese considered precious; it was common practice on the voyages to make presents to local leaders and consequently demand tribute by force

2. Sinocentric Contextualization:

- Ma Huan almost exclusively uses Chinese names for places and disregards the native names as foreign; he seemingly claims the land as being Chinese

3. Portrayal of the Javanese Society:

- Ma Huan divides the Javanese society into three hierarchical classes: the first two classes include Chinese descendants and other foreigners; the last category consists of natives of Javanese
- This hierarchy is reflected in his use of adjectives attributed to each class of people (see table)
- Economic profits from Java seem important, but shared among Chinese descendants rather than through equal cooperation with the Javanese

Chinese or other foreigners	Javanese
wealthy (p. 90*, p. 96)	terrible (p. 88)
choice (p. 93)	unkempt (p. 87)
clean (p. 93)	ugly (p. 93)
*page numbers in Ma Huan 1970	strange (p. 92, p. 93)
	dirty (p. 93)
	bad (p. 93)
	repugnant (p. 93)
	savage (p. 94)
	ferocious (p. 94)

Conclusion: The three aspects of Ma Huan’s writings demonstrate that the voyages of Zheng He are embedded in the Ming Dynasty’s aggressive expansionist politics. Consequently, the voyages can be considered as an indication of colonialism and imperialism on Java before the Dutch.

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