Wang Dayuan's 汪大淵 *Daoyi Zhilüe* 島夷志略: Did the World Beyond Chinese Borders Stretch to Morocco?

Ileana Amadei

Abstract: Wang Dayuan (14th century) travelled far and wide during the Yuan dynasty. On his two voyages he sailed to hundreds of places in Southeast Asia and India, also reaching the Near East and the coast of Africa. His work, the *Daoyi zhilüe* (1349/50), gathered information on places and local traditions, offering a Chinese view of the world beyond the imperial borders. This chapter examines Wang's work and provides an analysis of the 77th section of the *Daoyi zhilüe*, entitled *Taji'na* to enhance our understanding of how far the known world outside Chinese extended at that time and to determine whether Wang Dayuan actually crossed the Mediterranean Sea, as some scholars claim.

Keywords: Yuan dynasty; Travel Literature; Chinese Geography; Chinese Toponymy; Maritime Silk Road.

1. Wang Dayuan's Travels to the West

The Middle Ages in Europe provide us with numerous examples of travelogues and accounts of journeys filled with incredible stories about the distant lands of the Orient, such as those told by Marco Polo and Odoric of Pordenone. A few decades after these explorers, the travels of Ibn Battuta (1304-1368/9) began from the Mediterranean shores of Morocco, providing us with a magnificent literary record of the Arabs' interest in the East. Another traveller worthy of consideration, albeit less famous than the aforementioned explorers, is the Chinese Wang Dayuan 汪大淵 (c. 1311–?). During the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), he too travelled, but in the opposite direction, i.e., from East to West (Park 2012, 115). His literary legacy, the *Daoyi zhilüe* 島夷志略 (*A Synoptical Account of the Islands and Barbarians*, 1349/50) (Ptak 1996, 127), can be considered a geographical work based on his experience of traveling, as the title has it, to various "Islands" among "barbarians". In his two voyages Wang Dayuan explored the so-called Southern Sea (*Nanhai* 南海), heading westward until he reached the coast of Africa.

His travelogue reflects the openness of the Mongol Era (Park 2012, 91) that witnessed a growing interest in contact between East and West, especially between the Chinese and the Islamic worlds (Park 2012, 92). When China became

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the centre of one of the largest empires in human history, the overland routes reopened and expanded, facilitating contact between distant lands (Park 2012, 8, 93). Nonetheless, maritime routes had been established even longer and they were diffuse (Chaffee 2013, 124), merchants often choosing the sea for trading purposes in order to avoid the wars between the khanates (Park 2019, 55; Schottenhamer 2019, 12). Indeed, much more trade went on than what was attested by official documents. The mainstream view in imperial times was that commerce was a marginal sector of the economy, the only acceptable form of which was represented by taxation, and this tended to overshadow the importance of the Chinese trading tradition in all its forms (Abu-Lughod 1989, 317–318). Maritime trade and trade routes, already well established under the Song dynasty (960–1279) (Schottenhammer 2015a, 437–525), reached their peak under the Mongols leading to a growth in the volume and quality of goods exchanged (Park 2019, 55). Not only did merchants and their commodities make use of these maritime routes, but ideas and knowledge also spread, accompanied by a broader vision of the world (Park 2019, 58–59). The increase in maritime contacts and commercial networks led to a new curiosity about the world and these are all elements that underpin Wang Dayuan's travelogue (Park 2012, 91). The known world outside Chinese borders was vast at that time, but how far did it stretch? Wang Dayuan travelled extensively on merchant ships, but did he actually get to cross the Mediterranean Sea and reach Tangier as some scholars claim? To investigate these questions, this chapter analyses the 77th section of the *Daoyi zhilüe*, called *Taji'na* 撻吉那, by examining scholarly publications on the subject. Following this brief introduction, the next section will introduce the *Daoyi zhilüe* and the ongoing scholarly debate; the final part of this chapter will focus on a description of *Taji'na,* offering a preliminary examination of the 77th section of the *Daoyi zhilüe*.

