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Anthro 1218  
Ship Model Project  
Paper 1

Chinese Country Passage Boat

When observing this country passage boat firsthand the task I considered to be most important was trying to figure out its origin. We knew from our assignment that it was of Chinese origin. Because we had little to work with regarding clues, I clung onto the images on the boat as potential ways to determine a more exact origin (see images below). Painted around the boat are about a dozen “yin yang” symbols. Upon further research this symbol solidified its origin as Chinese.

These symbols first appeared around the 3rd century BCE in China¹. It has been known to symbolize a handful of things, among them government, and I believe that its presence on the sides of the boat were a way for the Chinese officials to mark their boat on the water. Overall, in comparison to more sophisticated ships we have seen this

country passage boat seems to be very simply constructed. The ship is primarily wooden with manually constructed masts, coupled with what looks to be linen sails.\(^2\)

History seems to suggest that some junk ships can contain up to five masts while ours seems to have just one large mast (and possibly a smaller second one). So for this reason I believe that this particular junk boat was an early model, as the addition of more masts did not come until later.

I believe that the primary use of this boat was for merchant purposes. I stand by my claim that it is a junk boat and according to scholars these boats were used during the Song Dynasty, which scholars say existed between 960-1276 AD.\(^3\) It is both important and interesting to note that during this particular dynastic period trade shifted from land to sea. The northern land trade routes, known as the Silk Road, were now replaced with southern sea routes aimed towards India and even all the way down to Northern Africa.


With this new focus, the need for ships was of greater importance. Thus the creation and ensuing popularity of junk boats came about. Our ship model contains a very covered deck, in other words, what looks to be wooden windows and doors are present on the ships deck. I believe that this because of the climate in which these boats sailed was one of violence and war. Thus I believe having this extra protection on the decks suited the merchants and protected them from potential adversaries. In addition, this “house” like feel likely allowed for long voyages on rough waters that offered both protection from the aforementioned enemies and also protection from storms such as typhoons, which we know to be prevalent in the areas in which these boats sailed. Typhoons bring strong winds and powerful waves that can overturn a boat and drench a deck in water in a matter of seconds.

This ship model thus provides us with a lot of socio, political, and economic context surrounding its culture. As mentioned before we know the Song Dynasty flourished in maritime trade along the coast of China and down towards India as well. With a move towards a more maritime scope, junk boats were responsible for carrying a myriad of items. Perhaps the most popular trade item of this time, however, was ceramics. The Song Dynasty was known for their beautiful ceramics. In future parts of this project, especially when talking about ship construction it may be helpful to consider the waters in which these boats sailed and the subsequent construction with these considerations in mind.