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(*) Papers should range between 3000/5000 words.
(*) Typing should be clear, double spaced and on one side of paper.
(*) A margin of 1 1/4 inches should be left on the right in case of Arabic, on the left in the case of papers in either English or French.
(*) Sources and footnotes should be typed on separate sheets at the end of the paper, but reference to them should be indicated by numerical figures throughout the paper. The figures must also be between brackets.
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Abd al-Rahman Ahmed
FOREWORD

Many Muslim scholars in Africa feel that there is a pressing need for a journal to bridge the academic gap between Africa and the rest of the Muslim world, and also to serve as a forum through which scholars can exchange ideas and develop research ties.

This task is being taken up by the INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF AFRICA. This is an academic institution set up for the purpose of strengthening Islamic culture in "Africa South of Sahara". One of the challenges which we have to face is the lack of accurate information about this area and the many misunderstandings about its history and societies. Such areas of study have, in the past, been the monopoly of a few western scholars who have not always been unbiased vis-à-vis Islam and African Muslims.

The time is now ripe for Muslim scholars, who specialize in this area, to come forward and bring some balance to the world of research.

We are accordingly inviting our readers to join hands with us, so that we may set this project moving. We hope that you will be able to participate by sending papers on any of the subjects mentioned below. It will also help if you would kindly circulate this journal among your colleagues and (or) draw our attention to any scholars whom you feel will be able to help in realizing this project.

Dirasat Ifriqiyya takes special interest in the following areas of specialization:

1. Islamic education in Africa.
2. The Arabic language in Africa.
3. The spread of Islam in Africa.
4. Islamic Da'wa and Christian missionary activities in Africa.
5. The cultural background of African Muslim societies and their impact on African practice of Islam.
6. Social, economic and political relations between Africa and the rest of the Muslim World.
7. Institutions of scholarship in and (or) having to do with Africa.

The journal will publish essays in Arabic, English or French. It will initially be published twice annually.

Authors of papers accepted for publication are offered an honorarium in appreciation.
DIRASSAT IFRIQIYYA

Très nombreux sont les chercheurs musulmans en Afrique qui éprouvent le besoin pressant de fonder un journal qui puisse jouer un rôle dans le fossé académique séparant l'Afrique du reste du monde musulman et qui serve de forum où les chercheurs peuvent échanger leurs opinions et développer des liens de recherche. Le projet est maintenant pris au sérieux par le Centre islamique Africain de Khartoum. C'est l'institution académique spécialement fondée dans le but de renforcer la culture islamique en “Afrique du Sud du Sahara”. Parmi les défis auxquels nous devons faire face est le manque d'informations exactes sur cette région ainsi que les multiples malentendus concernant son histoire et sa société. Ces domaines d'études étaient, dans le passé, le monopole de quelques chercheurs occidentaux qui n'étaient pas toujours neutres vis-à-vis de l'Islam et des musulmans Africains.

Il est temps que les chercheurs musulmans dans ce domaine se montrent et établissent un certain équilibre dans le domaine de la recherche.

Nous vous écrivons maintenant pour vous inviter, en tant que chercheur accompli, à nous donner le main pour relancer ce projet.

Nous espérons que vous pourrez y participer en envoyant des études consacrées aux sujets mentionnés ci-dessous:

Il serait très utile si vous pouviez faire circuler cette lettre parmi vos collègues et/ou nous signaler les chercheurs qui vous paraissent capables d'aider à la réalisation de ce projet.

Les domaines de spécialisation du journal sont les suivants:
1. L'Éducation islamique en Afrique.
2. La langue arabe en Afrique.
4. Le Da'wah islamique et les activités missionnaires chrétiennes en Afrique.
5. Les relations sociales, économiques et politiques entre l'Afrique et le reste du monde musulman.
8. La coopération étroite entre.

Titre : “Dirassat Ifriquiyya” (Etudes Africaines).
Langue : Les articles doivent être rédigés en arabe, en anglais ou en français.
Durée : Le journal sera publié, au début, deux fois par an.

Selon la sélection des articles:
Les articles acceptés par le Comité de rédaction seront publiés et leurs auteurs seront rémunérés. Une somme honorifique de 300 Dollars est consacrée à chaque article publié.

Dans l'attente de vous lire bientôt, nous vous remercions d'avance et nous vous prions d'agréer l'expression de nos sentiments distingués.

Les articles non-admis ne sont pas restituables.
The Relations Between Sudan and China:
From The Pre-Islamic Era until the 19th century with special focus on The relations During Tang and Song Dynasties In China

Dr. Gaafar K. Ahmed *

Introduction

This paper focuses on Sino-Sudanese relations from the pre-islamic era until the 19th century, with special emphasis on the relations during the Tang dynasty era (618-907), the Song dynasty (960-1279) and the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Relations between the two countries have existed for at least over a thousand years, evidenced by discoveries and findings of Chinese items in Aihab and other places throughout the Sudan.

Besides Arabic, Chinese, and western sources continue to connect Sudanese eastern ports with Far East and China probably from the second century to the sixteenth century A.D.

