

1421 Project

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by

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This report represents the work of one or more WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of completion of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. ABSTRACT	3
2. INTRODUCTION	3
3. OVERVIEW	6
3.1. Literature Review	6
3.2. Global Inequality Debate	8
3.3. Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School	8
3.4. Freshman Seminar	9
4. METHODOLOGY	10
5. OBSERVATIONS	11
6. UPDATED GOALS	14
7. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	15
8. WPI FRESHMAN SEMINAR	16
8.1. THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE	16
9. CONCLUSION	17
10. PERSONAL REACTIONS	18
APPENDICES	
A. PROPOSAL FOR THE 1421 PROJECT	19
B. INFORMATION ABOUT GLOBAL INEQUALITY COURSE	25
C. REVIEWS OF SCHOLARLY WORKS	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY	35

## **ABSTRACT**

The 1421 Project examines the educational implications of the book *1421: When China Discovered America*, by Gavin Menzies. Meetings with area teachers were conducted to determine the best method of delivery of this controversial material into the school system.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 1421 IQP project was created with the intention to explore the implications for the Massachusetts high school social studies curriculum, if Gavin Menzies' claims are proved right in 10 years. The 1421 project team wanted to hold book club type meetings with teachers and curriculum specialists from the area in order to gather their thoughts on what might be the social implications of this information being included in a high school curriculum. With these teachers' reactions, and help from a few other selected individuals, who had read Menzies' book, our goal was to propose a unit of study for a high school class using *1421* as a text. The complete original proposal can be found in Appendix A.

Over the duration of the project the 1421 team learned that the current conception of history is very resistant to change and decided that the chances of Menzies' thesis being included in any way is pretty low. Therefore the original goal of the project was modified to align with what we believe the curriculum role for a controversial body of historical evidence might be.

With the encouragement of our advisor, we observed a college experimental class (The Global Inequality Debate) in which a group of about 6-8 students were required to read and compose both an individual and a

joint review of *1421*. These reviews produced a wide range of reactions. We used these initial reviews as a benchmark for our proposed book club sessions. In order to fully understand how far reaching the implications of the information in *1421* were, we decided to study those people who would be using this information the most, if it was true. We asked teachers from the Worcester Public School System, as well as those from the nearby Mid-Wachusett League, if they would be interested in participating in a book club to further their own understanding about the case for Chinese contact with the Americas prior to 1492.

After our book club invitations were declined by multiple curriculum advisors, Social Science chairs, and teachers, we contacted the Academy of the Pacific Rim Public Charter School to interview the director and some teachers. We also received an excited reply from a Wachusett Regional High School AP History teacher.

While working on setting up several book club sessions for high school teachers in the Worcester/ Shrewsbury area, our advisor received an invitation to participate in the Thirty Third New England Undergraduate Sociological Research Conference at Salem State. Presenting at the conference provided the 1421 project team with the chance to present our initial findings from the book club sessions and also to tell others about the thesis of *1421*.

After completing all the book club sessions we came together as a team to discuss what we had learned with our advisor. In reviewing all the twists and turns of the 1421 project over the past three terms we came to the conclusion that pushing for Menzies' claims from *1421* to be included in

the future high school curriculum was not a viable goal for our project. The importance of *1421* truly lies in the paradigm busting thoughts it provokes in the reader. When a student reads this material, it does not fit with the historical frame they have about who discovered America and the relationship of Europe to rest of the world. What does one do with cognitively dissonant information that does not match their frame?

The 1421 project group realized that *1421* would be perfect for a high school Advanced Placement (AP) or college freshman seminar course designed to provoke and practice critical thinking. That is the point in students' lives when they recognize that the text book and the teacher may not always be completely correct, and that it is totally fine to question what has been discovered in the past. If along the way a student learns a lot about China that wasn't covered in prior texts, all is well.

Rather than trying to force a change in a change-resistant environment, the history forum, the 1421 project group would like to take advantage of a less intrusive way to bring in new material by showcasing the educational value of introducing a controversial topic in the classroom. One does not have to claim that Menzies is right in any way to learn from him. By bringing *1421* into the classroom students are provided with an opportunity to figure for themselves out what to do with material that doesn't fit in their view of history. A new synthesis is sure to cause dissention and that is educationally valuable. The description for such a class is in Appendix B.

## OVERVIEW

### LITERATURE REVIEW

During the course of this project we read and reviewed a few books and researched some outside reviews of *1421*. The books reviewed are: *1421: When China Discovered America* by Gavin Menzies, *When China Ruled the Seas*, by Louise Levathes, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* by Jack Wetherford. Reviews of Wetherford and Levathes can be found in Appendix C.

The following is an excerpt of the 1421 group's combined book review of *1421: When China Discovered America*.

"*1421* begins with a background piece on China's naval might and in particular, the changes that were being made during the reign of Ming Emperor Zhu Di. In 1382, at the end of the Yuan dynasty, many boys of the Yuan (Mongols) were castrated and served in the emperor's palace. This ensured that any children born in the palace were fathered by the emperor. There were effectively two strong powers in the Chinese court at this time: the eunuchs heavily influenced by the Mongols of the previous dynasty, and the mandarins, learned members of the "Han" Chinese educated in Confucian philosophy. Emperor Zhu Di put most of his trust into the eunuchs rather than the mandarins because they had helped him come to power and had no other loyalty. As a result, these eunuchs wielded great power over the Chinese court at the time. Zhu Di had very little time for his son and future heir, so he was placed in the care of the mandarins. This influence on the future emperor would lead to tragedy for Zhu Di's fleet as they came back from their voyages.