2. The *Daoyi Zhilüe*

The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Yuan dynasty, together with the expansion of maritime trade routes, made it possible for a work like *Daoyi zhilüe* 島夷志略 to see the light of day in 1349. Wu Jian 吳鑒[1] asked Wang Dayuan to publish it on the local gazetteer of Quanzhou bearing the title *Daoyi zhi* 島夷志. Published also as separate work,[2] what is now known as *Daoyi zhilüe* is divided into one hundred sections, of which ninety-nine focus on individual places that the author claims to have visited. Even though it may sound incredible for a young man in medieval times to have reached so many distant lands,

[1] Wu Jian 吳鑒, *zi* 字 or courtesy name Mingzhi 明之, was a writer from the Yuan dynasty. Originally of Sanshan 三山 in Fujian, was the editor of the local gazetteer of Quanzhou entitled *Qingyuan xuzhi* 清源续志 (*Continuation of the History and Topography of Qingyuan*) and author of the *Qingjing si ji* 清净寺記 (*Notes on the Qingjing Temple,* 1350).

[2] Some scholars have doubted that the *Daoyi zhilüe* and *Daoyi zhi* are the same work (Liao 2001, 135–42).

most scholars hold that it is impossible to disprove it, although doubts do persist (Rockhill 1913, 475; Ptak 1996, 130). Thanks to his first-hand experiences, Wang must have been considered the person most qualified to write about foreign lands (Su 1981, 11; Ptak 1996, 127), and even today his brief treatise remains an important source on medieval geography, commerce, local costumes and the economy of the Yuan era.

The sections of the *Daoyi zhilüe* follow the same structure throughout. After the title, which is usually the only source of information about the name of the place, each short section starts with a description of the location, topography, and weather, followed by information about the traditions and customs of indigenous populations; the final part is about the local products and trading interests. The sections, however, are not arranged in any geographical or chronological order,[3] which makes it difficult to determine the actual itinerary of the writer. In fact, we do not know much about Wang's life or his travels except for what is narrated in this work. The location of the toponyms mentioned in the *Daoyi zhilüe* and the extent of Wang's itinerary are thus topics that deserve further investigation, even though some questions may remain unanswerable (Ptak 1996, 137).

Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the *Daoyi zhilüe* caught the attention of scholars, which led to the publication of the first annotated editions and translations. Shen Cengzhi (Xu 2019) and Fujita Toyohashi (1936) were the first scholars to analyse the work, but one of the most significant studies on the *Daoyi zhilüe*, both in terms of its depth of analysis and the number of sources consulted, is Su Jiqing's annotated edition, published posthumously in 1981. In the 1990s, Shen Fuwei devoted several chapters of his works on China's relations with foreign countries to *Daoyi zhilüe*, providing a fresh perspective on the work, the author, and the itinerary of his journeys: here Wang Dayuan is seen as one of the first Chinese travellers to sail across the Mediterranean as far as Morocco. Western academics also studied the *Daoyi zhilüe*. Between 1913 and 1916 Rockhill, for example, translated some passages of the *Daoyi zhilüe* in the journal *T'oung Pao*.[4] The first annotated editions and Rockhill's translation do not clarify the location of some of the toponyms; this is in contrast to Zheng Suhuai – who edited the *Daoyi zhilüe* with Wang Bei in 2022 – and Su Jiqing, who provide numerous examples and hypotheses that occasionally differ from those of Shen Fuwei (Ptak 1996, 135–36). According to Su Jiqing, Wang travelled across the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea to the coast of East Africa, while according to Shen Fuwei, he explored the Indian Ocean on a first expedition. On a second, he started from the Indian Ocean and, having reached Aden, headed towards Mecca. After visiting Egypt, he sailed across the Mediterranean to Tangier and it was on his return that he reached the coast of East Africa (Shen 1990, 390–92). As Ptak has pointed out, Su Jiqing and Shen

[3] Ptak (1996, 130–1) suggests that there is a symbolic structure in which numerology also plays a part.

[4] A more recent translation is that of Chen Hurng Yu (2023).

Fuwei disagree most strongly with regard to the African sections. This leads us to the core question: did the world beyond the borders of China stretch as far as Morocco for Wang Dayuan? Unlike most scholars, Shen Fuwei states that when sailing from Egypt, Wang crossed the Mediterranean and reached the Moroccan port of Tangier (also the hometown of Ibn Battuta). The latest translation published in 2023 also assumes that Wang Dayuan sailed to the Mediterranean, called *Guowang hai* 國王海, and reached the Sicilian town of Licata, *Lijiata* 哩伽塔 (Chen 2023, 177–78), although excluding Morocco from the itinerary.[5] Su Jiqing states that he did not get that far in the West, thus offering a different perspective on the subject when discussing the *Taji'na* section.