The discovery of Chinese pottery in Meroe styled on the Chinese pottery pattern indicates some knowledge about Chinese porcelain industry and Art. In addition, some Chinese scholars believed that their rulers in Han dynasty were already in contact with kush in Northern Sudan.

The relations between China and Sudan in the pre-islamic era.

Sudan is a land of ancient civilization, which flourished on the banks of the world’s largest river, the Nile. A German archaeologist and a specialist on ancient Nubian civilization, Frenz Hinz, said that the ancient Nubian civilization on the Nile river bank was one of the earliest human civilization. It flourished under the name of Ancient Nubian Kingdom in Albagrawia and Meroe for more than three thousand years, and reached its peak between the period 2800 B.C. - 525 A.D. It has had relations with its contemporaries civilizations, specially Greece, Roman and other nations, its influence reached Egypt, North Africa as well as east Mediterranean .(1)

Some 2500 years ago, in the eighth century B.C. Kushite in present days (Sudan) conquered Egypt. They established a vast riverian Empire extending from the confluence of the Blue and White Nile to the Mediterranean Sea, historian would count these Kushite Kingdoms as Egypt dynasty XXV.(2)

The Kushite Kingdom at that time was an international power which extended its influence and protectorates upon many small nations in Asia such as Palestine, Syria and Yahoza Kingdom against Ashories aggression.(3)

The flourishing period of the Sudanese Civilization from 2800 B.C.-525

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A.D. was contemporaries with Western Han dynasty 206 B.C.- 24 A.D in China.

Meroe the second Sudanese ancient civilization was an extension to the first Nubian Civilization. It was active in its foreign relations with other countries as Axum in Ethiopia and with Far East and India. (4)

After Meroe came the three Nubian Christian Kingdoms Nubadia, Magara and Alwa, which followed by entrance of Arabs and Islam into Sudan. (5)

The long distance between Sudan and China, 12,140 kilometers long sea route from Guangzhou in South China to Aidhab in Sudan, and the differences in languages and cultures especially in ancient times did not prevent the communication between the two countries. But before dealing with these possible communications between ancient Sudan (Kush and Meroe) and China, we want to observe that the evidence of the possible communication is scanty in spite of the fact that Meroe had a proved and concrete relations with India, but certainly we can date back this relations to more than one thousand years ago, as we will see later.

The Chinese sources and the western sources as well as the discoveries in the Sudan confirmed a possible kind of contact between the two countries in the ancient time.

Philip Snow in his famous work The Star Raft stated that some Chinese scholars maintain that their first rulers who traded long distance (the Han dynasty) at the turn of the Christian era 202 B.C. to 220 A.D. were already in touch with the Kingdom of Kush based at Meroe in the Northern Sudan, that it thought to have been styling its pottery and its bronze utensils after the fashion of the goods from China. (6)

The famous Chinese scholar Shen Fu Wei, discussed in his book Cultural flow between China and outside world throughout history an interesting information and terms found in the China legend and annals, such as the term Xiwangmu (translated literally western Queen mother) which generally described a ruler of a remote western country. (7) This term appear in many Chinese historical sources such as Shan hai Jing (The classic of mountains and rivers) written during the warning states period (475-221 B.C.), and also in Shi-Ji. (Historical Record, c. 91. B.C.) (6) Later Xiwangmu became general term connected with a remote western country with a “running sand” and “thin water” located at a place “near the sunset”. Shen Fu Wei believes that during the Eastern Han dynasty 25 - 225 A.D. the Chinese came to know that “running sand” desert “and “thin water”, also existed in the land of Africa beyond the Red Sea. In the words of the book “Hu Han Shu” History of the Eastern Han dynasty the place was “very near to the home of Xiwangmu and almost where the sunset down. According to the Greek historian Herodotus (484 - 425 B.C.), the “thin water” (where even a feather could not float) was obviously a stream of petroleum, flowing from Egypt into Ethiopia. “Running Sand” referred to Nubian Desert of Africa. Xiwangmu (Western Queen Mother) could be non than the ruling Queen Kushi of Meroe, which was a site of the court and graves of at least five ruling queens from queen Barbare (260-250 B.C.) to Queen Amanikhatashan (62-85), besides Kush! These female rulers thus became the “Western Queen Mother”

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described in ancient Chinese books, which originating from fascinating symbols of China’s expanding geographic contact with the west, and her widening knowledge about the western world. (9) Surprisingly we found in the Merotic descriptions a similar term given to the Merotic Queen - has the same meaning, that was the term of the title (Kid ki) which according to many Sudanese and western scholars a title given to the “Queen mother” (10) Meanwhile many Merotic Ruling Queens hold also the title Kid-ki (The Queen Mother) (11). Thus, Chinese term Xiwangmu refer to the Kushite Queens show that the Chinese sources were aware even with the social and political system of the Merotic era based in North Sudan. It is worth-mentioning that Kid-ki (Queen Mother) appeared seven times in the ancient Merotic descriptions. (12) However, it is relevant to mention that, the (Wen hua cidian) (the Dictionary of the Chinese culture) explain the meaning of the term Xiwangmu as Queen Goddess, (13) which also according to the Merotic inscriptions and sources that the Queen Mother, kid-ki considered in the early period as goddesses. (14)