"The story of Zheng He's fleets begins with an extraordinary party held to celebrate the opening of the Forbidden City, in the new capital of China, Beijing. The beginning part of the voyages involved having the explorers return many foreign dignitaries to their home countries around the Indian Ocean. After that, they proceeded to round the Cape of Good Hope, and then

sailed with the trade winds to cross the Atlantic. Here the voyagers diverged; Admiral Hong Bao charted the eastern coast of South America and the coast of Antarctica, and Zhou Wen continued up the coast of North America via the Caribbean, touching the coast of New England, and finally reaching home by navigating the Arctic Ocean around Russia. Zhou Man rounded Cape Horn to chart the Western Coast of South America, then crossed the Pacific Ocean to Australia, charting most of that continent. He then crossed the Pacific again and charted parts of the west coast of North America then continued home. Instead of going around the Cape of Good Hope with the other fleets, Yang Qing used his fleets to follow an eclipse and use the results to determine longitude. He operated only in the Indian Ocean. When the survivors from each of these fleets returned to China, they were not met with the hero's welcome that they might have deserved. Rather, Emperor Zhu Di was no longer the emperor and his son had taken over the throne to the detriment of the sea-faring eunuchs. Zhu Gaozhi, the new emperor, was educated by the mandarins in his youth and decidedly changed Chinese foreign policy, grounding Zheng He's fleet, and tolerating the destruction of all of his records by Mandarins determined to keep the Emperor from changing his mind and continuing exploration."

This book is full of controversy because of its claims that China, long considered by the average American to be a backward country, actually discovered the Americas before Europe. The 1421 group wanted to find a way for the information in *1421* to spread across the public school curriculum. It was decided to use book club meetings to help make teachers aware of *1421* and the controversy it contains. There is a lot of valuable information for teachers in this book, including an interesting look at Chinese maritime technology of the time. We hoped to spark some interest in discussing the ideas in *1421* through these book clubs, and in turn showing Menzies' theories to the world.

## **THE GLOBAL INEQUALITY DEBATE**

The Global Inequality Debate is a course focused on the root cause of the modern inequalities of wealth and power by continent. *1421: When China Discovered America* by Gavin Menzies and Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* were used as examples of contrasting ways to explain global inequality.

Throughout his book Diamond explains the inequality without regard to culture and time period. Diamond's opinion appears to be that history is deterministic and technology is the key social force. Menzies on the other hand, portrays China as a nation that acts almost solely on the basis of culture and religion. Culture and the interest in expanding it to the rest of the world is Menzies' reasoning behind the China's discovery of America and the rest of the World.

The class was split in two, half of which read *1421* while the other half read *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. These two groups each read different sections of their books, wrote reviews and taught the material to the other half who did not read the book. We observed the class (with a focus on the *1421* half) to gather their initial reactions and final reviews. These reactions were our benchmark when meeting with teachers in the book clubs later on.

## **ACADEMY OF THE PACIFIC RIM PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL**

The Academy of the Pacific Rim Public Charter School (APR) is a public charter school in Boston, Massachusetts with the mission to

“empower urban students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to achieve their full intellectual and social potential by combining the best of the East (high standards, discipline and character education) with the best of the West (a commitment to individualism, creativity and diversity).” (“Academy of the Pacific Rim – Our Story”)

APR teaches Mandarin Chinese starting in seventh grade and continues the Asian influence through uniforms, routines and rigorous work ethics. APR is a unique school which carefully balances American culture while creating one of it’s own to include Asian aspects of discipline and diligence.

As a graduate, Millisent knew that APR’s teachers would be perfect participants for the 1421 project book clubs. While there was a relatively small group of teachers that read *1421*, the book club still proved to be very eye opening and provided many reactions to *1421*.

### **FRESHMAN SEMINAR**

As mentioned above, we believe that the perfect place for *1421* would be in the classroom, specifically a college freshman seminar course. The idea is to have a course structured more around the process of assessing and selectively internalizing cognitively dissonant information than rewriting history. The process of effectively communicating your views to others is a valuable skill. Students would be required to read *1421*, record and discuss initial reactions with classmates. Once students have synthesized their personal reactions they will research outside reviews and write an individual book review to hand in. Groups should be formed in the beginning and the final project would require the group to create a group book review. We

anticipate that in the process of combining all views to create a single review; students will have deep discussions that emphasize their personal views of *1421* and view of history as a process and a factual record.

## **METHODOLOGY**

When our project began, John Wilkes, the advisor for the *1421* project, was teaching an experimental class that used *1421* to study Global Inequality. The group was able to join a few of the classes as observers and experience student initial reactions to *1421*. We also understood that, while the students were a good jumping off point for this project, we still needed reactions from experts, in this case teachers who offer social studies classes.

The first step when searching for participants in the teacher/curriculum specialist book club was to speak to the Social Studies Curriculum Specialist for the Worcester Public Schools, Colleen Kelly. Colleen Kelly thought that our idea was very good, but she doubted that Worcester teachers would be available for this study because she was already requiring those teachers to do a lot of out of classroom learning in order to improve the MCAS test scores for her district. She agreed to pass the proposal on to teachers, but we did not receive any responses from the Worcester Public Schools.

