

July 16, 2014

Last week Pasternak, this week Shostakovitch. [Real Clear History](#) writes on how Dmitri survived Stalin and the rest of the Russian true believers in powerful government.

Consider a Russian born in 1900 with a natural 70-year lifespan. What are his chances of survival? He would have to endure the First World War, the Revolution, Civil War and famine, Stalinist terror in the 1930s, the invasion of Hitler, the remainder of Stalin's life, the Khrushchev years, and the first part of the Brezhnev stagnation.

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Turning our attention to another musical genre, [The Village Voice](#) has the story about Dave Robinson, the record producer who made Bob Marley a household name. *At the time of his death, in May 1981, Bob Marley was 36 years old, reggae's biggest star, and the father of at least eleven children. He was not, however, a big seller.*

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Two years after Marley's passing, Chris Blackwell, the founder of Marley's label, Island Records, brought Robinson in to run his U.K. operation. Robinson's first assignment was to put out a compilation of Bob Marley's hits. He took one look at the artist's sales figures and was shocked.

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The result of that coolly pragmatic vision was *Legend: The Best of Bob Marley and the Wailers*, an album that became one of the top-selling records of all time, far exceeding even the ambitious goals Robinson had set for it. Unlike the Backstreet Boys' *Millennium*, 'N Sync's *No Strings Attached* and many other best-selling albums in recent decades, *Legend* isn't a time capsule of a passing musical fad. Selling roughly 250,000 units annually in the U.S. alone, it has become a rite of passage in pop-music puberty. It's no wonder that on July 1 Universal released yet another deluxe reissue of the album, this time celebrating its 30th anniversary.

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A few years ago, [Nicholas Kristoff](#) went to an island of the coast of Kenya seeking to answer questions grown out of the legend of an ancient (1421) Chinese shipwreck on the coast of Africa.

From the sea, the tiny East African island of Pate, just off the Kenyan coast, looks much as it must have in the 15th century: an impenetrable shore of endless mangrove trees. As my little boat bounced along the waves in the gray dawn, I could see no antennae or buildings or even gaps where trees had been cut down, no sign of human habitation, nothing but a dense and mysterious jungle.

The boatman drew as close as he could to a narrow black-sand beach, and I splashed ashore. My local Swahili interpreter led the way through the forest, along a winding trail scattered with mangoes, coconuts and occasional seashells deposited by high tides. The tropical sun was firmly overhead when we finally came upon a village of stone houses with thatched roofs, its dirt paths sheltered by palm trees. The village's inhabitants, much lighter-skinned than people on the Kenyan mainland, emerged barefoot to stare at me with the same curiosity with which I was studying them. These were people I had come halfway around the world to see, in the hope of solving an ancient historical puzzle.

"Tell me," I asked the first group I encountered, "where did the people here come from? Long ago, did foreign sailors ever settle here?"

The answer was a series of shrugs. "I've never heard about that," one said. "You'll have to ask the elders."

I tried several old men and women without success. Finally the villagers led me to the patriarch of the village, Bwana Mkuu Al-Bauri, the keeper of oral traditions. He was a frail old man with gray stubble on his cheeks, head and chest. He wore a yellow sarong around his waist; his ribs pressed through the taut skin on his bare torso. Al-Bauri hobbled out of his bed, resting on a cane and the arm of a grandson. He claimed to be 121 years old; a pineapple-size tumor jutted from the left side of his chest.

"I know this from my grandfather, who himself was the keeper of history here," the patriarch told me in an unexpectedly clear voice. "Many, many years ago, there was a ship from China that wrecked on the rocks off the coast near here. The sailors swam ashore near the village of Shanga -- my ancestors were there and saw it themselves. The Chinese were visitors, so we helped those Chinese men and gave them food and shelter, and then they married our women. Although they do not live in this village, I believe their descendants still can be found somewhere else on this island."

I almost felt like hugging Bwana Al-Bauri. For months I had been poking around obscure documents and research reports, trying to track down a legend of an ancient Chinese shipwreck that had led to a settlement on the African coast. My interest arose from a fascination with what to me is a central enigma of the millennium: why did the West triumph over the East?

For most of the last several thousand years, it would have seemed far likelier that Chinese or Indians, not Europeans, would dominate the world by the year 2000, and that America and Australia would be settled by Chinese rather than by the inhabitants of a backward island called Britain. The reversal of fortunes of East and West strikes me as the biggest news story of the millennium, and one of its most unexpected as well.

As a resident of Asia for most of the past 13 years, I've been searching for an explanation. It has always seemed to me that the turning point came in the early 1400's, when Admiral Zheng He sailed from China to conquer the world. Zheng He (pronounced jung huh) was an improbable commander of a great Chinese fleet, in that he was a Muslim from a rebel family and had been seized by the Chinese Army when he was still a boy. Like many other prisoners of the time, he was castrated -- his sexual organs completely hacked off, a process that killed many of those who suffered it. But he was a brilliant and tenacious boy who grew up to be physically imposing. A natural leader, he had the good fortune to be assigned, as a houseboy, to the household of a great prince, Zhu Di. ...

The voyages of Zheng He have led to a theory propounded in Gavin Menzies' book **1421: The Year China Discovered America**. The blog [How Stuff Works](#) have examined Menzies claims and finds them wanting.

... From its introduction in 2003, Gavin Menzies' 1421 theory has come under assault. The writing that seeks to disprove Menzies is at least as long as his book. One question perhaps looms largest when approaching the 1421 theory: If the Chinese had a presence in the Americas prior to Christopher Columbus, then why isn't their mark left indelibly on the face of American civilization?

The Norse, who sailed as far west as Newfoundland in their travels across the Atlantic, left remnants of their visits to North America. Their folklore includes accounts of the Vikings' encounters with Native Americans. The crumbling remains of the stone outposts they built during their stay can still be seen. This was 1,000 years ago, and 500 years before Columbus' voyage. Yet the Vikings brief settlement in North America is still evident. If the Chinese had such a thorough impact on societies in the Americas just 70 years before Columbus' arrival, then why isn't evidence of their presence everywhere?

What's more, there's a distinct lack of cross-cultural pollination between the new world and China. When the Europeans arrived in the Americas, they brought with them things that have never before been seen in the continents, like steel and horses. But more importantly, they took back exotic treasures from the new world. Maize and tomatoes, along with vast amounts of plundered

gold, found its way to Europe upon the ships of returning explorers. Where's the Incan gold or the corn of the Aztecs in China? ...

The Economist posts on the days when New York City becomes ManhattanHenge. *WHEN traffic lights changed to red on the evening of July 11th, hundreds of New Yorkers raced out to the middle of Manhattan's roads, cameras in hand, safety be damned. They faced west, where the setting sun was lighting up the sky. The skyscrapers and high-rises framed the fiery orb which lit up the surrounding glass, brick and stone buildings spectacularly. For the next 15 minutes or so, the pattern repeated. Traffic lights changed, the sun worshippers took to the street to capture the stunning sight, until the sun disappeared. The cosmic phenomenon is known as Manhattanhenge, or the Manhattan Solstice. ...*

... The phenomenon is not designed by gods or man. The perfect alignment is a cosmically happy accident. Manhattan's street grid was designed for 1m people in 1811, when the population was only 100,000. It runs east to west from the East River to the Hudson River and roughly north to south—28.9 degrees east of north, to be exact. Because the street grid is not strictly laid out to true north, Manhattanhenge takes place around May 28th and again around July 11th, each date roughly three weeks before and after the summer solstice. The relatively low topography in New Jersey across the Hudson River to the west, coupled with Manhattan being an island, means the horizon is mostly unobstructed. The best places to view the sun and the blazing skyscrapers are at 14th, 23rd, 34th, 42nd and 57th Streets. ...