However it seems to me by 222 - 280 A.D. Chinese were in direct contact with Kush kingdom in north Sudan. Zhu Yin and Kan Tai the envoys of south China ruling Wu King to the west stated in their report appear in the Chinese sources that “ China merchant ship sailed from India arrived at Kush of Rome Empire after a voyage over one month. (15)

In addition to that, the discovery of a Chinese pottery in ancient Meroe ruins give more support for a possible contact between Sudan and China, in the ancient time. (16)

The Chinese documents stated that some merchants, may be Egyptian came to China in 166 A.D. through Alexandria port and the Red Sea, they brought with them Ivory and horn of rhinoceros. (17)

Professor He thinks that this was the first recorded contact between Africa and China according to the Chinese official documents. (18)

I think that the ivory and the rhinoceros horn which the Egyptian traders brought to China must be Sudanese commodities brought by the Egyptian to China, because historically there were no elephants and rhinoceros in Egypt. Al-Masudi mentioned in his book Meadows of Gold when he talked about Sudan, that the Sudanese used to kill elephants and take their tusks, and from their land, elephant tusks were prepared to be taken by Oman merchants to China. (19)

Timothy Kendall wrote that “for centuries Sudan supplies Egypt with exotic items such as elephant tusks and panther skins”. (20)

Thus, the first recorded communication between Africa and China done by Egyptian merchants using Sudanese commodities in 166 A.D.

Sino-Sudanese Relations During the Tang dynasty 618-907 A.D.
Du Huan Journey to Sudan
While evidence of direct relations in the pre-islamic era is still scanty, we strongly believe that a direct contact between the two countries was recorded in the mid eight century when Du Huan visited Sudan.

Du Huan was a Chinese officer captured by Arab in Talas river battle July
751 A.D. and vanished into dominions of the Abbasid caliphate, reappearing in China twelve years later to compose a "Record of my Travel" most of his book was lost, but a passage preserved in an encyclopedia compiled by his cousin tells of a country called Molin which he reached after crossing the great desert. Molin was inhabited by black people and of a violent disposition. It was approached through mountains where a variety of religions were professed (Islam, Christianity and the Zem teaching). It seems to have lain not far from the coast as horses were fed on dried fish and date, men eat Hu-Mang, which name is explained as meaning the Persian dates. The climate was not appealing. There were little grain and no vegetation and malaria was endemic. Hirth quoted from Ma Tuan-lin that "the hill tribes which one has to pass in pursuing the over land road of this country are of the same race".

We did not find the name given by Du Huan to a Sudanese Red Sea port "Molin" in any known names to this area, not even in any near coastal area in Egypt or Eritrea and may be if his valuable book was not lost we may be able to know more about his journey to this area. But Hirth in his book Roman Orient believes that the desert that Du Huan crossed is no doubt the desert of Sin or the Peninsula of Sinai, and the country described here extended along the west coast of the Red Sea may be ports of Eastern coast of Egypt which according to Hirth is being more likely to have furnished dried fish in quantities as food for horses than some territory in the interior of Africa. Hirth added, the Red Sea coast of Egypt was quite prominently known for its parrenness and dates palm as in other parts of Egypt furnished the main part of man daily food.

Philip Snow in his work cited earlier, believes that Du Huan had probably made his way to the coastal of the kingdom of Axum, the territory now known as Eritrea, according to Snow, this is the best explanation of the mixture of religions he described.

Snow went on to ask what Du Huan was doing in Eritrea? Snow tried to find an explanation for Du Huan trip to this region, he said, it was possible Du was attacked to a deputation which the Caliphate sent in 759/760 to escort a Nubian Prince home to his kingdom at Dongla in North Sudan, tributaries of the Caliphate, the Nubian had been giving trouble lately and the attachment of a Chinese in the Party may have been indeed to awe them by exhibiting the vast range of people who were subject to Arab rule.

I think that the good endeavor of Philip Snow to determine the place where Du Huan visited in Red Sea coast, and as far as our knowledge about the history and geography of the area as being Sudanese and African, is more close to reality than Hirth endeavor who content with an extensive determination to the area along east coast of the Red Sea, saying that "The port which Du Huan visited may be one of the Egyptian coast". But we think that the area which the text described its historical, geographical and cultural situation is the Beja coastal area in Eastern Sudan, and the coast which Du Huan described, and which Hirth considered as an Egyptian coast, must be one of the Sudanese sea ports. In spite of the fact that Philip Snow came close to the area when he referred to Beja tribes which originally settled in
Sudan, he did not refer to Sudan and said that Du Huan visited Eritrea referring to the mixture of religions when he described the region he visited. But the Beja area in Sudan at Red Sea coast had also mixture of religions as Islam, Christianity, Paganism and ancient Meroitic religions. The description of the land of the Beja by Hamadani known as “Ibn El Fagiheh” (died in 903 A.D) can be a very good insight for a region with a cultural and religious diversity, he said “And Alagi is in the land of the Beja, they are black and they are Moslems, Christians and idolators”. (25) al-Masudi who died in (907 A.D) mentioned that the Beja are idolators. (26) Also the author of al-Alag Elfaes (died in 903), Yagwbi and Al Astakbar, who lived in the tenth century, all of them mentioned the worship of the Beja for idols. (27)