Next, we made a mass mailing of our book club proposal (A copy of which can be found in Appendix A) to the Social Studies directors, and principals of each of the schools of the Mid-Wachusett League. The Mid-Wachusett League is a group of schools from Central Massachusetts that come together for sporting events and curriculum planning. This was a good place to start to get a list of all of schools in the area that may be willing to

come to Worcester for a book club. The group ended up with three responses from the mailings to the Mid-Wachusett Schools, although we were ultimately only able to get one teacher from Wachusett Regional High School to participate. (For awhile it looked like a whole club would form in Shrewsbury.) Our other source of information came from Millisent's High School, Academy of the Pacific Rim Public Charter High School (APR). We had two meetings with teachers from APR, one to discuss the book itself and what they thought about Menzies' controversial statements, and another to discuss the possible implications of it in a High School setting.

The group continued to read reactions and book reviews from scholars in an attempt to understand what more expert historians thought about *1421*.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

The classroom experience was truly eye-opening. We observed a very wide range of responses about the validity of Menzies claims and the usefulness of this book in general. One student completely disregarded the whole book. He insisted that it was not truthful at all. At the other extreme we had someone so entranced with the idea that to him it didn't matter whether it was true or not. The fact that such a case could be made was so intellectually exciting was a revelation. Since neither the traditional view nor Menzies could be completely correct, the truth remains to be sought out in between. Others were already in the Middle ground trying to decide what to believe but on the whole open-minded about the information in the book. The most interesting part about the classroom experience was their response

when asked to create a combined review with their classmates to present to the class. The students were able to present the ideas of *1421* very clearly to their peers; however, the combined review read more like a long summary of the book than a book review with an opinion. They were unable to reconcile each of their distinct opinions with those of the rest of the group. This situation exemplifies the intense reactions which this book can inspire and is instrumental in the final conclusions of this project.

One piece, however, that almost every student who read this book was shocked by was the technological superiority of China over Europe during the 15th century. Very few of these students had had substantial knowledge about Chinese technology. The illustration of a Treasure ship alongside the Santa Maria was enough to convince most students that they were under-informed about China and its technology.

As for the teachers, one of the schools that responded to our initial mailing, but did not end up participating was Shrewsbury Public. At the time we talked to them, they wanted continuing education credits to offer to the teachers who participated. By the time we were able to negotiate a credit opportunity, the head of the Social Studies department decided that most of her teachers had already planned for their continuing education credits this year, and that she would be unable to offer our project to them after all. Unfortunately the window of time that we were presented with had closed before we realized it was limited. In retrospect, after speaking with teachers from the Mid-Wachusett League and Worcester Public, we should have come armed with a way to make continuing education credits available to teachers who participated and wrote a review of the book. We think that having

credits available ahead of time would have resulted in an opportunity to talk with teachers from different backgrounds, and essentially have two separate books clubs of 4-5 teachers each.

Within the meetings themselves and the teachers that we did talk to we received very similar to reactions those of the students who read the book. The director of APR was very excited at the opportunity to go against what is the currently established consensus and work towards something different with more attention to Asia. He held the opinion that all of this *could* have happened, so why shouldn't we teach it in schools? We also encountered the skeptic, in this case a chemistry teacher. She read about Menzies' "DNA evidence" and was wary of it, rather, she wanted to read exactly what kind of information in DNA that Menzies had looked for. Lastly, a history teacher was supportive of increasing the information on Asia to be less Eurocentric, but skeptical that information such as this could be included in the curriculum during our lifetimes. She believes that the only way to get this into schools is to change the history books and that is almost impossible, especially to change it with information that might put China in a better light than Europe.

While it might be wrong to favor one group of people over another, it makes sense that Americans, especially in this time of a new technology race between America and China, would not want their children to learn that China was the World leader for more of history than Europe was and that it was the original discoverer of America. The one AP European History/AP World History teacher from Wachusett Regional High School did not see why this information could not be correct. He completely understood that China

was the technological leader at the time, and believed that his students would appreciate learning about this as well.

## **UPDATED GOALS**

As the project continued, we realized that the creation of a model curriculum assuming Menzies was right to explore its implications was not plausible in light of scholarly reviews of the information found in *1421* (Appendix C). We received mixed reviews from the people we talked to, and continued to read mixed reviews in articles by historical scholars.

Louise Levathes is a very learned scholar of the Ming Chinese (a review to her book *When China Ruled the Seas* can be found in Appendix C). While searching for more information about her, we discovered a book review of *1421* authored by her. This review by a trusted source made us doubtful of that many of Menzies' claims in *1421* would be validated in the end. Most notably, she explains that Chinese men at that time would not have sailed farther than what was charted while their parents were still alive. This Confucian belief stems from the idea that men are supposed to protect and take care of their parents for their entire lives. Furthermore, at least some of the Chinese records that Menzies says were "destroyed" are intact and say nothing about the possibility of these voyages or even the "missing years" from 1421-1423. Levathes claims that there are documents covering activities of the treasure fleet during these years. While Levathes discounts many of Menzies' claims, she does not throw his work to the gutter.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

After reviewing the plethora of reactions that we have heard and read over the course of this project, the thought came to mind: what's next? While our original proposal stated that we wanted to complete a proposal to change the high school curriculum, should the information presented in *1421* be true, we realized that we could not pursue that goal any further. One cannot assume that Gavin Menzies is going to be vindicated in his claims about the route and fate of the Chinese fleet in detail during the fifteenth century. However, one *can* assume that he is thought provoking in those assertions.