Real Clear History

[Surviving Stalin's Terror and Censorship](#)

by Phillip K. Decker

Consider a Russian born in 1900 with a natural 70-year lifespan. What are his chances of survival? He would have to endure the First World War, the Revolution, Civil War and famine, Stalinist terror in the 1930s, the invasion of Hitler, the remainder of Stalin's life, the Khrushchev years, and the first part of the Brezhnev stagnation.

The remarkable Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), personal target of Joseph Stalin and Party censors, managed to survive all these periods while maintaining his artistic integrity.

Shostakovich encountered harsh challenges throughout his career, but his greatest test was during the time of Stalin. The personalized terror campaign that Stalin's government waged against Shostakovich is emblematic of the extent to which the Soviet state desired control over its citizens' cultural and aesthetic lives. During Stalin's rule, Shostakovich suffered two major denunciations, in 1936 and 1948, and numerous smaller attacks were interspersed throughout his career. His music was frequently deemed "formalist," "counterrevolutionary," "anti-Soviet," or "pro-Western"; these epithets came in varying degrees of intensity, and their issuers more than once threatened Shostakovich's life.

The artistic constraints imposed on the composer forced him to think deeply about how to express himself truthfully within an external guise of Party orthodoxy. A public figure's survival in the Stalin era required an astute political eye, adaptability, and a measure of plain luck. Shostakovich was fortunate to have all three of these. What made him particularly successful, in a cultural and historical sense, was that he deployed these gifts within an unforgiving environment while remaining faithful to his creative impulses.

Opportunities to adapt, with disastrous consequences for failure, emerged during Shostakovich's rise as a composer in the mid-1930s. His opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District* attained enormous popularity in 1934 and 1935, and in these years Shostakovich became a celebrated name in urban households. Stalin attended a performance in early 1936; the next day, an angry anonymous article appeared prominently in *Pravda*, called "Muddle Instead of Music," which viciously attacked the opera as "vulgar" and "primitive."

Opera houses were ordered to cancel performances and Shostakovich's other work fell from official favor. Accusations of "corruption" and "pro-Western formalism" erupted in the state-run press, while intellectuals distanced themselves from the composer, as his name had become toxic. Shostakovich fearfully read *Pravda*, carefully tracking nuances in the Party's stance toward him. It is in this period that Shostakovich first experienced the brunt of Stalin's terror. He started sleeping in the hallway of his apartment complex in expectation of arrest, not wishing to wake his wife when the moment occurred. He became an obsessive smoker and developed an array of nervous tics.

The denunciation of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District* forced Shostakovich, with his life on the line, to rework his style into a more acceptable idiom. In the midst of his denunciation, he withdrew the Fourth Symphony from rehearsal before it could be premiered. For the next few years, he concentrated on writing film scores to make up for lost income and to keep a low profile. He also set to music poems by Alexander Pushkin, a "safe" author.

After some time, he released the Fifth Symphony of 1937, which was in a simplified design tolerable to party bosses, popular with audiences, and personally satisfying. Shostakovich was rehabilitated, at least partially, in the eye of the state, and again enjoyed public approval. His choices reveal a sharp mind that could function under acute stress. Adaptability and political shrewdness proved invaluable to Shostakovich, who survived where others did not (e.g. Shostakovich's talented but careless acquaintance Osip Mandelstam, who died in a gulag in 1938).

The onset of the Second World War radically altered the political calculus in the Soviet Union. Presumably realizing his error in executing dozens of qualified officers during the late 1930s, Stalin chose to retain what had suddenly become another vital asset — artistic talent. Stalin appears to have recognized that while in peacetime it was possible to use Marxist themes as the basis of his regime's legitimacy, in wartime a much more emotionally riveting and psychologically powerful force would be necessary. The Party redeployed imagery of Russia's rich history, religious tradition and cultural life, encouraging emotional connections to "Russianness" as opposed to the impersonal messages of socialist realism. The profound "Russianness" of Shostakovich's music was in line with this national priority.

The Seventh Symphony in C Major (1942, "Leningrad") is ostensibly a musical testament to the suffering of the Russian people during the war, but features a significant double meaning. The circumstances of the invasion permitted Shostakovich to skillfully express his true feelings toward the Party and its leader while simultaneously inspiring Soviet citizens, and indeed other Allied citizens, to defy Hitler's armies.

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While the Second World War is the most famous example of Shostakovich's alertness of shifts in the Party's stance, he would use other changes to his advantage as well. After Stalin's death the composer capitalized on the Khrushchev thaw to be more open in his criticism of the government. Like the Seventh Symphony before it, the Thirteenth Symphony in B flat Minor (1962, "Babi Yar") — which commemorates the slaughter of thousands of Jews by Nazi forces — disparages the flaws of the Soviet state, particularly its failure to put a memorial on the site of the murder and misinformation regarding war crimes.

The symphony's central text is Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem "Babi Yar," which is, by Soviet standards, scathing in its condemnation of the regime. Khrushchev's apparatchiks gave both the poet and the composer a hard time, launching yet another smear campaign and pressuring musicians to avoid the symphony. However, Shostakovich correctly sensed that the danger was not comparable to that he had experienced in 1936: accordingly, he refused to withdraw the work from performance. Like the Seventh, the Thirteenth was praised by a public which appreciated the composer's honesty.

Nevertheless, no amount of careful posturing could entirely protect a Soviet citizen from lethal persecution. Shostakovich enjoyed some luck, the third factor in question. Had Stalin desired it, Shostakovich and his family could have disappeared into the night, his famous name written off as a case of "retirement," and his image would have been airbrushed out of photographs. Shostakovich's attention to detail and quick wits defended him somewhat — he would have been a high-profile murder — but he was also lucky that Stalin chose not to kill him.

Shostakovich's triumph was his ability to find an original idiom; infuse it with personal belief, emotion, and commentary; and disguise it effectively while under severe strain. He danced among dangerous flames without prostituting himself to the Party. Deft political maneuvering — and, indeed, simple luck — constitute an extraordinary Soviet success story.

Philip K. Decker writes on the Soviet, European, and American history.

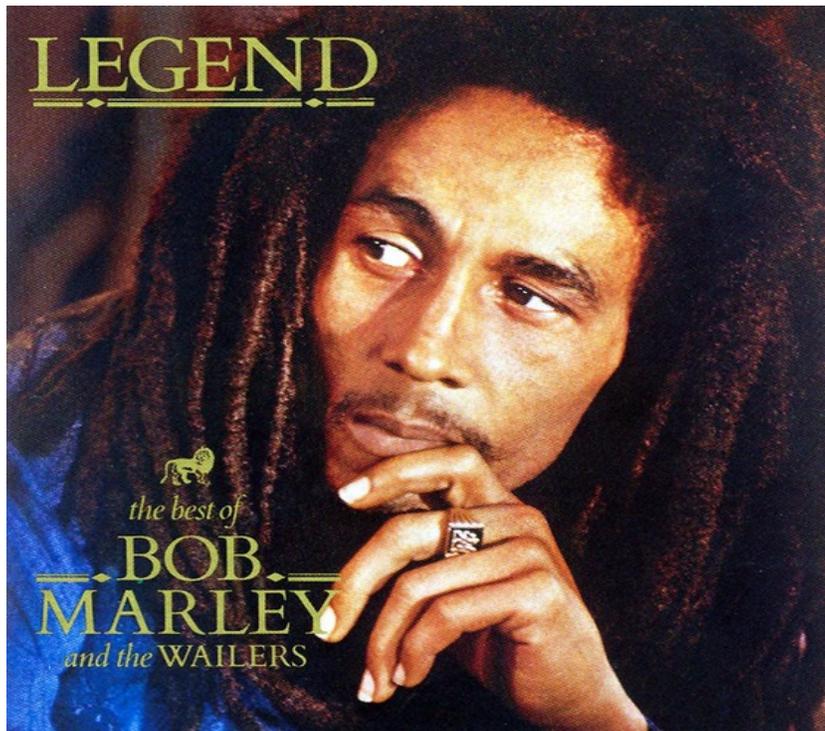
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[Shostakovich 7th \(Leningrad\) Symphony](#)

Village Voice

The White Album: How Bob Marley Posthumously Became a Household Name

by Chris Kornelis



For Legend, Island Records' Dave Robinson chose a cover photo in which Marley appears more reflective than rebellious.