The Beja in general were faithful to their Pagan religion, a fact which is reported recurrently by Muslim writers and had received confirmation from the discovery of worshipping Places of Beja and the slow process of adoption of correct Islamic burial structure in their tombs. (28)

The Beja worshipped Meroitic gods and frequented their temples. They were forcibly evicted in 583 A.D. from Philae with their idols when their temples were closed down. This confirms the textual evidence where Arab writers stressed recurrently the Beja paganism down the Tenth century. (29)

We agree with Snow that what Du Huan saw were Beja tribes, who still live in eastern Sudan and still have their own language and culture which Du Huan saw in the mid eighth century. Anyhow, Philip Snow in his analysis again refers to the possibility that Du Huan may visit Sudan when he tried to find an answer to the important question which is what Du Huan was doing in that area? He answered that “Du Huan came accompanying Abbaside Caliph delegation to Nubian Prince in Dongla in Northern Sudan”. But I notice that in spite of Philip Snow, good investigation to know the area visited by Du Huan and the reason for the visit, he made a geographical mistake when he considered Sudanese port Badi as an Eritrean port, and he supposed that Du Huan visited this port, he wrote, “Badi, a port in Eritrea conceivably known to Du Huan.” (30)

Again, the Sudanese archaeologist Professor Hakim agrees with what we explained, he also added, that, the description in the book “Records of My Travel” is exactly similar to that on Red Sea coast specially on Badi, Aheid and Haliab Ports, this area is inhabited by Beja people and Beja culture which is an essential part of Sudanese culture is dominant in this area and until present day there are palm trees in Haliab and its near coastal areas, this place like other Sudanese places is Malaria epidemic and of hot weather and with lot of fish, he also added, most of the Sudanese eastern coastal ports were important and well known ports. (31) We can add that, the people of this area are known through out their history as being good fighters as described by Du Huan. The nearest description of warlike people of this region what we find in the Yagobi who enumerates the kingdoms of the Beja, he says “And the fifth kingdom is called Badi to a place called “Vicon” and they are very Alert and very hard to defeat and they have a home for their fighter named (Dar Asow) which has a very young and strong fighters al-
ways in a state of readiness for fights and war. “(32) Also Ibn Batutta who visited this area in 1325 A.D. mentioned that “The area is well supplied with fish, milk, and dates, its inhabitants are the black skinned people.”(33)

We strongly believe that Du Huan visited Sudan in the mid eighth century which means that this was probably the first contact between Sudan and China recorded in the post-Islamic era. What recorded by Du Huan in his book “Record of My Travel” is considered as far as I know one of the earliest information recorded about Sudan in Chinese records.

Furthermore, there are two other Chinese researchers who think that Du Huan visited Sudan. One of them is Professor Ridwan Lui Ling Roi from Beijing University, who presented a paper at the Chinese-Moroccan relations symposium, he said that, “Du Huan visited Sudan within his tour in Arab countries.”(34)

Wang Gui Fa other Chinese scholar believes that Du Huan visited Sudan and Egypt before visiting Morocco.(35)

**The archaeological findings in Sudan, and the evidence of the relations throughout The Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties in China.**

It seems to me that sudan was already known to the Chinese in that period. The Chinese scholar Zhu Jia Qin believes that Sudan was known to the Chinese geographers.(36) He added in Duan Zhang shi book (yu yang Tsai - Tsu) (850-860 A.D.) Sudan was mentioned under the name Xi Tang.(37) The book also mentioned another country named Tang gang.(38) We are not sure if the writer meant the northern part of the Sudanese Nubian or he described another area in the region.

However, the book clearly mentioned Egypt under the name Wu Si Li and Southern Egypt as E - Xial.(39) So Tang Gang must be some area in Northern Sudan.

Regarding the Chinese information that Xi tang (Sudan) produced good horses, is a correct information confirmed by the findings in the Royal Tombs in lower Nubia contained skeletons of horses.(40) Moreover, the ancient Sudanese descriptions and source stated that “Piankhi the Napatan king who conquered Egypt and established the Sudanese XXV dynasty in Egypt, was so sad when he knew that the Egyptian ruler were treating the horses badly.”(41)

It seems that, Eastern Sudan, which Du Huan visited in mid-eighth century, historically continued to play through its ports Aidhab, Swakin and Badi a pioneering role in early Sudanese relations with Far East in general and with China in particular. The most important are Aidhab, the oldest Sudanese sea port, and a famous one for Arab traders, geographers and historians. Aidhab port on Red Sea coast north of Halaiib, as described by Ibn Gabeer Alandalsi when he passed by it in the twelfth century, was world famous sea port, because ships came from India and Yemen and went to it. al-Masud in his book, Meadows of Gold, wrote that in Aidhab there is pridot mineral which was taken east to China, west to Spain and north to Russia and Balkan.”(42)