Here we believe we have found another way to get this information into a curriculum, though with a different goal in mind. *1421* has the incredible aptitude to spark debate. Whether one believes everything he says, or not, one wants to seek out further information and argue with others who might have different views than their own. It provides an amazing opportunity to have intelligent discussion and debate in a classroom setting. To that end, the 1421 group decided that an ideal time to present this material to students is either in an AP History class at the high school level, or a freshman seminar course at the college level. AP courses offer detailed study of topics that are included on the AP test, which can be exchanged for college credit, if the score is sufficient. After the AP test there is a lull of studying when the class is not yet over for the summer, yet the AP test, for which the majority of the course is spent preparing, is already complete. *1421* and its controversies offer an opportunity to continue honing debate and writing skills without being as mentally taxing as the AP course itself.

As a student who matriculated through the Massachusetts public school system she has witnessed the shortcomings in the Massachusetts public school curriculum for teaching about Asia. This realization occurred only after participating in this project and meeting Millisent and experiencing APR. *1421* is a great opportunity to introduce non controversial material on the technological might of the Ming Chinese, as well as the culture and people that seem to be forgotten from a curriculum that is based more on American History than that of the rest of the world. We see the potential in *1421: When China Discovered America*, Wetherford's *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*, and Levathes' *When China Ruled the Seas*, to present interesting information to fill these holes in Eurasian history that are left by the current Massachusetts public school Social Studies curriculum.

This information fits with the curriculum at the end of an AP class or the beginning of a college career because it has such potential to spark debate and intelligent thinking. This is exactly what a freshman seminar course should teach: how to intelligently express one's opinion regarding a controversial subject. This also fits well because it allows students to study China's history before Imperialists from Europe had major influence on it. Learning about China is extremely relevant due to its current position in the world and how important China is to the world economy.

## **WPI FRESHMAN SEMINAR**

### **THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE**

During the course of this project, the 1421 project group learned that, in order to pique teacher's interest, one needs to have something to offer

them in exchange for participation in a study like this. They may be interested in learning more about the subject at hand already; however, many teachers need a more concrete reason to take the time out of their schedules to read a book as involved, and long, as *1421*. If this project were to continue we would definitely suggest either a WPI or a school endorsed continuing education credit for active participants.

The information needed to support a change to the curriculum like the change that 1421 group's original proposal suggested would take a lot more institutional support than this project had. If a respected school were dedicated to the advancement of Menzies' theories and the acceptance of Chinese naval might in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, small changes might occur. Overall these changes to a high school or Middle school curriculum are almost impossible without a consensus. In this case, mountains of concrete, agreed upon evidence. For example, evolution still is not accepted fully into the curriculums of all high schools despite the overwhelming evidence supporting it. Menzies' theories are far too shaky to support such widespread change. The place for this kind of paradigm busting theory is in a course designed to inspire debate.

## **CONCLUSION**

Menzies' *1421: When China Discovered America*, contains paradigm busting ideas. This book will never, however, become the "factual" text in a high school history class. Menzies does a wonderful job inspiring controversy and debate, but his evidence is too shaky and his conclusions are too hastily drawn. More information is needed before parts of this book will be accepted

as correct in the world of history scholars. The true value of Menzies' book lies in its ability to inspire revisionist thought. In young minds, it can inspire debate and research. This is an invaluable tool for teachers who might normally have trouble helping students *want* to learn history. *1421* puts a different spin on a story that American children, especially those on the east coast, know all too well, or thought they did, the discovery of America.

### **PERSONAL REACTIONS**

On a personal note, Angela feels this project opened her eyes about the controversy surrounding many of the historical ideas that she considered "fact" prior to embarking on this study. She thinks that completing this IQP will make her more aware of the author's perspective on what she is reading. For example, Menzies is very convincing in his arguments, but he does not have the full background needed to support those arguments with scientific knowledge. Anyone can write a book. This showed Angela that it is not just the words in a book that need to be examined, but the history behind how the author came to those conclusions.

For Millisent, this project taught her how difficult it can be to find participants for something that does not provide any compensation besides good conversation. She was proud that her high school would find such an interest in her academic endeavors and wanted to help in any way possible. In terms of the book, *1421*, Millisent realized the difference between proven fact and historical speculation when it comes to education. The fact that the 1421 project group needed to change the plan in order to move forward into the classroom with *1421* was a little disappointing. However, it was an enlightening learning experience.

## APPENDIX A

Angela Burrows and Millisent Fury Hopkins

### PROPOSAL FOR 1421 PROJECT

The 1421 project is centered on the book *1421: The Year China Discovered America*, by Gavin Menzies. *1421* is a detailed account of how the voyages of the Ming Fleet in 1421 could have happened in the eyes of a retired British submarine captain. Menzies goes into extremely precise detail when discussing his ideas that may not be entirely accurate. We hope to show teachers and curriculum specialists in the Worcester/Boston area that these ideas are possible and could change high school Social Studies Curriculum by the year 2017. We will accomplish this by inviting teachers and curriculum specialists to a book club meeting where they can voice their opinions about *1421*, then continuing the study with a smaller group through a month long weekly workshop that will explore facets pertinent to Menzies argument and its implications. Ultimately we want to create, with help from a couple of teachers, a curriculum proposal that will use *1421* in a classroom setting based on feedback from our workshop group.