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Marley's best-selling album, 1977's *Exodus*, had only moved about 650,000 units in the U.S. and fewer than 200,000 in the U.K. They were not shabby numbers, but they weren't in line with his profile.

"Marley was a labor of love for employees of Island Records," says Charly Prevost, who ran Island in the United States for a time in the '80s. "U2 and Frankie Goes to Hollywood and Robert Palmer is what paid your salary."

Blackwell handed Robinson — the cofounder of [Stiff Records](#), famous for rock acts such as Nick Lowe and Elvis Costello — an outline of his vision for the compilation, which Blackwell says presented Marley as somewhat "militant."

"I always saw Bob as someone who had a strong kind of political feeling," he says, "somebody who was representing the dispossessed of the world."

Robinson balked. He'd seen the way Island had marketed Marley in the past and believed it was precisely this type of portrayal that was responsible for the mediocre numbers.

"Record companies can, just like a documentary, slant [their subjects] in whatever direction they like," Robinson says. "If you don't get the demographic right and sorted in your mind, you can present it just slightly off to the left or the right. I thought that was happening and had restricted his possible market."

Robinson believed he could sell a million copies of the album, but to do it he would have to repackage not just a collection of songs but Marley himself.

"My vision of Bob from a marketing point of view," Robinson says, "was to sell him to the white world."

The result of that coolly pragmatic vision was *Legend: The Best of Bob Marley and the Wailers*, an album that became one of the top-selling records of all time, far exceeding even the ambitious goals Robinson had set for it. Unlike the Backstreet Boys' Millennium, 'N Sync's No Strings Attached and many other best-selling albums in recent decades, *Legend* isn't a time capsule of a passing musical fad. Selling roughly 250,000 units annually in the U.S. alone, it has become a rite of passage in pop-music puberty. It's no wonder that on July 1 Universal released yet another deluxe reissue of the album, this time celebrating its 30th anniversary.

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"It doesn't just define a career, it defines a genre," says SoundScan analyst Dave Bakula. "I don't think you've got another genre where you've got that one album."

Robert Nesta Marley was born on his grandfather's farm in the Jamaican countryside in 1945. His father, Norval Marley, was white, of British descent. He was largely absent from his son's life and died when Marley was ten. Two years later, his mother, Cedella Booker, an African Jamaican, moved the family to Trench Town, a poor, artistically fertile neighborhood in Kingston.

A budding musician at age sixteen Marley scored an audition with a not-yet-famous Jimmy Cliff, then a label scout.

"My first impression of him was he was a poet and he had a great sense of rhythm," says Cliff, now 66 and on tour himself this summer. "And I think he carried that on throughout his career."

In 1962, Cliff's label, Beverley's, released Marley's first single, "Judge Not," a ska shuffle. Soon after, Marley formed the Wailing Wailers (later shortened to the Wailers) with a core group of musicians that included Neville Livingston (a.k.a. Bunny Wailer) and Peter Tosh. All three men practiced Rastafari, a religion and lifestyle that emphasizes the spiritual qualities of marijuana.

"We didn't use no drugs; we only used herb," says Aston "Family Man" Barrett, a bass player, long-time Marley collaborator and current leader of the Wailers. "We use it for spiritual meditation and musical inspiration."

The band released two albums for Island Records that merged reggae with rock & roll. The initial printing for the first LP, 1973's *Catch a Fire*, opened on a hinge to look like a Zippo lighter, at a time when Americans could do hard time for possessing even a single joint. *Burnin'*, also from 1973, featured the Marley composition "I Shot the Sheriff," a song about police brutality, which became a hit for Eric Clapton. On the back cover of the LP, Marley is smoking a fatty.

When Livingston and Tosh left the band, in 1974, Marley continued on as Bob Marley and the Wailers. He also became entrenched in Jamaica's often violent political wars. In 1976 he and several members of his entourage were shot two days before he performed at the Smile Jamaica Concert, an event intended to help ease tensions ahead of an election. The gunmen were never found.

In 1980 Marley visited Cliff at a studio in Kingston. By this time both men were internationally recognized reggae stars; Cliff had broken through with the 1972 movie *The Harder They Come* and its corresponding soundtrack. Though Marley had been treated for a malignant melanoma on his toe in 1977, Cliff noticed nothing out of the ordinary about his health as Marley embarked on a tour in support of his latest album, *Uprising*.

Al Anderson, a guitarist with Bob Marley and the Wailers, remembers the Uprising tour as "an amazing time," with the band picking up momentum. But when the tour got to Ireland, Anderson says, Marley mentioned that he was having trouble singing and performing. "He knew he wasn't well," says Anderson.

On September 20, 1980, following a two-night stand at Madison Square Garden, Marley went for a jog in Central Park. He collapsed, had what appeared to be a seizure, and was rushed to a hospital. Doctors told him that cancer had spread throughout his body. His next show would be his last.

It's not that Bob Marley didn't have white fans when he was alive. Caucasian college students in the United States — particularly those around Midwestern schools like the University of Michigan, Prevost says — constituted a large percentage of his base. But in order for the compilation to meet Robinson's lofty sales goals, those students' parents had to buy the album, too.

Robinson had a hunch that suburban record buyers were uneasy with Marley's image — that of a perpetually stoned, politically driven iconoclast associated with violence. And so he commissioned a London-based researcher named Gary Trueman to conduct focus groups with white suburban record buyers in England. Trueman also met with traditional Marley fans to ensure the label didn't package the album in a way that would offend his core audience.

Less than a decade before violence and drugs became a selling point for gangsta rap, the suburban groups told Trueman precisely what Robinson suspected: They were put off by the way Marley was portrayed. They weren't keen on the dope, the religion, the violent undertones, or even reggae as a genre. But they loved Marley's music.

"There was almost this sense of guilt that they hadn't got a Bob Marley album," Trueman says. "They couldn't really understand why they hadn't bought one."

At home one night, Trueman mentioned to his wife that many of the respondents referred to Marley as a "*Legend*." He said he was going to recommend the title *The Legendary Bob Marley*. She shot back: "No, just call it *Legend: The Best of Bob Marley*."

An Island employee named Trevor Wyatt, known as the label's reggae guy, gave Robinson an initial list of songs, which were played to focus groups for feedback. Robinson spent months arranging the order of the tracks. At the time, his wife was pregnant; they'd go for drives, listening to different sequences of the album on cassette. Robinson swears that his unborn son would "kick his mother to pieces" when he liked what he heard.

"The running order is so crucial," Robinson says. "Some people like to do it chronologically, and I think that's all rubbish. When you're doing a greatest-hits, you have to get it to work. It has to get to the end and you want to put it back on again."

Perhaps most critically, Robinson softened Marley's image. He chose a cover photo in which Marley appears more reflective than rebellious. He tapped Paul McCartney to make a cameo in the music video for the album's first single, "One Love," which portrayed Marley as a smiling family man. He even chose not to use the word "reggae" to promote the record in a marketing campaign that included radio and television commercials — a novel and expensive idea at the time, but one Robinson felt was necessary.

Released three years after Marley's death, *Legend* was an immediate, unqualified hit in the U.K. In the sprawling U.S., success didn't come as quickly. Prevost says Island spent \$50,000 on TV commercials that didn't move the needle. But the album sold gradually and relentlessly. SoundScan didn't start tracking album sales in the U.S. until seven years after *Legend's* 1984 release, yet it's still one of the top ten sellers in the SoundScan era, with more than 11 million albums sold. Universal Music Group, which is now Island's parent company, says that worldwide, more than 27 million copies of *Legend* have shipped.