This port was well known to Arabs and Asians since the seventh century,
but Aidhab sea port had another name during Roman Period as the western books used to call it Berenica. We do agree with the Sudanese scholar Ganfar Murgani that, Aidhab is the ancient sea port of Berenica. In Roman era maps, Berenica was probably located at Aidhab place.(43)

Hirth quoted from Chinese records " Hou- han - shu" regarding the trade route between China and Africa saying that "this route passes through Iran, Iraq and Syria until the Red Sea ", he added that, the coast of the Red Sea contains various outlets of oriental trade all of which may perhaps claim to have been ports of Ta-Ts'in, there was a route from Berenica "Aidhab", probably to the southern most to Koptos on the banks of the Nile.(44)

It is important to note that the road from Berenica "Aidhab" to Koptos Egypt existed until the seventeenth century.

However some archaeological discoveries in Aidhab, can be traced back to the pre-Islamic era. These discoveries are coloured Chinese Porcelain and small sculpture with Latin letters which can be traced back to Patalmic era.(45)

Aidhab became known by its current name from eighth century until the fifteenth century and continued to be an important Sudanese trade port with China. Many Arabic and Islamic references referred to Aidhab as an important trade port with Far East and China as Professor Hassan Mouanas in his book History of Islam Atlas wrote that "trade goes to east from Fustat by land route to Galzam port in Egypt, then to Aidhab and from Aidhab to Jeddah and Yemen ports and to east". (46)

Hassan Mouanas believes that after Galzam port deterioration, people shifted to Aidhab port where trade goes to Jeddah, Sind, India and China(47)

Also, the Sudanese references described Aidhab as an urban center, pilgrim port and center for trade with Far East, Middle East, Europe and Africa.(48)

The archaeological evidences proved that Aidhab was an important connecting point between Sudan and China, since Tang dynasty era. Many archaeological discoveries proved that there was a trade relations between Sudan and China, at least starting from Tang dynasty era. Many Sudanese and foreign archaeologists and researchers found thousand pieces of Chinese porcelain along the coast of Aidhab, this porcelain belongs to different era from Tang to Ming era, which mean that Sudanese-Chinese contacts continued from Tang to Ming dynasty era without interruption. Aidhab was an important center for the Chinese porcelain distribution, from it, porcelain was taken to Aswan and other Egyptian Towns.(49)

Professor Zhang Guang Da wrote that, in the tenth century Chinese porcelain used to be taken from Aidhab to Fostat.(50)

From 1912 to 1920 the archaeologist found six hundred thousand pieces of broken porcelain. This porcelain is dated back to the period from eighth to ninth century. Another group also discovered and can be dated back to the sixteenth and seventeenth century.(51)

The Yemeni-Jewish who visited Aidhab in the fourteenth century mentioned that, the most important commodity at Aidhab port is porcelain.(52)
The Japanese researcher Mikami Tsugio wrote that Aidhab ruin two kilo-

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metres along the sea coast is full of broken porcelain dated back to different era, Tang dynasty, Song dynasty, Yuan dynasty and the early years of Ming dynasty. (53)

In 1966 the Japanese scholar Mikami Tsugio made a quick survey on Aihab coast, without any archaeological digging. He was able to collect thousand pieces of porcelain made at different Chinese Provinces, as Yue porcelain which was produced by Zhejiang Province in South-east China, this kind of porcelain was produced from early Han dynasty to Song dynasty, and also blue flower porcelain which was produced by Jiangxi Province (54)

Many other types of Chinese porcelain were found as:
1. White porcelain.
2. Black glaze porcelain.
3. Long Quan porcelain (produced in South Song period).
4. Green blue glaze.
5. Blue flower small bowl (produced in early Ming dynasty).
6. Blue flower porcelain with Mongolian Phags-pa- scripts (produced in Yuan dynasty). (55)

The Chinese porcelain discovered by Mikami can be dated to different era extending from Tang to Ming dynasty era. He noticed that wherever he goes in Aihab coast he found tenth of broken porcelain pieces dated to different era. He said that “No doubt Aihab was a main port and an important center for Chinese porcelain, which was transported from China to Aihab crossing sea route more than 10,000 sea miles”. (56)

One of the important and multi-disciplinary researches was that conducted by joined Sudanese-French mission from Khartoum University and Lyon University in 1979-1981 at Red Sea area. A digging was conducted at Aihab, the most important finding was Chinese porcelain dated back to the period from twelfth to fifteenth century. (57)

The Continuation of the Relations During Yuan, Ming, Qin Dynasties.
Chinese historian Zhang Guang Da says that, during 1250-1517 A.D. Mameluke period in Egypt, there was a famous business family named Karimi who was engaged in trade with China, for example, a merchant from this family, born 1149, conducted the cotton and silk textile trade with China. The most well-known person from this family Ez Aldeen Abdal Aziz Ibn Mansour Alkulami came to China five times and because of his trade with China in Porcelain and other commodities he became rich and made a lot of money. Professor Zhang quoted from an essay written by Arthur Lan and R.B. Serjeant that “Karimi is a Jewish family.” (58)