*1421: The Year China Discovered America* details the proposed voyages of Zheng He's Ming Chinese fleets. On March 8, 1421, a floating city left China on a scientific mission to chart and meet the peoples of the world. The Ming Chinese wanted to extend their tribute system all over the world. Four admirals, Hong Bao, Zhou Man, Zhou Wen, and Yang Qing commanded these fleets. Three of these admirals, Hong Bao, Zhou Man, and Zhou Wen, rounded the Cape of Good Hope from the Indian Ocean and continued up to cross the Atlantic. Hong Bao went along the east coast of South America, ultimately re-

crossing the Atlantic close to Antarctica and gaining the ability to accurately calculate latitude using the Southern Cross as a reference point. Zhou Man Accompanied Hong Bao until they reached Cape Horn, when he turned north and explored the western coast of South America, then crossed the Pacific to explore Australia. After exploring Australia, he crossed the Pacific again, at a higher latitude, and explored some of the west coast of North America, only to return to China again across the Pacific. Zhou Wen, according to Menzies, went up the eastern North American coast, circumnavigated Greenland, and returned to China around Russia via the Arctic Ocean. Yang Qing's voyage was more scientific than the other three eunuch admirals. He stayed in the Indian Ocean in order to calculate longitude using an eclipse. Upon the fleet's return, they discovered a new world in their own home. Emperor Zhu Di had fallen, and the new emperor was not as progressive as he had been. A new foreign policy of semi-isolationism had been instated, and voyages like the 1421 mission had been ended. Records of these great missions were destroyed by the new government. This eliminated all Chinese record of contact with these new lands. Menzies believes that these Chinese fleets circumnavigated the globe, figured out how to calculate latitude and longitude, and left colonies behind in North and South America.

Using this information as a reference point, we hope to be able to enlighten the Social Studies specialists in the Worcester Area to understand Menzies and want to use his theories as the basis for a unit in their curriculum.

### **Statement of Need**

The current Social Studies curriculum in the Boston/Worcester Area is lacking sufficient cultural awareness. The average high school student knows very little about the history of Asia, and in particular, the technological advances that were made in China before the Europeans got out of the Middle Ages. This is evident when looking at the reactions of several college students to the information found in *1421*. One of the most intriguing ideas in *1421* to these students is the idea that Chinese treasure ships were indeed up to 10 times the size of the Columbus' Santa Maria. This is a grave injustice to a huge portion of the world's history. Using *1421* and the themes that it addresses, gives us an opportunity to show curriculum specialists and teachers how they can bring original thinking into their classrooms, while still discussing historical themes. This kind of curriculum also gives teachers an opportunity to teach students about Asian technology and culture. It gives a current context to a historical idea that will show students that history is constantly changing as new methods for study are being developed. The ability to form and argue one's own opinion is critical for an educated citizen of modern society, and study of *1421* in high school should do just that.

In investigating the implications of *1421* on the social studies curriculum we will contact Worcester and Boston area teachers and school administrators to gather information. We are looking to explore the reactions to *1421* as a controversial book about the history of America and the world. We will gather reactions from administrators who have a stake in the possibilities raised from this book and also from college students who read this in a classroom with no direct affect in their lives.

We expect that college students with a shallower knowledge of history will be more open to the possibility that Christopher Columbus was not the first to discover America. College students, being younger, will be more willing to question their historical framework and may even be willing to change it if *1421* is proven to in fact be history. On the contrary, we expect that history teachers will be more reluctant to accept a change to the history of America. We expect them to be more skeptical of Menzies and want to discuss his arguments and style of portraying them. We expect that with their background knowledge it will be a deeper conversation that will provide us with the insight about what aspects of *1421* are harder to accept for historical academics.

In observing the discussions following the college class' reading of *1421* and the history teachers' book club we hope to gain an understanding of the implications of *1421* on the future of social studies curriculum in Boston and Worcester area classrooms. One day the implications of this affecting the curriculum across America will be explored. Possible implications include the following; it will be proven that China discovered America and the world before the various historical European explorers and nothing in the history books will change. On the other hand, everything in the history books may change; Chinese history will be taught before European history and Christopher Columbus Day may be taken off the calendar. Will America in turn be less Eurocentric? Many more questions will follow and we will explore them as we come across them. These questions will be the basis for multiple discussions in the classroom, our book club and subsequent workshops.

Our project will consist of a book club meeting and a series of four workshops. History teachers who would like to participate will, after reading the book, share their opinions of it with their colleagues and discuss the possibility of placing these ideas in the classroom. The book club will occur on the evening of January 30, 2007 with the subsequent workshops occurring on the following four Tuesday evenings. The first workshop will be a kind of information session where we will introduce other information about Zheng He and his fleets from other books to the group. Next, we will offer a session in which we will share the reviews from the students who read the books, as well as our own reviews and ideas. Third, we will offer a session dedicated to discussing the implications for the Social Studies curriculum in 2017. Finally, a session will be offered during which Professor Wilkes will give a presentation on the book *1491*, which details other implications regarding the Social Studies curriculum that might be of use to our participants. This series of workshops should give us sufficient data about implications to begin writing a proposal for a school that includes Menzies' ideas. By this point, we hope to have identified two or three trusted advisors who can help us in writing a proposal about the curriculum. This proposal could even be co-written by these advisors.

We obtained a wide range of reactions to the ideas in *1421* while observing a class of college students who have very little background in Asian history. From our experience, some readers will accept Menzies views with few reservations, while others will resist using outside sources to discredit Menzies claims, and still others will discredit Menzies completely based on some incorrect elements. Based on the book reviews that we collected during this class, we

expect that acceptance of these controversial ideas will come from people who have very little background in Asian history, and have not read any of the critical reviews of Menzies' book available online. Those who have read these reviews will likely have less faith in what Menzies states as fact. This is one reason why we hope to discourage the reading of outside materials regarding this subject in our workshops. We want our participants to have open minds when it comes to these ideas so that they may see *1421* not as a textbook, but as an opportunity to explain the inconsistencies of current accepted "history".