Dave Robinson, cofounder of Stiff Records, worked on Legend for Island Records in the early '80s.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its success, *Legend* left behind it a host of problems.

The millions of dollars that Marley albums have brought in have sparked a tug of war between Marley's musicians and the songs' rights holders; numerous lawsuits have been filed by members

of the Wailers against Island and Universal. In 2006, a justice in London's High Court dismissed a lawsuit brought by Aston Barrett against Island seeking \$113 million for royalties and songwriting credits.

"There was a lot of hard work from the Wailers band members to help produce Bob's music that just never got credited," says guitarist Anderson, who, like Barrett, recorded extensively with Marley and who appears on *Legend* cuts like "Could You Be Loved."

(Neither Chris Blackwell's spokesperson nor Universal's spokesperson responded to requests for comment about the allegation.)

Meanwhile, Barrett's and Anderson's camps have been involved in lawsuits over the right to perform under the Wailers name, and today each musician leads a competing version of the group. Anderson's group is called the Original Wailers, and Barrett's band is known simply as the Wailers.

Even *Legend's* music itself is not without its critics.

Writing for [Slate](#), Field Maloney called the album "a defanged and overproduced selection of Marley's music. Listening to *Legend* to understand Marley is like reading *Bridget Jones's Diary* to get Jane Austen."

For their parts, Blackwell calls the album "wonderful," Anderson says it is "likable" and Cliff is ambivalent. "I have not listened to that record, really," he says.

While it's unfortunate that Marley didn't live to see the success of *Legend*, Robinson speculates that the album might never have been made on his watch.

"Greatest-hits projects, the ones that really work, unfortunately work mainly because the people are dead," he says. "These kinds of artists, left to their own devices, would have a different greatest-hits. A living artist will tell you that the greatest song he's ever written is the one he's last written."

Marley's son Julian has another theory: "Why do a greatest-hits album when you're still here doing great things?"

And yet musically, it's hard to argue that *Legend* isn't an iconic work. The songwriting on tracks like "No Woman, No Cry" and "Redemption Song" is so compelling that the works transcend genre, as Clapton's success with "I Shot the Sheriff" demonstrates.

It's also worth noting that Robinson didn't intend for the record to be comprehensive; he just wanted to get Marley's music onto stereos worldwide. In doing so, he did something bigger: He helped make Marley's image and message ubiquitous. Today you'll see the artist's face on beach towels and his lyrics on posters in countries from Russia to Chile.

And ironically, over the past three decades, rebelliousness and violence have become a routine method of marketing pop stars. Robinson may have softened Marley's image, but he didn't whitewash it. Marley remains an international touchstone of rebellion, known as much for his social and cultural convictions (and his affinity for good bud) as for his musical oeuvre.

Though *Legend* may be the preferred dinner-party soundtrack for polite company, it's also been the gateway drug for generations of Marley aficionados, who heard something in the record and wanted more.

Click below

[Here's the whole album](#)

[Redemption Song](#)

[Satisfy My Soul](#)

NY Times

[1492: The Prequel](#)

Decades before Columbus, Zheng He sailed from China with 300 ships and 28,000 men. His fleet got as far as Africa and could have easily reached America, but the Chinese turned back. What happened?

by Nicholas D. Kristoff

From the sea, the tiny East African island of Pate, just off the Kenyan coast, looks much as it must have in the 15th century: an impenetrable shore of endless mangrove trees. As my little boat bounced along the waves in the gray dawn, I could see no antennae or buildings or even gaps where trees had been cut down, no sign of human habitation, nothing but a dense and mysterious jungle.

The boatman drew as close as he could to a narrow black-sand beach, and I splashed ashore. My local Swahili interpreter led the way through the forest, along a winding trail scattered with mangoes, coconuts and occasional seashells deposited by high tides. The tropical sun was firmly overhead when we finally came upon a village of stone houses with thatched roofs, its dirt paths sheltered by palm trees. The village's inhabitants, much lighter-skinned than people on the Kenyan mainland, emerged barefoot to stare at me with the same curiosity with which I was studying them. These were people I had come halfway around the world to see, in the hope of solving an ancient historical puzzle.

"Tell me," I asked the first group I encountered, "where did the people here come from? Long ago, did foreign sailors ever settle here?"

The answer was a series of shrugs. "I've never heard about that," one said. "You'll have to ask the elders."

I tried several old men and women without success. Finally the villagers led me to the patriarch of the village, Bwana Mkuu Al-Bauri, the keeper of oral traditions. He was a frail old man with gray



Chinese blood? Some inhabitants of the African island of Pate believe they're descended from Chinese sailors.

stubble on his cheeks, head and chest. He wore a yellow sarong around his waist; his ribs pressed through the taut skin on his bare torso. Al-Bauri hobbled out of his bed, resting on a cane and the arm of a grandson. He claimed to be 121 years old; a pineapple-size tumor jutted from the left side of his chest.

"I know this from my grandfather, who himself was the keeper of history here," the patriarch told me in an unexpectedly clear voice. "Many, many years ago, there was a ship from China that wrecked on the rocks off the coast near here. The sailors swam ashore near the village of Shanga -- my ancestors were there and saw it themselves. The Chinese were visitors, so we helped those Chinese men and gave them food and shelter, and then they married our women. Although they do not live in this village, I believe their descendants still can be found somewhere else on this island."

I almost felt like hugging Bwana Al-Bauri. For months I had been poking around obscure documents and research reports, trying to track down a legend of an ancient Chinese shipwreck that had led to a settlement on the African coast. My interest arose from a fascination with what to me is a central enigma of the millennium: why did the West triumph over the East?

For most of the last several thousand years, it would have seemed far likelier that Chinese or Indians, not Europeans, would dominate the world by the year 2000, and that America and Australia would be settled by Chinese rather than by the inhabitants of a backward island called Britain. The reversal of fortunes of East and West strikes me as the biggest news story of the millennium, and one of its most unexpected as well.

As a resident of Asia for most of the past 13 years, I've been searching for an explanation. It has always seemed to me that the turning point came in the early 1400's, when Admiral Zheng He sailed from China to conquer the world. Zheng He (pronounced jung huh) was an improbable commander of a great Chinese fleet, in that he was a Muslim from a rebel family and had been seized by the Chinese Army when he was still a boy. Like many other prisoners of the time, he was castrated -- his sexual organs completely hacked off, a process that killed many of those who suffered it. But he was a brilliant and tenacious boy who grew up to be physically imposing. A natural leader, he had the good fortune to be assigned, as a houseboy, to the household of a great prince, Zhu Di.

In time, the prince and Zheng He grew close, and they conspired to overthrow the prince's nephew, the Emperor of China. With Zheng He as one of the prince's military commanders, the revolt succeeded and the prince became China's Yongle Emperor. One of the emperor's first acts (after torturing to death those who had opposed him) was to reward Zheng He with the command of a great fleet that was to sail off and assert China's pre-eminence in the world.

Between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He led seven major expeditions, commanding the largest armada the world would see for the next five centuries. Not until World War I did the West mount anything comparable. Zheng He's fleet included 28,000 sailors on 300 ships, the longest of which were 400 feet. By comparison, Columbus in 1492 had 90 sailors on three ships, the biggest of which was 85 feet long. Zheng He's ships also had advanced design elements that would not be introduced in Europe for another 350 years, including balanced rudders and watertight bulwark compartments.

The sophistication of Zheng He's fleet underscores just how far ahead of the West the East once was. Indeed, except for the period of the Roman Empire, China had been wealthier, more advanced and more cosmopolitan than any place in Europe for several thousand years. Hangzhou, for example, had a population in excess of a million during the time it was China's capital (in the 12th century), and records suggest that as early as the 7th century, the city of Guangzhou had 200,000 foreign residents: Arabs, Persians, Malays, Indians, Africans and Turks. By contrast, the largest city in Europe in 1400 was probably Paris, with a total population of slightly more than 100,000.