However the Sudanese archaeologist Professor Hakim says that “Karimi is a Sudanese family, neither Egyptian nor Jewish”, and Karmi is a group of Sudanese traders who traded directly with China from thirteenth until fifteenth century. The center of this group of traders was Aihab which was located 23 kilometers north of Sudanese Halaib. Aihab was an important trade center. Ships came to it from porcelain centers in China and porcelain stores in Chinese Indian islands, Shiraz, Tagakistan and Afghanistan. (59) In addition to Hakim point of view the names itself karimi, Ezal -deen and Ab-
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dalazeez, are not Jewish names. Moreover it is also well known that Karimi group spent a lot of money in building schools, hospitals and Mosques in Macca and Cairo, probably also in Aidhab. (60) This practise strongly confirmed that karimi Family were not Jewish, as throughout history Jews were not involved in building Muslims Mosques.

As being an international merchants group, Karimi was being in a kind of trade relations with the Jewish business communities in Africa and Middle East. (61)

The Arabic sources believe that the name “karimi” is a corrupted version of the name kanem, an area between Bahar Algaalz in the Sudan and Chad lake. (62) Algalgashondi the famous Arab geographer confirmed that the trade center of Karimi group was Aidhab. (63) The Egyptian Sources mentioned that all Sudanese and central Africa traders were called the Karims. (64) According to Magrezy “the Karimi merchant were rich enough to donate the Mamluke Sultans when they are in need. He added that “they transport their merchandise from Aidhab to Goss on the back of the camels, then through the Nile to Karimi hotels and stores in Fustat (Cairo).” (65)

However this group succeeded in activating the commercial relations between Sudan, Egypt and other countries in the sea coast of the Red Sea with China.

Anyhow, we do understand the confusion in considering Karimi as an Egyptian Jewish family and may be considering Aidhab itself as an Egyptian port. As we mentioned before Aidhab is a Sudanese port under Beja rule. But it seems that the states succeeded in Egypt was keen in having a representation in this port as it was the main artery for Egypt trade with other countries. But some time Egypt ruler put it under their control. Many Arab traders and geographers admit that Aidhab is a Sudanese port controlled by Sudanese-Beja tribe such as Alyagobi who passed through it in the tenth century. Ibn Saleem Alaswani who passed through it in the eleventh century and Ibn Gabeer who passed, in the twelfth century and also Ibn Battutah who visited the port in 1325 A.D. and mentioned that “The inhabitants of Aidhab are Sudanese Beja, two thirds of the city was ruled by Mamaleek of Egypt and the other third was ruled by Beja King who is known as Hediribi”. (66)

Aidhab was described by many of the Arab writers as Sudanese sea port. Al Masudi mentioned Aidhab as a port of the Beja and Hadariba when he mentioned a coalition in 332 Higa between the Arab of Rabia and the Beja. (67) Al Astakhbani in his book Kitab El Agaleem also mentioned that “the boundaries of Egypt ends at deserts, with gold mines, owned by the Beja, which leads to a town on the bank of the Nile, known as Aidhab. (68) And also Gass el Deen Khalil Shaheen al-Zahir in his book “Zubdat Khosh al Mamalik wa bayan el-Turug wa el-Masalik” mentioned that Aidhab at the land of the Hadariba”. (69)

Ibn Jubier who passed by Aidhab in the 12th century mentioned that “Its people who dwelled there were from the Sudan who were known as Beja and they have a sultan of their own lives with them in the mountains adjacent to it”. (70)

al-Nuri in his book (Ni Hayat el-Arab fi funwn el-Adab) says “Aidhab is
the port of the Beja". (71)
During Mameluke era Hejaz and the western coast of Red Sea until Aidhab were a part of Mameluke rule, even Bibrs one of the famous Mameluke ruler of Egypt controlled also Swakin, the second Sudanese sea port so as not to compete Aidhab. (72)
Aidhab was also under the Egyptian control during Salah el-Deen Alayobi era in 1168-1193 A.D. It continued to be under the Egyptian rule until the end of Ayyoubi period in 1252. (73)
The history of the Egyptian colonization of the Sudan in general, and to the Eastern ports in particular probably led to the geographical and historical confusion that led some scholars to consider Karimi as an Egyptian or Jewish family, and even Aidhab itself as an Egyptian port. (74)