The *1421* project aims to show that there is an audience for Menzie's claims about how American history is incorrect. Once an audience is found there is room to move forward and create change in the classroom to educate younger generations about this updated history of America. In searching for the appropriate audience we expect to encounter resistance and with that information, a way to persuade a change in accepted opinion. Our curriculum proposal will address all the resistant ideas with information to counter these formed opinions. We aim to raise awareness in both the college and professional level about *1421* and the many changes in history it is pushing for. By raising awareness we hope to open a flood-gate, pushing our participants to engage others in conversation about this topic. Change starts with an idea and continues through people. We want to not only begin change through raising awareness but spark exploration into this and other claims about social studies. We want to push to move the center of history away from the western hemisphere and into a more global understanding of technology and culture.

## **APPENDIX B**

STS 121x "The Ming, Mongols and Americans in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Age of Discovery"

The basic goal of this course is to fill the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Asian and American (Aztec, Inca etc.) gaps in high school social studies, and debate how they should have been handled in the high school curriculum. The 4 books to be covered in this course are 1421: The Year the Chinese Discovered America, 1491: The Americas Before Columbus, When China Ruled the Seas and Genghis Khan and the Shaping of the Modern World. Portions of Guns, Germs and Steel may also be assigned as much of that book deals with the meeting of Europeans and the Incas, among other American peoples.

The class will break up into 4 teams: one to become the class experts on Northern Asia and particularly the Mongols. Another team will become the experts on Chinese maritime technology in the Ming era trying to reconcile two inconsistent accounts 1421... and When China Ruled the Seas. A third team will read portions of Guns, Germs and Steel, portions of 1421 and all of 1491 but focus on the Peoples of North America. A fourth team will read the same books but focus on the Peoples of South America.

Critical analysis, selection and integration of material from these 4 revisionist historical accounts will be the main task of the second half of the class. Oral and written presentations to the rest of the class will serve as a means of

working toward a joint proposal for HS curriculum revision produced by the class as a whole. This will be presented to another Freshman Seminar group for practice and then to an invited group of secondary school social studies teachers.

## **APPENDIX C**

*When China Ruled the Seas*

Angela Burrows

### **Theme**

*When China Ruled the Seas* is a compelling, well supported narrative about the Ming Dynasty, its rulers, and their fascination with the seas. The overall theme of this book is that China had a very strong influence on matters of state and trade during the Ming Dynasty because of its immense treasure fleet. This theme plays out throughout the book as a believable story of how things were when China had the largest navy in the world. It shows that gracious ways that the Chinese controlled the Indian Ocean and the people that inhabited it.

### **Summary**

*When China Ruled the Seas* begins with a detailed account of key events in China's history immediately before the creation of the treasure fleet. These events include the Yuan dynasty, and how it fell to make way for the Ming dynasty. This shows the reader how the Chinese, who have little historical knowledge of shipbuilding and seafaring, came to understand the inner workings of an ocean-going ship. During the early Ming, 1405, 317 ships were ordered by emperor Zhu Di to be built. This gave Zhu Di significant advantage over the other civilizations in the area, but did not guarantee that this advantage would be maintained. The book describes each of Admiral Zheng He's voyages with his treasure fleet. Chinese sailors knew how to calculate latitude in order to navigate throughout the seas. Zhu Di was able to use this technological superiority to exert the authority of the Dragon Throne over the inhabitants of

the Indian Ocean. While the treasure fleet was away on its last voyage, a number of ominous events for the emperor Zhu Di came to a grisly culmination in the fires at the Forbidden City. Zhu Di had just moved his capital to Beijing and built the Forbidden City when a fire broke out, destroying the three main halls, killing "a large number" of people, and destroying the people's faith in their leader. Shortly after this fire, Zhu Di died and his successor, mandarin educated, Zhu Gaozhi took his place. He stopped all voyages of the treasure ships. He died after only nine months of ruling leaving his eldest son as his heir. Zhu Zhanji was a combination of his father and grandfather, trusting of the mandarin officials, but understanding of the eunuchs as well.

Finally, Levathes discusses controversial ideas. There are many clues that lead Levathes to believe that there might have been Chinese settlements as far west as Kenya and as far south as Australia. For example, the Baijini people are a legend in Australia. They arrived before the Europeans or the Indonesians and cultivated rice and fished, then saw smoke over the sea and left Australia, never to return. There is also a tale of the Bajuni people. They are fisherman off the coast of Kenya with fairer skin than that of the surrounding Africans. Also, a small bronze lion statue was found off the Kenyan coast.

### **Importance**

This is a very important book to its readers. It not only gives a detailed and accurate picture of how China viewed the world and what the government in China was like from 1405-1433, but it shows the reader the importance in understanding the history of the Ming Chinese and how they interacted with their neighbors. Also, in the epilogue, it tactfully opens up the doors for

controversial idea exchange when it introduces the possibility that the Baijini people of Australia and the Bajuni people of Eastern Africa are Chinese descendants.

### **Kind of read**

*When China Ruled the Seas* is an easy book to read, however, it is full of details that are not always essential to understanding the facts in the book. It is a great eye opener about the Ming way of life and inspires more reading about the Chinese culture.