Zheng He's armada was the largest the world would know for 500 years. The grandest vessels had nine masts and were 400 feet long. By comparison, Columbus's largest ship measured 85 feet.

A half-century before Columbus, Zheng He had reached East Africa and learned about Europe from Arab traders. The Chinese could easily have continued around the Cape of Good Hope and established direct trade with Europe. But as they saw it, Europe was a backward region, and China had little interest in the wool, beads and wine Europe had to trade. Africa had what China wanted - ivory, medicines, spices, exotic woods, even specimens of native wildlife.

In Zheng He's time, China and India together accounted for more than half of the world's gross national product, as they have for most of human history. Even as recently as 1820, China accounted for 29 percent of the global economy and India another 16 percent, according to the calculations of Angus Maddison, a leading British economic historian.

Asia's retreat into relative isolation after the expeditions of Zheng He amounted to a catastrophic missed opportunity, one that laid the groundwork for the rise of Europe and, eventually, America. Westerners often attribute their economic advantage today to the intelligence, democratic habits or hard work of their forebears, but a more important reason may well have been the folly of 15th-century Chinese rulers. That is why I came to be fascinated with Zheng He and set out earlier this year to retrace his journeys. I wanted to see what legacy, if any, remained of his achievement, and to figure out why his travels did not remake the world in the way that Columbus's did.

Zheng He lived in Nanjing, the old capital, where I arrived one day in February. Nanjing is a grimy metropolis on the Yangtze River in the heart of China. It has been five centuries since Zheng He's death, and his marks on the city have grown faint. The shipyards that built his fleet are still busy, and the courtyard of what had been his splendid 72-room mansion is now the Zheng He Memorial Park, where children roller-skate and old couples totter around for exercise. But though the park has a small Zheng He museum, it was closed -- for renovation, a caretaker told me, though he knew of no plans to reopen it.

I'd heard that Zheng He's tomb is on a hillside outside the city, and I set out to find it. It wasn't long before the road petered out, from asphalt to gravel to dirt to nothing. No tomb was in sight, so I approached an old man weeding a vegetable garden behind his house. Tang Yiming, 72, was still lithe and strong. His hair was gray and ragged where he had cut it himself, disastrously, in front of a mirror. Evidently lonely, he was delighted to talk, and offered to show me the path to the tomb. As we walked, I mentioned that I had read that there used to be an old Ming Dynasty tablet on Zheng He's grave.

"Oh, yeah, the old tablet," he said nonchalantly. "When I was a boy, there was a Ming Dynasty tablet here. When it disappeared, the Government offered a huge reward to anyone who would return it -- a reward big enough to build a new house. Seemed like a lot of money. But the problem was that we couldn't give it back. People around here are poor. We'd smashed it up to use as building materials."

A second mystery concerned what, if anything, is actually buried in Zheng He's tomb, since he is believed to have died on his last voyage and been buried at sea. So I said in passing that I'd heard tell the tomb is empty, and let my voice trail off.

"Oh, there's nothing in there," Tang said, a bit sadly. "No bones, nothing. That's for sure."

"How do you know?"

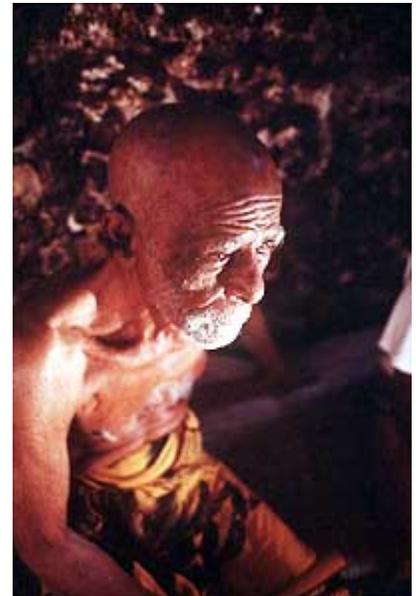
"In 1962, people dug up the grave, looking for anything to sell. We dug up the ground to one and a half times the height of a man. But there was absolutely nothing in there. It's empty."

The absence of impressive monuments to Zheng He in China today should probably come as no surprise, since his achievement was ultimately renounced. Curiously, it is not in China but in Indonesia where his memory has been most actively kept alive. Zheng He's expeditions led directly to the wave of Chinese immigration to Southeast Asia, and in some countries he is regarded today as a deity. In the Indonesia city of Semarang, for example, there is a large temple honoring Zheng He, located near a cave where he once nursed a sick friend. Indonesians still pray to Zheng He for a cure or good luck.

Not so in his native land. Zheng He was viewed with deep suspicion by China's traditional elite, the Confucian scholars, who made sure to destroy the archives of his journey. Even so, it is possible to learn something about his story from Chinese sources - from imperial archives and even the memoirs of crewmen. The historical record makes clear, for example, that it was not some sudden impulse of extroversion that led to Zheng He's achievement. It grew, rather, out of a long sailing tradition. Chinese accounts suggest that in the fifth century, a Chinese monk sailed to a mysterious "far east country" that sounds very much like Mayan Mexico, and Mayan art at that time suddenly began to include Buddhist symbols. By the 13th century, Chinese ships regularly traveled to India and occasionally to East Africa.

Zheng He's armada was far grander, of course, than anything that came before. His grandest vessels were the "treasure ships," 400 feet long and 160 feet wide, with nine masts raising red silk sails to the wind, as well as multiple decks and luxury cabins with balconies. His armada included supply ships to carry horses, troop transports, warships, patrol boats and as many as 20 tankers to carry fresh water. The full contingent of 28,000 crew members included interpreters for Arabic and other languages, astrologers to forecast the weather, astronomers to study the stars, pharmacologists to collect medicinal plants, ship-repair specialists, doctors and even two protocol officers to help organize official receptions.

In the aftermath of such an incredible undertaking, you somehow expect to find a deeper mark on Chinese history, a greater legacy. But perhaps the faintness of Zheng He's trace in contemporary



*The keeper of oral traditions,
Bwana Mkuu Al-Bauri.*

China is itself a lesson. In the end, an explorer makes history but does not necessarily change it, for his impact depends less on the trail he blazes than on the willingness of others to follow. The daring of a great expedition ultimately is hostage to the national will of those who remain behind.

In February I traveled To Calicut, a port town in southwestern India that was (and still is) the pepper capital of the world. The evening I arrived, I went down to the beach in the center of town to look at the coastline where Zheng He once had berthed his ships. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Calicut was one of the world's great ports, known to the Chinese as "the great country of the Western ocean." In the early 15th century, the sight of Zheng He's fleet riding anchor in Calicut harbor symbolized the strength of the world's two greatest powers, China and India.

On this sultry evening, the beach, framed by long piers jutting out to sea, was crowded with young lovers and ice-cream vendors. Those piers are all that remain of the port of Calicut, and you can see at a glance that they are no longer usable. The following day I visited the port offices, musty with handwritten ledgers of ship visits dating back nearly a century. The administrator of the port, Captain E. G. Mohanan, explained matter-of-factly what had happened. "The piers got old and no proper maintenance was ever carried out," he said, as a ceiling fan whirred tiredly overhead. "By the time we thought of it, it was not economical to fix it up." So in 1989, trade was halted, and one of the great ports of the world became no port at all.

The disappearance of a great Chinese fleet from a great Indian port symbolized one of history's biggest lost opportunities -- Asia's failure to dominate the second half of this millennium. So how did this happen?