It seems to me Aidhab continued to play its significant role during Ming period, beside the discoveries of Ming porcelain in its ruin, Zhen He, The great Chinese Muslim admiral visited Aidhab in his fourth voyage (Dec. 1413-July 1415) A.D. (74)
Aidhab was not the only port in Eastern Sudan which had trade relations with China, not far from this port another old port, Swakin. This port was well known on the sixth dynasty of the Pharaoh 3000 B.C. when the old Egyptian gallery found their way down the Red Sea up to the land of Punt in which was the port of Swakin. (75)
According to Dr. Bloss the Ptolemies of Egypt called the place the port of good tidings. (76)
The Roman followed the Ptolemies and occupied Swakin with the idea of increasing their own trade with India and China. (77)
At the height of its prosperity, trade flourished between it and Arabia, Ethiopia, Ceylon, India and China where the Swakinese mariners sailed. (78)
Hamid M. Hamadi believes that "after the opening of Suez Canal in 1869, the Red Sea became a high way to the East. Therefore Swakin was bound to increase in importance under the new conditions, in that Period (1869) and after, Swakin was reported to import rice, silk cloth and incense from India and China. (79)
Anyhow the archaeological findings of Chinese porcelain dated back to different Chinese dynasties in Swakin port is a material evidences to the existence of trade communications between Sudan and China through Swakin port.
The Sudanese historians recorded that the Funj Sultanate traders at the capital Sennar used to trade with Far East and India through Swakin port, carrying elephant tusk, gold and other Sudanese exports, their journey used to take two years. Sennar itself was an important trade center where trade carvan came from India, Ethiopia and Egypt. (80)
As sea trade route to China was known to Sudanese trader since Karimi Time in 1280-1517, the Funj Sultanate traders may continued their way from India to China.
The evidences of Sudanese-Chinese relations is not only the archaeological and historical discoveries found at Aidhab and Swakin. The archaeologists also discovered blue China at Sudanese Nuba area, dated to Song dynasty.
The archaeologists also found silk fabric in western Sudan. At Sinnar the capital of Funj Sultanate 1504-1821 A.D., thousand pieces of coloured Chinese porcelain were recently discovered, which means that, Funj Sultanate used to exchange trade with China through its port Swakin and may be Aidah. It is known that the Chinese porcelain at that time was one of the precious objects owned only by kings, ministers and rich traders of Sinnar.

The Chinese porcelain was also found at different parts of Sudan as Badi in Eastern Sudan, which Philip Snow refers to the possibility that Du Huan may visited it. Also Chinese porcelain was found at another archaeological location in (Hazer Bant) near Sinkat City (Eastern Sudan), this place was a trade center.

Chinese porcelain was also discovered in Suba near Khartoum, in addition to porcelain discovered at Al Fashir in western Sudan. However the western imperialism succeeded in the 15th century in controlling the Indian ocean as well as the Red Sea and its outlets. In 1821 Sudan as a whole fall under the foreign domination, when the Turko-Egyptian forces occupied the country, to isolate Sudan from the outside world and to end any direct or indirect communication between Sudan and Far East.

In 19th century luckily the historical coincidence played its role in favour of more similarities in relations between Sudan and China, when the Sudanese revolution reawakened in August 1881- November 1889 for Tai Ping revolutionary movement martyrs (1851 - 1866) by killing General Charles Gordon on January 26, 1885. Gordon was sent to Sudan and appointed as a governor general after eleven years from suppressing Tai Ping revolutionary movement. He continued governing Sudan from 1877 to 1880, to return back to England and being called again to go to Sudan on January 26,1884 to suppress Al Mahdi revolution. Gordon was chosen on the bases of his bloody history in suppressing the revolution in China. The British Circle used to call him at that time the Chinese Gordon. But the Mahdist revolution concluded its long march of struggle and captured the capital Khartoum where Gordon was killed. Among the things that the revolters gained was Gordon yellow Riding Jacket awarded by the imperial Qing government as acknowledgement for Gordon bloody service to the British Empire during his leadership of the so-called ever victorious Army that played a major role in suppressing the Tai Ping revolutionary movement.

This yellow riding Jacket is still at Khalifa Abdullahi Museum in Khartoum.

During our study of Tai Ping revolutionary movement we have noticed some important similarities between Tai Ping and Mahdi revolution. The first notice is that the two spiritual revolutionary leaders, Mohamed Ahmed Almahdi and Hung Hsui-chuan (the guiding spirit of the Tai Ping revolution movement) were religious leaders highly effected by Islam in case of Mohamed Ahmed Almahdi and by Christianity in Hu Hsui-chuan. It is clear that
Hung as al-Mahdi in Sudan mobilized the revolutionary side in Christianity which opposed inequality and corruption and sought to establish fair state to be controlled by Chinese themselves and not by foreigners. He also applied fair land system and called for virtue and this was very clear in his social, economic and cultural system in the capital Nanjing. (90)

The religious motivation was an essential to Hung, for whenever the army went, Temples and monasteries were built, idols were either burned or destroyed. (91)

He also gave great consideration to apply virtue, noble values and sacrifice among his followers. (92)

The Mahdist revolution which appeared fifteen years after Tai Ping revolution suppression, was also religious and nationalistic in nature which depended on revolutionary values in Islam to struggle against injustice, corruption and foreign hegemony. Its spiritual father Mohamed Ahmed Almahdi was a religious leader who was trying to apply Islamic virtue state. He also applied land law similar in its nature to Hung Hsiu Land Law. (93)

The two revolutions also used similar military tactics which in the main war overthrowing town and rural areas to reach the capital and control the state. As in the Sudan as well as in China some Islamic and Christian men opposed the revolution and joined anti-people front. (94)

Unfortunately, the international imperialist power with cooperation with Qing Imperial Government defeated Tai Ping revolution, while the Mahdist revolution succeeded in the Sudan, due to its objective reasons. This was the first victory for any third world country in the 19th century against imperialism. Mahdi destroyed and defeated the British military machine and established a Sudanese state with a full sovereignty from 1885 till 1899 when the colonial foreign army again invaded Sudan and put an end to the Mahdist state.