### **Style**

Levathes' style is very informative. She successfully explains every element of the story she tells so that the reader sees the bigger picture of what was going on at the time. She is very careful to be sure that the reader knows when a statement she makes is controversial. In the epilogue, for instance, she talks about the controversial idea that the Baijini people of Australia and the Bajuni people of Africa are descendants of the Ming Chinese. Levathes is sure to clarify that although there is some evidence that these people were Chinese, there is no definite proof that this is the case.

### **Reaction**

This book is quite reasonable and understandable in everything it asserts. In contrast to *1421*, all details that Levathes presents are corroborated with appropriate evidence from scholarly sources. It is very interesting to examine these two books as a pair. The way that Levathes presents controversy is much more subdued than Menzies. Levathes writes in a much more scholarly tone,

and one believes her as an authority on Ming Chinese ocean travel. Menzies is an authority on ocean travel alone.

## APPENDIX C cont.

Millisent Fury Hopkins

### **Review of *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World***

*Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* is an amazing book by Jack Wetherford. This novel rewrites the history of Genghis Khan and the Mongols. The story starts with a modern day excursion to Mongolia and follows the history of the Mongol people from Genghis Khan all the way through and back to modern day. This history shows Mongolia and its ancestry in true light with the contrast of Europe's records of the Tartars. This journey is eye opening in more ways than one. The reader finds herself enchanted with the spiritual traditions, intrigued with the military expertise, disgusted with family feuding and lastly in awe that such an amazing culture has been represented across the pages of history.

The three main themes gathered from the story were:

1. The Mongols were a more civilized group than historically recognized for.
2. The Mongol culture is one of respect and harmony.
  - a. A respect for the body.
  - b. A respect for different cultures and religions.
  - c. A respect for science and technology.
3. The Mongols were responsible for the spread of culture and trade in Europe.
  - a. The control and utility of the Silk Road and Indian trade market.
  - b. The use of military advancements.
  - c. The policy of religious freedom and tolerance.
  - d. A form of paper currency.
  - e. The spread of the Bubonic Plague.

*Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* is not your typical historical fiction. This book is a translation with some elaboration of the *Secret History* of Genghis Khan and his Golden Family. This story leads you through the

rise and fall of the Mongol Empire using their historical accounts. The reader follows the journey of the Golden Family from Genghis Khan's childhood all the way through his grandchildren. Anyone from a high school student to a history scholar would find *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* an interesting read.

Wetherford's book is an important read for the sake of rectifying the Mongol image in history. The history books describe the Mongol people as barbaric and a community that lacks culture and civilization. According to Wetherford's book, the Mongol people have a great culture filled with tradition and values quite different from the Western world. Wetherford attributes much of the success of Europe to the Mongol Empire. The trade routes developed through the rise of the Mongol Empire allowed Europe to grow and prosper. However, I would not say that I see *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* becoming a classic. The world as a whole is not terribly worried about correcting the historical image of the Mongol people.

In terms of style, this book is beautifully written. Wetherford does a wonderful job at illustrating the history of the Mongols. Wetherford expresses the emotions and the surroundings in such a way that you feel as if you are there seeing everything as it is happening in front of you. As a reader I appreciated the book for its great detail and imagery. Overall it is an eye-opening read for anyone unfamiliar with Mongol history.

## Global Crossing

[FINAL Edition]

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1421

The Year China Discovered America

By Gavin Menzies

Morrow. 552 pp. \$27.95

The title of Gavin Menzies' book, published last year in Britain, is a tease meant to challenge the conventional understanding of the New World's "discovery." The date puts the event more than 70 years ahead of Christopher Columbus's fabled voyage. The notion that the Ming Treasure Fleet may have wandered into the Americas is particularly strange, especially to readers accustomed to the image of China as the insular "sleeping dragon" of the Asian continent.

Is the question of who got here first worth fresh consideration? Certainly the last 10 years have produced a remarkable re-evaluation of the voyages of the Treasure Fleet, once considered insignificant trade ventures. In fact, the fleet's seven voyages (1405-1433), brainchild of the third Ming emperor, Zhu Di, brought most of the city-states in the Indian Ocean basin under nominal Chinese control. Chinese influence and culture spread rapidly throughout the area; a host of innovations and new knowledge, from glass blowing to Arab medical arts, as well as enormous profits, flowed back into China.

Stories of the exploits of these voyages are meticulously recorded in three eyewitness accounts: one by Ma Huan, a translator on the last four voyages; another by Fei Xin, a senior officer; and the third by Zheng He, admiral of the fleet, who left two stone tablets, one inscribed in 1421 and the other in 1431. The official Chinese histories of the period also describe the voyages in considerable detail; some of the most complete such accounts appear in the multivolume Ming shi (Official History of the Ming Dynasty). And, remarkably, a 16th-century copy of the navigation charts used by Zheng He, showing all the ports of call and the sailing routes on the seven voyages, has survived. The most spectacular voyages were the first (1405-07), during which a fleet of 317 ships with a crew of more than 27,000 men exploited the lucrative trade in silks, porcelains, spices and precious stones as far west as India, and the last (1431-33), which ventured into the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea and down the East African coast.

But these are not the voyages that interest Gavin Menzies, a retired British submarine captain. He is interested only in the sixth, which is reported to have left China on March 3, 1421, and returned on Sept. 3, 1422. It was a hastily organized trip with the sole purpose, according to the Zheng He tablets, of conducting "the ambassadors from Hu-lu-mo-ssu [Hormuz] and other countries, who had been in attendance at the capital for a long time, back to their countries." This was a courtesy voyage, the gesture of a generous emperor, escorting home the ambassadors who had come to the dedication of Beijing's Forbidden City on Feb. 2, 1421. Zheng He's lieutenant Hung Pao was in command, and he made several stops in Indonesia before going on to Malaysia, India, Ceylon, Hormuz and Aden on the Arabian peninsula, and finally the city-states of Brava and Mombasa in East Africa.