While Zheng He was crossing the Indian Ocean, the Confucian scholar-officials who dominated the upper echelons of the Chinese Government were at political war with the eunuchs, a group they regarded as corrupt and immoral. The eunuchs' role at court involved looking after the concubines, but they also served as palace administrators, often doling out contracts in exchange for kickbacks. Partly as a result of their legendary greed, they promoted commerce. Unlike the scholars -- who owed their position to their mastery of 2,000-year-old texts -- the eunuchs, lacking any such roots in a classical past, were sometimes outward-looking and progressive. Indeed, one can argue that it was the virtuous, incorruptible scholars who in the mid-15th century set China on its disastrous course.

After the Yongle Emperor died in 1424, China endured a series of brutal power struggles; a successor emperor died under suspicious circumstances and ultimately the scholars emerged triumphant. They ended the voyages of Zheng He's successors, halted construction of new ships and imposed curbs on private shipping. To prevent any backsliding, they destroyed Zheng He's sailing records and, with the backing of the new emperor, set about dismantling China's navy.

By 1500 the Government had made it a capital offense to build a boat with more than two masts, and in 1525 the Government ordered the destruction of all oceangoing ships. The greatest navy in history, which a century earlier had 3,500 ships (by comparison, the United States Navy today has 324), had been extinguished, and China set a course for itself that would lead to poverty, defeat and decline.

Still, it was not the outcome of a single power struggle in the 1440's that cost China its worldly influence. Historians offer a host of reasons for why Asia eventually lost its way economically and was late to industrialize; two and a half reasons seem most convincing.

The first is that Asia was simply not greedy enough. The dominant social ethos in ancient China was Confucianism and in India it was caste, with the result that the elites in both nations looked

down their noses at business. Ancient China cared about many things -- prestige, honor, culture, arts, education, ancestors, religion, filial piety -- but making money came far down the list. Confucius had specifically declared that it was wrong for a man to make a distant voyage while his parents were alive, and he had condemned profit as the concern of "a little man." As it was, Zheng He's ships were built on such a grand scale and carried such lavish gifts to foreign leaders that the voyages were not the huge money spinners they could have been.

In contrast to Asia, Europe was consumed with greed. Portugal led the age of discovery in the 15th century largely because it wanted spices, a precious commodity; it was the hope of profits that drove its ships steadily farther down the African coast and eventually around the Horn to Asia. The profits of this trade could be vast: Magellan's crew once sold a cargo of 26 tons of cloves for 10,000 times the cost.

A second reason for Asia's economic stagnation is more difficult to articulate but has to do with what might be called a culture of complacency. China and India shared a tendency to look inward, a devotion to past ideals and methods, a respect for authority and a suspicion of new ideas. David S. Landes, a Harvard economist, has written of ancient China's "intellectual xenophobia"; the former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the "petrification of classes" and the "static nature" of Indian society. These are all different ways of describing the same economic and intellectual complacency.

Chinese elites regarded their country as the "Middle Kingdom" and believed they had nothing to learn from barbarians abroad. India exhibited much of the same self-satisfaction. "Indians didn't go to Portugal not because they couldn't but because they didn't want to," mused M. P. Sridharan, a historian, as we sat talking on the porch of his home in Calicut.

The 15th-century Portuguese were the opposite. Because of its coastline and fishing industry, Portugal always looked to the sea, yet rivalries with Spain and other countries shut it out of the Mediterranean trade. So the only way for Portugal to get at the wealth of the East was by conquering the oceans.

The half reason is simply that China was a single nation while Europe was many. When the Confucian scholars reasserted control in Beijing and banned shipping, their policy mistake condemned all of China. In contrast, European countries committed economic suicide selectively. So when Portugal slipped into a quasi-Chinese mind-set in the 16th century, slaughtering Jews and burning heretics and driving astronomers and scientists abroad, Holland and England were free to take up the slack.

When I first began researching Zheng He, I never thought I'd be traveling all the way to Africa to look for traces of his voyages. Then I came across a few intriguing references to the possibility of an ancient Chinese shipwreck that might have left some Chinese stranded on the island of Pate (pronounced pah-tay). One was a skeptical reference in a scholarly journal, another was a casual conversation with a Kenyan I met a few years ago and the third was the epilogue of Louise Levathes's wonderful 1994 book about China's maritime adventures, "When China Ruled the Seas." Levathes had traveled to Kenya and found people who believed they were descended from survivors of a Chinese shipwreck. So, on a whim and an expense account, I flew to Lamu, an island off northern Kenya, and hired a boat and an interpreter to go to Pate and see for myself.

Pate is off in its own world, without electricity or roads or vehicles. Mostly jungle, it has been shielded from the 20th century largely because it is accessible from the Kenyan mainland only by taking a boat through a narrow tidal channel that is passable only at high tide. Initially I was disappointed by what I found there. In the first villages I visited, I saw people who were light-

skinned and had hair that was not tightly curled, but they could have been part Arab or European rather than part Chinese. The remote villages of Chundwa and Faza were more promising, for there I found people whose eyes, hair and complexion hinted at Asian ancestry, though their background was ambiguous.

And then on a still and sweltering afternoon I strolled through the coconut palms into the village of Siyu, where I met a fisherman in his 40's named Abdullah Mohammed Badui. I stopped and stared at the man in astonishment, for he had light skin and narrow eyes. Fortunately, he was as rude as I was, and we stared at each other in mutual surprise before venturing a word. Eventually I asked him about his background and appearance.

"I am in the Famao clan," he said. "There are 50 or 100 of us Famao left here. Legend has it that we are descended from Chinese and others.



The island of Pate today, where one of Zheng He's ships may have foundered five centuries ago.

"A Chinese ship was coming along and it hit rocks and wrecked," Badui continued. "The sailors swam ashore to the village that we now call Shanga, and they married the local women, and that is why we Famao look so different."

Another Famao, with the same light complexion and vaguely Asian features, approached to listen. His name was Athman Mohammed Mzee, and he, too, told of hearing of the Chinese shipwreck from the elders. He volunteered an intriguing detail: the Africans had given giraffes to the Chinese.

Salim Bonaheri, a 55-year-old Famao man I met the next day, proudly declared, "My ancestors were Chinese or Vietnamese or something like that." I asked how they had got to Pate.

"I don't know," Bonaheri said with a shrug.

Most of my conversations were like that, intriguing but frustrating dead ends. I was surrounded by people whose appearance seemed tantalizingly Asian, but who had only the vaguest notions of why that might be. I kept at it, though, and eventually found people like Khalifa Mohammed Omar, a 55-year-old Famao fisherman who looked somewhat Chinese and who also clearly remembered the stories passed down by his grandfather. From him and others, a tale emerged.

Countless generations ago, they said, Chinese sailors traded with local African kings. The local kings gave them giraffes to take back to China. One of the Chinese ships struck rocks off the eastern coast of Pate, and the sailors swam ashore, carrying with them porcelain and other goods from the ship. In time they married local women, converted to Islam and named the village Shanga, after Shanghai. Later, fighting erupted among Pate's clans, Shanga was destroyed and the Famao fled, some to the mainland, others to the village of Siyu.

Every time I heard the story about the giraffes my pulse began to race. Chinese records indicate that Zheng He had brought the first giraffes to China, a fact that is not widely known. The giraffe caused an enormous stir in China because it was believed to be the mythical qilin, or Chinese unicorn. It is difficult to imagine how African villagers on an island as remote as Pate would know about the giraffes unless the tale had been handed down to them by the Chinese sailors.

Chinese ceramics are found in many places along the east African coast, and their presence on Pate could be the result of purchases from Arab traders. But the porcelain on Pate was overwhelmingly concentrated among the Famao clan, which could mean that it had been inherited rather than purchased. I also visited some ancient Famao graves that looked less like traditional Kenyan graves than what the Chinese call "turtle-shell graves," with rounded tops.