Conclusion

This paper sets out to shed light on the Sino-Sudanese relations since the Pre-Islamic era until the 19th century. The paper came through some evidences regarding contacts between the two countries in Western Han dynasty era. It mainly focused on relations during Tang dynasty era, while we lack evidences on the possible contact between Sudan and China in the Pre-Islamic era, the archaeological discoveries throughout the second half of this century in the Sudan confirm that there was a kind of contact between Sudan and China during Tang and Song dynasties era.

The paper also discovered that the international trade route connecting the old Sudanese ports such as Bernica (Aidhab) with the Chinese ports since the first and the second century A.D. (95) The famous Arab Geographer Ibn khardathaba also believes that the African trade route with China started mainly from the Sudanese Red Sea Coast. (96)

On the whole the writer’s aim was to shed light on the archaeological discoveries in Sudan in this century in order to attract the attention of scholars and researchers for more archaeological and historcial investigation concerning Sudan’s relations with Far East and China in the Middle Ages.
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Footnotes:

5. Shibeka, op.cit., pp. 22-23
8. Shi Ji (Historical Record) chapter 123 in Chinese language.
9. Chen Fuwei, op.cit., p. 7
11. Ibid., pp. 13-17
12. Ibid., p. 14
15. Chen Fuwei, op.cit., pp. 44-54
18. Ibid.
21. Du Huan Travel quoted from Du You's Tung Dian (in Chinese language). See also Snow Philip, op.cit., pp. 3-5. See also Hirth F., China and the Roman Orient, Leipzig and Munich, George Hirth, Shanghai and Hong Kong, Kelly wash 1885 Reprinted in China 1930, pp. 204-207
22. Hirth, op.cit., pp. 204-205
23. Snow, Philip, op.cit., p. 4
24. Ibid.
25. Ibn al-Fakih al-Hamadhani, Kitab Al-Boldan, Brill, Leyden, 1885, p. 121 (in


28. An interview with Professor Ahmed M. A. Hakim University of Khartoum, Faculty of Arts, Department of Archaeology, October 6, 1994. See also Ahmed M. Hakim, Al Atabye and the Red Sea, unpublished paper. No date.

29. Ibid.


31. An interview with Professor Hakim, op.cit.


33. Def Rem Ery B. R. Translated by H. A. R. Gibb, The Travels of Ibn Battuta (A.D. 1325- 1354), Translated with revisions and notes from the Arabic Text, Reproduced by permission of the Hakluyt Society, Nendeln, Lech Tenenba, 1958, pp. 68-69. See also, Abu Abdallahi Mohamed Ibn Ibrahim

34. Allawati (Ibn Battuta) under the title (Aihdab). op.cit.


38. Ibid. See also Chen Gong Yuan, op.cit., p. 15.


43. See Hirth General Index p. 330 see also Gaafar Murgani op.cit.

44. Hirth, op.cit., pp. 157-158.


47. Ibid.

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49. He Fangchuan, op. cit., p. 813
52. Ibid., p. 193
53. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
58. Zhang Guang Da, op. cit., p. 754
59. An interview with Professor Hakim, op. cit.
61. Ibid., pp. 54-55
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
68. El-Issthachri, Kihab al-Aqaeen, op. cit., pp. 15, 29, 30
69. Gars al-Deen Khalil ben Shaheen al-Sahri, Zohdat, Kachf El-Mamalik, wa Bihan Almro, wa al Masalik, Paris, imprimerie Nationale, 1894, p. 25 (in Arabic language)
70. Ibn Jubair, op. cit., p. 48
71. Shahab al-Din Ahmed Bin Abd al-Wahab al -Niwarai, Nihayat al-Erab Fi Marefi Ihon al-Adab, part one, Costtewmas press, Cairo, no date, p. 243 (in Arabic language)
73. Mounas, Hassan, op. cit., p. 302
74. Shen Fusui, op. cit., p. 189
75. Hamid A. Hamadi, Swakin The Port of Good Tidings, published by Ministry of Culture and Information, Khartoum, al Guraishi Advertising and Printing Corporation, p. 4
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid., p. 3
79. Ibid.

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80. Mekki Shibeka, op.cit., pp. 77-80
81. Mi-Kami Tsugio, Chinese Porcelain Discovered in Egypt, op.cit., p. 194
82. He Fangchuan, op.cit., p. 813. See also Mikami p. 194
84. Ibid.
85. An interview with Professor Hakim, op.cit.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
89. Ibid., p. 112
92. Ibid., pp. 22, 69
93. It is interesting to note that Gordon which the west consider him as a religious herald calling for one and only god in pagan land in Africa and China and who tries to call for Christianity, he is the one who participated in suppressing Tai Ping revolutionary movement in spite of its Christian nature and Principles at pagan country and he himself tried to suppress Mahdi revolution in Sudan.
94. Ibid., p. 22. See also Mekki Shibeka, op.cit., pp. 93, 113, 192.