All of this is in the Chinese records. It is therefore quite astonishing that Menzies, who writes that he worked "without Chinese records to help me," launches into an elaborate, highly speculative, 500-page tome about the sixth voyage of the Treasure Fleet and what happened during what he calls the "missing years" of 1421-23. Ignoring the Chinese sources and Zheng He's chart -- and for whatever reason adding a year to the length of the voyage -- Menzies asserts that between 1421 and 1423 the Chinese fleet circumnavigated the globe, established colonies from California to Peru, charted Australia, the Arctic and Antarctica, and fixed the absolute position of the North and South Poles. And, oh yes, he claims that along the way Zheng He's navigators also figured out how to calculate longitude 400 years before the Europeans did.

Menzies thus argues that on this expedition the Treasure Fleet traveled more than 44,000 nautical miles instead of the usual 4,000 to 6,000, yet accomplished this in the same amount of time that the other trips took -- two years. Re-supplying the enormous fleet at sea -- serious business that took the Chinese three to six months on other voyages -- does not particularly concern Menzies. Although the fleet had 20 water tankers, it could not stay at sea for more than 30 days at a time. In his re-creation of possible routes on this round-the-world sixth voyage, he repeatedly has the Chinese crossing open bodies of water for more than 30 days. Had the Chinese followed these routes and not stopped for months to

shorelines of the major continents before Columbus's epic voyage to the New World in 1492. If it was not the Portuguese and the Spanish, then whose fleets charted the world, in particular the Southern Hemisphere? "Those fleets can only have been Chinese," Menzies asserts.

Menzies' map analysis is difficult to follow; the details do not appear clearly in the photographs provided in the book. But Patricia Seed, a Rice University history professor who specializes in 16th-century navigation and cartography, has studied the maps Menzies uses -- including the Piri Reis (1513), Jean Rotz (1552), Cantino (1502) and Waldseemüller charts (1507) -- and says they are all based entirely on Portuguese sources, not Chinese maps. The maps are also dated after the voyages of Dias, Columbus, da Gama and Cabral, who claimed Brazil for Portugal in 1500.

If the Chinese had indeed charted the whole world before the Europeans, where are the maps? Were they all lost? The 21-foot-long navigation chart that Zheng He had on board during his voyages is bordered on the west by East Africa and on the east by Japan. The northern boundaries are India and the Arabian peninsula and the southernmost point on the map is Timor in Indonesia. Zheng He's map does not include Europe. The Chinese knew about Europe from Arab traders but had no desire to go there because Europe offered only wool and wine -- commodities of low esteem in Ming China. Like Columbus's sailors who believed that if they ventured too far west they would fall off a flat Earth, Zheng He's sailors feared that beyond the charted regions of their map lay a vast morass, a swamp, in which the great treasure ships would get hopelessly stuck.

Menzies' assertion that the emperor's "master plan was to discover and chart the whole world" fails to consider the Confucian view, strongly held at the time, that discouraged ventures into the unknown: While his parents are alive, the son may not take a distant voyage abroad; if he has to take such a voyage, the destination must be known.

Menzies' other set of arguments to support his speculation about early Chinese circumnavigation centers on much-chewed-over evidence of possible Asian contact in the New World before Columbus: round stones with holes found off the coast of California that could be Chinese anchors, Asiatic chickens in Mexico, New World traditions of lacquer work and jade carving that are reminiscent of Asian crafts. As the late British sinologist Joseph Needham wrote in *Trans-Pacific Echoes and Resonances; Listening Once Again*, and as J.L. Sorenson and M.H. Raish's excellent bibliography *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas Across the Oceans* makes clear, the periods of possible Asian New World contact occurred in the 6th or 7th centuries B.C., again around the time of the birth of Christ, and as late as about the 8th century A.D.

Menzies does the scholarship in this area a disservice in his book by jumbling the time periods and mixing well-documented work with ill-researched or incomplete studies. Most scholars agree that if there was contact by what is now China, Japan or Indonesia, it was brief and, contrary to Menzies' theories, did not occur as late as the Ming dynasty in the 15th century or involve the Treasure Fleet or the establishment of colonies. These early seafarers used large sailing rafts or outrigger canoes and, like the Polynesians, navigated across the Pacific by the stars.

Menzies also does a disservice to scholarship on the Treasure Fleet itself. He exaggerates the size of the largest ships in the fleet, and says they were flat-bottomed boats that carried stones as ballast. Zheng He's ships had keels running along the bottom that the Chinese called "dragon bones"; water, not ballast, was flooded into water-tight compartments to steady ships in a high sea. Menzies fantasizes that the fleet carried concubines and that babies were born at sea; the Chinese records make no mention of women on board. It appears as though Menzies has read none of the primary Chinese language sources.

Menzies concludes that he has "found the evidence to overturn the long-accepted history of the Western World," yet he acknowledges that some of his theories require "some leaps of the imagination that are not, as yet, backed by hard evidence." Ground-breaking history or flight of fancy? In the end, Menzies is his own severest critic. He seems unsure of what he has accomplished in 1421, and so are we.

Louise Levathes is the author of "When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433."

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