Researchers have turned up other equally tantalizing clues. Craftsmen on Pate and the other islands of Lamu practice a kind of basket-weaving that is common in southern China but unknown on the Kenyan mainland. On Pate, drums are more often played in the Chinese than the African style, and the local dialect has a few words that may be Chinese in origin. More startling, in 1569 a Portuguese priest named Monclaro wrote that Pate had a flourishing silk-making industry -- Pate, and no other place in the region. Elders in several villages on Pate confirmed to me that their island had produced silk until about half a century ago.

When I asked my boatman, Bakari Muhaji Ali, if he thought it was possible that a ship could have wrecked off the coast near Shanga, he laughed. "There are undersea rocks all over there," he said. "If you don't know exactly where you're going, you'll wreck your ship for sure."

If indeed there was a Chinese shipwreck off Pate, there is reason to think it happened in Zheng He's time. For if the shipwreck had predated him, surviving sailors would not have passed down stories of the giraffes. And if the wreck didn't occur until after Zheng He, its survivors could not have settled in Shanga, since British archeological digs indicate that the village was sacked, burned and abandoned in about 1440 -- very soon after Zheng He's last voyage.

Still, there is no hard proof for the shipwreck theory, and there are plenty of holes in it. No ancient Chinese characters have been found on tombs in Pate, no nautical instruments have ever turned up on the island and there are no Chinese accounts of an African shipwreck. This last lacuna might be explained by the destruction of the fleet's records. Yet if one of Zheng He's ships did founder on the rocks off Pate, then why didn't some other ships in the fleet come to the sailors' rescue?

As I made my way back through the jungle for the return trip, I pondered the significance of what I'd seen on Pate. In the faces of the Famao, in those bits of pottery and tantalizing hints of Chinese culture, I felt as though I'd glimpsed the shadowy outlines of one of the greatest might-have-beens of the millennium now ending. I thought about the Columbian Exchange, the swap of animals, plants, genes, germs, weapons and peoples that utterly remade both the New World and the Old, and I couldn't help wondering about another exchange -- Zheng He's -- that never took place, yet could have.

If ancient China had been greedier and more outward-looking, if other traders had followed in Zheng He's wake and then continued on, Asia might well have dominated Africa and even Europe. Chinese might have settled in not only Malaysia and Singapore, but also in East Africa, the Pacific Islands, even in America. Perhaps the Famao show us what the mestizos of such a world might have looked like, the children of a hybrid culture that was never born. What I'd glimpsed in Pate was the high-water mark of an Asian push that simply stopped -- not for want of ships or know-how, but strictly for want of national will.

All this might seem fanciful, and yet in Zheng He's time the prospect of a New World settled by the Spanish or English would have seemed infinitely more remote than a New World made by the Chinese. How different would history have been had Zheng He continued on to America? The mind rebels; the ramifications are almost too overwhelming to contemplate. So consider just one: this magazine would have been published in Chinese.

How Stuff Works

Did the Chinese beat Columbus to America?

by Josh Clark

In his bestselling book, "1421: The Year China Discovered America," [British](#) amateur historian Gavin Menzies turns the story of the Europeans' discovery of America on its ear with a startling idea: Chinese sailors beat [Christopher Columbus](#) to the Americas by more than 70 years. The book has generated controversy within the halls of scholarship. Anthropologists, archaeologists, historians and linguists alike have debunked much of the evidence that Menzies used to support his notion, which has come to be called the **1421 theory**.

But where did Menzies come up with the idea that it was Asians, not Europeans, who first arrived in America from other countries? It's been long held by scholars that it was people from [Asia](#) who first set foot in North America, but not in the way that Menzies describes. Sometime 10,000 years ago or more, people of Asian origination are believed to have crossed over the Bering land bridge from Siberia to what is now Alaska. From there, they are believed to have spread out over the course of millennia, diverging genetically and populating North and South America.

But Menzies' 1421 theory supposes much more direct influence from China. Rather than civilization evolving separately in the Americas and Asia, under the 1421 theory, China was directly involved in governance and trade with the peoples of the Americas with whom they shared their ancestry.

So what evidence does he have to support this notion? It's Menzie's belief that one merely has to refer to certain [maps](#) to see the light.

A full 30 years before Gavin Menzies published his book, Baptist missionary Dr. Hendon M. Harris perused the curiosities in a shop in [Taiwan](#). It was there he made an amazing discovery: a map that looked to be ancient, written in classical Chinese and depicting what to Harris was clearly North America. It was a map of **Fu Sang**, the legendary land of Chinese fable.

Fu Sang is to the Chinese what **Atlantis** is to the West -- a mythical land that most don't believe existed, but for which enough tantalizing (yet vague) evidence exists to maintain popularity for the idea. The map the missionary discovered -- which has come to be known as the **Harris map** -- showed that Fu Sang was located exactly where North America is. Even more amazingly, some of the features shown on the map of Fu Sang look a lot like geographical anomalies unique to North America, such as the Grand Canyon.

As if the Harris map weren't suggestive enough, other maps have also surfaced. It's a specific map that Menzies points to as definitive proof that the Chinese had already explored the world long before the Europeans ever set sail in the age of exploration. This map, known as the **1418 map** -- so called for the date it was supposedly published -- clearly shows all of the world's oceans, as well as all seven continents, correct in shape and situation. Even more startling is the map's accurate depiction of features of North America, including the Potomac River in the Northeast of the present-day United States.

Menzies believes that not only had the Chinese already explored the world before Columbus and other European explorers, but that it was with Chinese maps that the Europeans were able to

circumnavigate the globe. Armed with the map as his flagship evidence, Menzies points out plenty of other artifacts that point to Chinese pre-Columbian occupation in the Americas. Read the next page to find out what supports his theory.

Physical Evidence for the 1421 Theory During the [Ming Dynasty](#), a great admiral named **Zhang He** (as well as other notable admirals) sailed out of [China](#) to explore the world. Under the behest of Emperor Zhu Di, He and the Chinese Fleet (made up of 28,000 men) made their way from [Asia](#) to the Middle East and Africa, eventually reaching as far as [Indonesia](#). But did the fleet continue west all the way to the Americas?

Perhaps the more logical possibility is that the fleet returned to China and then again set sail, this time eastward, across the Pacific to the west coast of North America. Either way, Menzies says that evidence of their arrival is scattered throughout the tradition, custom and art of [American Indian](#) tribes. And he's not alone. "1421" has created a stir among its readership, generating scores of additional submissions of evidence of a Chinese presence within the Americas before the Europeans set foot on the continents. To Menzies and his supportive readers, one need merely look at the rich cultural tapestry of the peoples of the Americas to find what they believe is the evidence of Chinese influence there.

Before the arrival of Europeans, neither North nor South America had a horse roaming upon it. This is the idea held by historians -- the horse is not indigenous to the Americas, and it wasn't until the Europeans brought the horse that the species found its way to the new world. But this is contradicted by some pre-Columbian native art found at Cofins Cave in [Brazil](#) and at Trujillo, [Peru](#) that depict horses, and in one case, what is thought to be Chinese cavalry on horseback. The Chinese were experienced horsemen for centuries, if not millennia, prior to the European age of exploration, and it's logical that were they to make an expedition to the Americas, they would have brought their valuable horses with them.

Indigenous legend and folklore is also fraught with what Menzies believes are stories about encounters between native tribes and Chinese explorers. The leaders of the Inca tribe -- a vast, powerful mountain tribe in the Andes Mountains of South America -- are thought by Menzies to have been governed by Chinese admirals. The leader Montezuma, ruler of the [Aztec](#) empire in [Mexico](#), is believed by Menzies to have mistaken the conquistador Cortez for his grandfather, returned again from his home in the East. The Cherokee Indians of the southeastern United States possess lore that tells of their accepting and warring with visiting Chinese travelers by sea.