3. Overview of the *Taji'na* Section

> *Taji'na*
> The country is in the land of *Dali*, which is the ancient Western territory. Mountains are few and fields are barren. The climate is frequently hot, the sky is often gloomy. Costumes are like those of Qiang. Men and women have faces and bodies like lacquer, with round eyes, and uncombed grey hair. They wear clothes made of soft brocade. Women make a living by spinning, men by collecting *yahu* gemstones. They boil seawater to obtain salt and ferment pomegranates to make liquor. There is a leader. The land produces *anxi* aromatics, glazed vases, borax, and gardenias; the latter are particularly superior to those of other countries. The goods traded are things such as placer gold, silver, multicoloured satin, iron tripods, copper wires, sulphur, and mercury.

The *Taji'na* section is the 77th of the *Daoyi zhilüe* and, like the other parts, is structured as explained above. The title, *Taji'na*, identifies the name of the place described, and this in itself has been the source of much debate. The annotated translation by Rockhill states that *Taji'na* was famous for its gardenia flowers, quoting from the text, but without providing any specific location. In China, the gardenia was called *chanyou* 禅友, 'the meditative friend' (Yetts 1941, 1–21), and it was appreciated for its scent and was sometimes even elevated to artistic subject status. Its fruit was used in traditional medicine or as a dye, since a maize colour can be extracted from it, to create yellow, one of the five official colours, other than white, that were used at court. These flowers and their fruits were among the chosen "ancient and honourable vegetable dyes" together with Chinese indigo, madder, acorns, and gromwell that were used to produce blue, red, black, and purple respectively (Schafer 1985, 208). The Chinese were thus interested in this product and saying that *Taji'na* grows gardenias "superior to those of other countries" would have had a certain significance. Botanical and medical treatises also mentioned this flower, which some believed to be originally from Western territories, *Xiyu* 西域.

[5] *Lijiata* 哩伽塔 is the section n. 91 of the *Daoyi zhilüe*. Chen (2023) locates the 77th section's *Taji'na* in India.

In the *Bencao gang mu* 本草綱目 (*Compendium of Materia Medica,* 16th cent.) the gardenia is described as a flower "as large as a wine cup" whose fruit was used "for dyeing an orange colour" (Bretschneider 1894, 502).[6] As noted by Bretschneider (1894, 501), gardenias are also described by Su Song 蘇頌 (11th century) in his work *Bencao tujing* 本草圖經 (*Illustrated Pharmacopoeia*, 11th cent.). The Chinese *zhanbo* 詹葡 would be equivalent to the Sanskrit *campaka,* also rendered in Chinese as *zhanbojia* 瞻葡伽, *zhanpojia* 旃波迦, *zhanpo* 瞻波. The champak, *michelia champaka* and its fragrant flowers were often confused with frangipani or jasmine (Schafer 1967, 199). During the Tang dynasty, Chinese gardenia was believed to be a native champak, generating thus even more confusion (Schafer 1967, 199).

According to Su Jiqing, Wang Dayuan in the *Daoyi zhilüe* perhaps used *zhizi hua* 梔子花 to mean the *fan zhizi* 番梔子, the foreign or western gardenia – i.e., the *Michelia champaka* rather than the *Gardenia florida* (or *jasminoide*) – adding that they may have been erroneously considered the same thing (Su 1981, 48). Some types of gardenia,[7] like the *Gardenia jasminoide,* were also confused with saffron (*Crocus sativus*) as attested in the in the *Huihui yaofang* 回回藥方 (*Muslim or West Asian Recipes*) compiled in Yuan times,[8] or with safflowers.[9] They are also mentioned in geographical works like the *Lingwai daida* 嶺外代答 (*Notes from the Land Beyond the Passes*, 1178) and the *Zhufan zhi* 諸蕃志 (*Description of the Foreign Lands*, 1225) as well as the one in question.[10] In Zhou Qufei's 周去非 *Lingwai daida*, gardenia flowers are listed among the products of the Arab region, specifically in the description of the country of Meilugudun 眉路骨惇, which Almonte suggests may be the city of Merv in modern-day Turkmenistan.[11] Another section of the *Lingwai daida*, the 133rd, focuses on foreign gardenias (*fan zhizi* 蕃梔子), celebrated for their perfume and originally from *Dashi* countries 大食國, the Arab territories (Hirth, Rockhill 1966, 203). The second part of the *Zhufan zhi,* called *zhiwu* 志物 (products), dedicates an entire section to garde-

[6] Bretschneider (1894), quotes and translates, among others, Li Shizhen's 李時珍 *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 and Su Song's 蘇頌 *Bencao tujing* 本草圖經.

