Apart from the title, “China Country Passage Boat”, it could be inferred that this ship model was from China because of the use of the yin and yang symbols painted along the sides of the boat. The yin and yang symbol is very important to Chinese culture as they refer to it as the origin of everything. The symbol represents opposites that work together in perfect harmony. “It has been said that “yang” originally refers to sunshine or what pertains to sunshine and light; and “yin” refers to the absence of sunshine, i.e., shadow or darkness. In later developments, the yang and yin came to be regarded as two cosmic principles or forces, the yang representing masculinity, activity, heat, brightness, dryness, hardness, etc., and the yin femininity, passivity, cold, darkness, wetness, softness, etc.” (Jiang, 438)

The idea of the yin and yang can be traced back as early as the third century BC as it was recorded in the Guo Yu (the Conversations of States). The Guo Yu is a Chinese ancient text that records the historical happenings of numerous states. The first recording is of the Zhou Dynasty. The Yijing, the Book of Changes, an ancient Chinese divination book also known as the “original ancestor of Chinese philosophy”, also makes mention of the yin and yang symbol and refers to it as the origin of all things. This book too dates back to the Zhou Dynasty.

The construction of the boat is similar to that of the ancient Chinese Junk boat. The model has but one large mast and it is said that “early junks of China were invariably single-masted and single sailed." (Cosco) Though the yin and yang symbol gives a clue to when this type of ship was sailing, the Junk ship was not invented
until the Song dynasty which was in power from 960-1279. During the Song dynasty, dramatic growth in commerce and maritime trade occurred. “With the coordination of a rudder, in the case of flat-bottomed boats additional leeboards were fitted, a sailing boat, or a junk, as we call it, could sail craftily to its destination in normal winds despite their directions.” (Cosco) Traditionally built without a keel (allowing access to shallow waters), the junk was ill-equipped to sail a straight course until an important innovation of the Song period; the addition of the sternpost rudder. The model has a rudder, though no longer attached most likely due to its age, and is shallow drafted allowing it to travel in shallow waters.

As said above, the Song Dynasty had an enormous increase in maritime trade. This occurred due to the loss of the northern empire, a bountiful region, as it increased the importance of overseas trade. It has been said that “the prowess of Chinese merchant ships in the Indian Ocean and of their annual voyages...brought iron, swords, silk, velvet, porcelain, and various textiles to places such as Aden (Yemen), the Indus River, and the Euphrates in modern-day Iraq.”

Though the title of the model describes the ship as a passage boat, the flexibility of its construction allows its use for many different things. It could be used as a merchant ship, as described above, an ocean-going ship, sailing vessel, or, as described simply a passage boat.
Works Cited