But what of physical evidence? If the Chinese had landed in the Americas -- let alone traded with and governed the people they found there, wouldn't direct evidence of their presence remain? Menzies and the proponents of the 1421 theory say it does exist. In the Pacific Northwest of the present-day United States, investigations at eight different sites have uncovered Chinese coins. A garment from the Nez Perce tribe of present-day Idaho that's dated at over 300 years old has woven ornaments into it that are believed to be Chinese beads. And in the Florida Keys and off the coast of Big Sur, Calif., artifacts of pre-Columbian Chinese jade have been unearthed from a riverbed and the sea floor.

But despite all of this evidence (and even more), historians aren't rushing to rewrite the history books. Find out why some consider Menzies' 1421 theory to be questionable.

The 1421 Theory: Junk History? From its introduction in 2003, Gavin Menzies' 1421 theory has come under assault. The writing that seeks to disprove Menzies is at least as long as his book. One question perhaps looms largest when approaching the 1421 theory: If the [Chinese](#) had a

presence in the Americas prior to [Christopher Columbus](#), then why isn't their mark left indelibly on the face of American civilization?

The Norse, who sailed as far west as [Newfoundland](#) in their travels across the Atlantic, left remnants of their visits to North America. Their folklore includes accounts of the Vikings' encounters with Native Americans. The crumbling remains of the stone outposts they built during their stay can still be seen. This was 1,000 years ago, and 500 years before Columbus' voyage. Yet the Vikings' brief settlement in North America is still evident. If the Chinese had such a thorough impact on societies in the Americas just 70 years before Columbus' arrival, then why isn't evidence of their presence everywhere?

What's more, there's a distinct lack of cross-cultural pollination between the new world and [China](#). When the Europeans arrived in the Americas, they brought with them things that have never before been seen in the continents, like steel and horses. But more importantly, they took back exotic treasures from the new world. Maize and tomatoes, along with vast amounts of plundered gold, found its way to Europe upon the ships of returning explorers. Where's the Incan gold or the corn of the Aztecs in China?

The 1418 Map of America Perhaps the evidence that's been most attacked is the 1408 map itself. Dr. Geoff Wade, a historian with the National University of [Singapore](#), has written extensively in an effort to debunk Gavin Menzies and the 1421 theory, even going so far as filing a complaint in the [United Kingdom](#) against the publishers of Menzies' book for marketing it as a history.

Wade points out several flaws with the 1408 map which suggest it's a fake, chief among them is that the map shows the world based on the idea that it's a sphere. This notion was unknown in Ming Dynasty China. He also points out that China is poorly represented on the map, and wonders why, if the map's creators were Chinese, their nation would be drawn clumsily.

It's Wade's belief that the 1408 map was created within the 21st century, possibly even to support Menzies' 1421 theory. Wade believes that the map is based on old maps created by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century. He points out that California is shown as an island and China is located at the center of the map, both examples of Jesuit cartography. He also says that some of the text has clearly been translated into Chinese from old Jesuit maps.

If the map is fake, then the entire 1421 theory falls apart. But isn't there any easier way to determine if the Chinese ever sailed to the Americas? Why not just ask? Here's where the story takes a turn that may maintain the 1421 theory's status as debatable for years to come. After the invading Manchu rulers took over China following the Ming Dynasty (establishing the **Qing Dynasty**), the foreigners took great pains to wipe out any reminders of the previous rule. This included destroying all accounts of the great fleet's extensive voyages. As these documents burned, any evidence, contradictory or supportive, of a Chinese presence in the Americas was lost forever.

The Economist

[The meaning of Manhattanhenge](#)



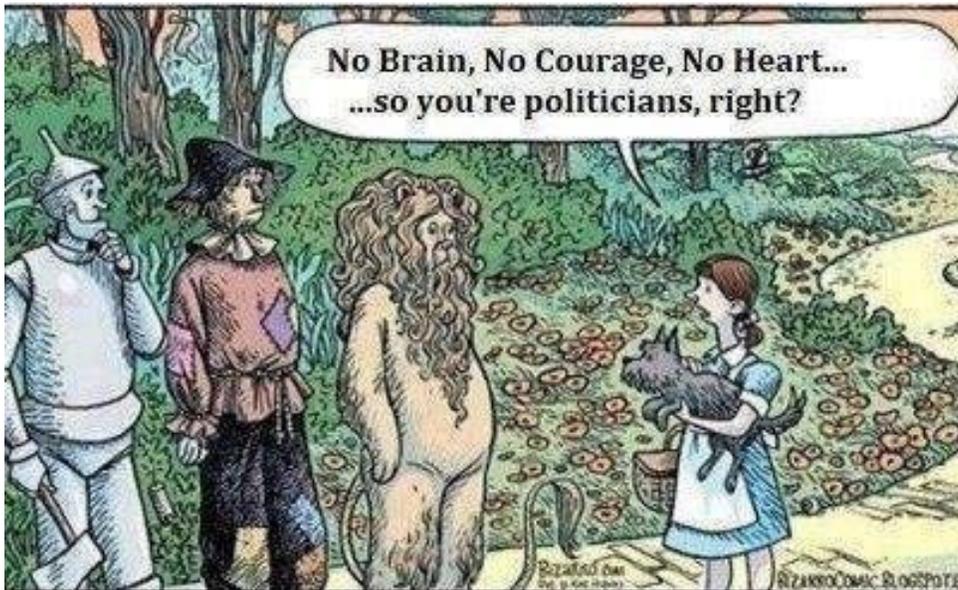
WHEN traffic lights changed to red on the evening of July 11th, hundreds of New Yorkers raced out to the middle of Manhattan's roads, cameras in hand, safety be damned. They faced west, where the setting sun was lighting up the sky. The skyscrapers and high-rises framed the fiery orb which lit up the surrounding glass, brick and stone buildings spectacularly. For the next 15 minutes or so, the pattern repeated. Traffic lights changed, the sun worshippers took to the street to capture the stunning sight, until the sun disappeared. The cosmic phenomenon is known as Manhattanhenge, or the Manhattan Solstice.

The term "Manhattanhenge", a play on England's Stonehenge, was coined by Neil DeGrasse Tyson, an astrophysicist and head of the Hayden Planetarium. Twice a year, as if designed by the gods, the sun perfectly aligns with Manhattan's streets and skyscrapers, just as it does with the standing stones of Stonehenge. Many ancient civilisations worshipped the sun. The Aztecs had half a dozen sun gods and a sun goddess; a dark chamber in a tomb in Ireland called Newgrange, older than Egypt's pyramids, is lit up by the rising sun during the winter solstice. Nowadays, skyscrapers create modern henges in cities including Toronto, Montreal, Chicago, and Baltimore. But none quite compares to Manhattanhenge.

The phenomenon is not designed by gods or man. The perfect alignment is a cosmically happy accident. Manhattan's street grid was designed for 1m people in 1811, when the population was only 100,000. It runs east to west from the East River to the Hudson River and roughly north to south—28.9 degrees east of north, to be exact. Because the street grid is not strictly laid out to true north, Manhattanhenge takes place around May 28th and again around July 11th, each date roughly three weeks before and after the summer solstice. The relatively low topography in New Jersey across the Hudson River to the west, coupled with Manhattan being an island, means the horizon is mostly unobstructed. The best places to view the sun and the blazing skyscrapers are at 14th, 23rd, 34th, 42nd and 57th Streets.

"What is fascinating to me and what I love about Manhattanhenge is it brings people back to the cosmos," says Jacqueline Faherty, an astronomer with the American Museum of Natural History. For the past six years a growing number of New Yorkers and tourists have paid homage,

sending out pictures via social media. "For a little while, the sun is the star of the city," says Ms Faherty. What will future civilisations think of Manhattan when they dig it up and discover the carefully laid-out network of streets? Like Stonehenge, the grid might be assumed to have astronomical significance. Much could be read into the fact that Manhattanhenge takes place around Memorial Day, which commemorates those lost in war, and baseball's All-Star game. "Future anthropologists might conclude that, via the sun, the people who called themselves Americans worshiped War and Baseball," Mr Tyson says.





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