[7] According to Han (2015, 236), different types of gardenias had different uses.

[8] The *Huihui yaofang* is a medical encyclopaedia that survives only in fragmentary form; it was compiled in the late Yuan dynasty and is based on earlier Persian medical texts (Schottenhamer 2015b, 86; Buell, Anderson 2021, 261). Saffron was barely known in China until the Yuan dynasty and was not well distinguished from safflower or turmeric (Shafer 1985, 125).

[9] Safflower (known as *honghua* 紅花, red flower) was introduced to China from Western regions along the silk route around the third century CE, while saffron (*fan honghua* 番紅花, meaning western red flower), was imported to China during the Mongol period. The colour effect produced by the former is largely red, while the latter has only yellow or orange dye components (Han 2015, 233–34), like gardenias.

[10] In the *Daoyi zhilüe*, this flower is listed among the local products of *Taji'na* and of *Longxianyu* 龍涎嶼, which, according to Su and the edition by Zheng and Wang, is the Indonesian island of Pulao Rondo to the north-east of Sumatra (Su 1981, 44–45; Zheng, Wang 2022, 12), while Rockhill and Fujita identify *Longxianyu* with Pulao Beras (Rockhill 1915, 158; Fujita 1935, 15).

[11] The identification of the toponyms remains a much-debated topic (Almonte 2017, 1–43; 2020, 148–49).

nia flowers under the name *qizihua* 梔子花, comparing them to safflowers and locating them, again, in the territory of *Dashi* 大食, the Arabs (Hirth, Rockhill 1966, 202). According to those sources, gardenias were generally associated with the West, particularly with Arab regions.

Shen Cengzhi and Fujita Toyohashi situated *Taji'na* in India. As noted by Su Jiqing, the former considered *Dali* 達里 a toponym for Delhi, thus locating *Taji'na* in central India, while the Japanese scholar locates it in the northwestern part of the same subcontinent (Su 1981, 305–6; Fujita 1936, 134–35). In his annotated edition, Fujita cites the *Zhufan zhi,* raising the question as to whether the toponym *Taji'na* 撻吉那 might have been mistakenly derived from *Chanaji* 茶那咭, the position of the last two characters having been inverted. *Chanaji* 茶那咭 in the *Zhufan zhi* is the capital of *Pengjialuo* 鵬茄囉, which corresponds to a place located in present-day India (Hirth, Rockhill 1966, 97). Fujita then suggests that *Taji'na* might be in the area of the desert of Jahar, but without specifying where (Fujita 1935, 134–135; Su 1981, 306), although another Japanese scholar, Kuwata Rokuro, is of a different opinion, and his notes on *Taji'na* in "New Annotations on *Daoyi zhilüe*" (*Daoyi zhilüe shin shō* 島夷志略新證, 1969) can be found translated in Chinese at the end of Su Jiqing's scholarly edition. Kuwata states that *Taji'na* is Deccan, in present-day Mysore in southern India. According to him, this toponym derives from Dakshina, the Sanskrit name for Deccan (Su 1981, 403–10). Although Su Jiqing's annotated edition excludes this hypothesis (Su 1981, 306), the local products that are reported make this claim not entirely implausible.

Having considered all the above, Su Jiqing situates *Taji'na* in Persia. According to him, *Taji'na* would have sounded quite similar to Tahiri, the ancient city also known as Siraf, which between the 9th and the 10th centuries was one of the most famous international and commercial ports of call in the Fars region. According to Su Jiqing, the *-hi* sound can be read as *-ki*, and *-ri* can be read as *-ni* or *-na*. However, it is worth noting that when Wang travelled to the Persian Gulf the glory days of Siraf had already passed.[12] At that time, as Su Jiqing also stresses, the island of Qeys (Kish) had already taken its place as the principal port of the gulf (Su 1981, 306). Moreover, Wang's contemporary, the writer Wu Jian, mentioned Siraf in his *Qingjing si ji* 清淨寺記 (*Notes on the Qingji Temple,* 1350) using its ancient name *Sanawei* 撒那威 rather than the name Tahiri (Su 1981, 306). Su Jiqing also quotes the annotated translation of *Zhufan zhi*, observing that when analysing the section *Dashi*, Hirth and Rockhill encountered the toponym *Silianguo* 思連國, which they considered to be either Siraf or Shiraz, but without making a definitive choice (Hirth, Rockhill 1966, 122; Su 1981, 306–7).

From India to Persia, the location of *Taji'na* then shifted further to the West as Shen Fuwei claimed that Wang Dayuan reached the even more distant land of Morocco. Shen backs up his argument on the ground of phonetics, stating that if the Minnan dialect, which is typical of Fujian, is taken into account, then *Taji'na*

[12] Siraf's importance lasted until the city was destroyed by earthquake in 977 (Schottenhammer, Xiao 2016, 145–6).

should be considered similar to Tangier, since the *r* of Tangier is pronounced as an *n* (Shen 1990, 397). If his assumption is correct, Wang Dayuan could be considered the perfect counterpart of Ibn Battuta, who reached Quanzhou from Tangier in approximately the same period.

The different hypotheses on the location of *Taji'na* continue on each side of the debate when other details are examined. From the text, *Taji'na* is in the land of *Dali* "*guo ju Dali zhi di* 國居達里之地", which indicates Tabriz in Iran according to Su Jiqing, reiterated in Zheng and Wang's annotated edition (2022, 99), the toponym resembles the name Tauris which is used to identify the Iranian city. In Yuan times Tabriz was the capital of the Ilkhanate domain and was considered a metropolis, a multicultural and economic centre lying on the trade routes between East and West (Rossabi 2010, 98). Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta described the magnificence of Tauris, celebrating its markets and the refined products one could find there, such as its silky fabrics and precious stones.[13] On the contrary, Shen Fuwei (1990, 398), arguing in favour of a Moroccan origin of *Taji'na*, states that *Dali* refers to the Berber tribe of Darisa, quoting the medieval historian Ibn Ḵhaldūn (1332-1406). The costumes of the people of *Taji'na* are compared to those of Qiang ("*suyu qiang tong* 俗與羌同"), whose main characteristics were nomadism and sheep herding (Wang 2002, 134). In this sense, apart from the phonetic similarities, *Dali* might arguably refer to Berber people who were often transhumant stock-breeders.

The section continues with the description of the location of *Taji'na*, and even a simple expression such as *Xiyu* 西域, generally translated as "Western territory", gives rise to such considerations. The text states that Dali corresponds to the ancient Western Territory, or to what once was the Western Territory ("*ji gu zhi Xiyu* 即古之西域"). Traditionally, *Xiyu* indicated everything to the west of the Chinese border. In a broad sense, this included India, the Near East and northern Africa, as stated by Zheng and Wang (2022, 99), although it was generally used to refer to India or the Middle East. According to Shen Fuwei, *Xiyu* should be read as a translation of the word Maghreb, which means the West, Western territory. However, it seems that there were already toponyms for Maghreb or Morocco in Song times, such as *Lingwai daida*'s *Mojiaguo* 默伽國[14] and *Mojialieguo* 默伽獵國 of the *Zhufan zhi*,[15] while the *Shilin guangji* 事林廣記 (*Vast Record from the Forest of Things,* 1264) mentions *Mojialaguo* 默伽臘國: all names that indicated the region of Maghreb or Morocco according to Ptak (2022, 21).[16]

[13] On Marco Polo's description, see Polo, Moule, Pelliot 1938, 104-105; Rossabi 2010, 97. On Ibn Battuta's description, see Gibb 2005, 101.

[14] Chapter *Waiguomen xia* 外國門下, Section 52 *Hanghai waiyi* 航海外夷 (Almonte 2020, 183-6).

[15] Volume 1, *juan shang* 卷上, chapter *Zhiguo* 志國 (Countries), section 38, *Haishang zaguo* 海上雜國 (Countries in the sea). See also Hirth and Rockhill (1966, 154).

[16] Almonte (2020, 183–86) when discussing Zhou Qufei's work is not entirely convinced that *Mojia* 默伽 referred to Maghreb or Morocco, not only because of the great distance separating Song China from northwest Africa – which, however, might justify the lack of information – but because of the position of the *Mojia* section in the work.

Even though it is not improbable for Wang Dayuan to use a different toponym to his predecessors, it is interesting to note that, if Shen is correct and *Xiyu* stands for Maghreb, Wang would have added a new meaning to the original, thus making *Xiyu* a semantic loan (Masini 1993, 129).

When analysing the section, there are also other details relating to the description of the local population and customs that need to be taken into consideration. For example, examining how people from *Taji'na* made a living, which was by collecting *'yahu shi'* ("*Cai yahu shi wei huo* 採鴉鵲石為活"). According to Su Jiqing the word *yahu* is a phonetic loan from *yāqūt* ياقوت, meaning "precious stone, gem" in Arabic, but also "ruby" in Persian (Su 1981, 154).[17] Central Asia was famous for its gems, as we read in Marco Polo's travelogue or in the account of Ibn Battuta, who, in describing Tabriz market, observes that the Ilkhanate capital was rich in precious stones (Gibb 2005, 101). In the *Daoyi zhilüe,* the section called *Mingjialuo* 明家儸[18] explains that if the gems are red coloured, they are called *yahu* ("*qi se hong huo, ming yahu ye* 其色紅活，名鴉鵲也"). It seems that *yahu* stones were red gems, or at least are considered as such in this travelogue.[19] Another text from the Yuan period, the *Chuogenglu* 輟耕錄 (*Retirement to the Countryside,* 1366) by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, mentions *yahu* stones and their red colour.[20] If *yahu* specifically indicates rubies rather than a gemstone in general, our attention again shifts, since the most famous ruby mines in ancient times were those in Badakhshan in Afghanistan (Bezhan 2011, Melikian-Chirvani 2001), in addition to those in Sri Lanka (Block, Figg 2000, 209).[21]

4. Final Remarks

Wang Dayuan travelled to very distant lands recording information on places that had never been mentioned by previous Chinese sources and would not occur in later ones. Some of Wang's notes may have been derived from indirect sources, as is common for ancient geographical works, making it more difficult to determine if the author had truly visited all the places he described. While many toponyms have already been identified by academics, many unsolved

[17] The dictionary *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典 states that *yahu shi* 鴉鵲石 are blue gemstones. A phonetic loan from *yāqūt* ياقوت would be the homophone *yahu* 鴉忽.

[18] The consulted version of *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (*Complete Library of the Four Branches of Literature*) recorded this toponym as *Mingjialuo* 明家儸, while other editions use *Pengjialuo* 朋家儸. According to Su Jiqing, the place name is only found in this text, and he identifies it with Maggona, Sri Lanka. According to Zheng and Wang's annotated edition, this was an ancient Sri Lankan port near Kalutara (Su 1981, 152–3; Zheng, Wang 2022, 46).

[19] According to Zhou Yunzhong (2014, 118), the *yahu shi* are black pearls, which would confirm his hypothesis of the location of *Taji'na* in southwest India.

[20] For a translation of the passage see Bretschneider (1910, 174). The Chinese text is available on the Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=389039&searchu=%E9%B8%A6%E9%B9%98&remap=gb.

[21] Although Wang Dayuan may have ignored the fact that these products could have been imported from other countries.

questions are still subject to scholarly debate, including the case presented here. Even though the hypotheses are detailed and accurate, at present it is not possible to state definitively where *Taji'na* was located or to prove that Wang Dayuan reached Morocco. However, the Mediterranean Sea was probably known in Yuan times, as the *Kangnido* map (*Map of Integrated Regions and Terrains and of Historical Countries and Capitals, Honil gangli yeokdae gukdo jido,* 1402) shows. The Korean map, based on previous Chinese, Arabic and Persian geographical sources (Park 2012, 104–5), depicts Asia, Europe, and Africa, mentioning numerous countries and towns in the Mediterranean area, even though the Mediterranean Sea per se was not well delineated (Kenzheakhmet 2016, 113–14). Previous Chinese sources had mentioned a "Western Sea *Xihai* 西海" to indicate the Mediterranean (Liu 2011) and at that time Morocco had already appeared in geographical treatises (Ptak 2022); even Sicily had been presented to Chinese readers through Zhao Rukuo's work (Fracasso 1982; Vinci 2013), but still very little was known. Thus, it is not clear whether Wang Dayuan ever crossed the so called "Sea between lands" and reached the extreme West. Nonetheless, the mere idea of this possibility opens up new horizons, providing the opportunity for further research and debate.

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