

# MAJOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

## The Indian Ocean World: The Making of the First Global Economy in the Context of Human-Environment Interaction

### Fifth International MCRI Conference in English and Chinese, “Zheng He’s Maritime Voyages (1405-1433) and China’s Relations with the Indian Ocean World from Antiquity” 22-24 August 2014

By Jennifer Craig

The Project held its fifth international conference at the end of summer in Victoria, Canada. It was hosted by the Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives (CAPI) at the University of Victoria (UVic). Along with support from the MCRI this conference was supported by The International Office (UVic) and the China Association for Maritime History Studies. The three day event brought together over 40 members of the MCRI project and other scholars from Canada, China, Germany, the UK, Norway, the US, South Africa, Austria, and Australia. Members of MCRI teams and representatives of Chinese tertiary institutions compared and contrasted their findings to date about, and interpretations of, the Zheng He voyages and the impact of those interpretations on the subsequent history of Chinese external relations across the Indian Ocean world. The panels were either English or Chinese with some papers delivered bilingually. Some of the broad themes covered included:



Lunch Meeting during the conference. Discussion on the different perspectives of Zheng He within and outside China

- Perspectives on the construction of Zheng He’s Treasure Ships
- The geography and accounts on/by foreigners and material evidence of the Seven Voyages
- The purpose of the voyages: conflict or consul
- Modern interpretations and legacies of Zheng He and his voyages manifest in celebrations, education and food both within and outside China

#### In this Issue...

1. Fifth International MCRI Conference
2. Team 4 Updates
3. Team 7 Introduction
4. Database Update



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

- The islamization by the Muslim Zheng He across the Indian Ocean World

The conference opened with a banquet during which our hosts Zhongping Chen and Helen Lansdowne welcomed us to the beautiful island of Victoria and reminded us that China was just west across the vast blue sea surrounding us. Prof Chen explained his personal interest in Zheng He studies which I invite you to read of in his column below.

Our 1st Keynote Speech was delivered bilingually in Chinese and English by Geoff Wade who immediately touched on the crux of this conference with examples in both historic and modern sources that portrayed different causes behind Zheng He's voyages. One major question permeated each presentation – to what extent are the sources valid?

Midway through the conference our 2nd Keynote Speech was delivered bilingually in Chinese and English by Liu Yingsheng who asked the audience to question

whether Zheng He was a pioneer or if he strengthened



Sydney Cunliffe and Gregory Blue

ties already in place prior to his voyages. He suggested to consider sources prior to the Zheng He voyages, their validity, and the potential of creating an open-access knowledge base which includes sources within and outside China that allow comparison between sources prior to, during and post the era of Zheng He.

The third and final Keynote Speech was delivered during dinner on the second day of the conference. Timothy Brook asked the audience to consider the perspective of Zheng He contemporaries. China had two parallel major exchange routes co-existing: the Terrestrial Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Route. Was China an inward facing nation towards the land or was it facing the sea? This question could be a framework to guide research questions on Zheng He. Gregory Blue then concluded the evening's talk with a presentation on the Selden Map, recently rediscovered in the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford. He evoked the potential this chart/map has for studies in both terrestrial and maritime connectivity.

The closing speech was delivered bilingually in Chinese and English by Zhongping Chen who summarized the discussion points in the Round-table meeting held in Chinese on the question "Zheng He Studies: What course to take?". Harald Bøckman shared an English translation of the roundtable discussion. These two perspectives by the speakers provided both English and a Chinese summary of Zheng He research and standpoints from within and outside China. Generally



Liu Yingsheng keynote speech

we were invited to step out of any sino- or west-centrism and examine the political agendas behind the acceptance of various sources and direction of Zheng He Studies.

This conference was made possible by the hard work of Team 4 Leader Zhongping Chen and Helen Lansdown (CAPI). We thank them for all their efforts in organizing and hosting this successful project conference!



## Zhongping Chen, University of Victoria

The research focus of our group (Team 4) is Zheng He (1371-1433) and his seven voyages across the Indian Ocean in 1405-1433. Here, I'll take you through my 2012 journey when I traveled to Nanjing's historical sites associated with Zheng He. This was supported by the MCRI/IOWC project and a faculty research fellowship from the Center for Asia-Pacific Initiatives, University of Victoria. Below I take you to the locations in relation to the man himself, the names and locations of museums and historical sites where some of Zheng He's stories are monumentalized.

Ironically, my research trip in Nanjing started from where Zheng He's life was supposed to have ended; it started at his tomb on the Niushou Mountain south of the city. This is only the tomb containing personal effects of Zheng He. I was provided an in-kind driver and car by Nanjing University as a gesture of thanks for a lecture I delivered on Zheng He's voyages. Zheng He's funerary park included the tomb, a lake and a scenic forest, and museum. After this trip I visited Zheng He's residence from when he served as a grand eunuch, in southeast Nanjing, which included a park and an interior museum.

The climax of my 2012 research trip was a visit to northwest Nanjing's "Historical Site of the Treasure Shipyards." A significant reason why Zheng He is an important person in Chinese history is that he is known to have captained fleets of enormous wooden

"treasure ships". Much mystery continues to surround the engineering feats and natural resource extraction of how and where these fleets were built. Amongst the mystery of the treasure ships is the controversial location of their construction. Were the colossal treasure ships built in Nanjing, an inland city on the Yangzi River, or in Fujian, on the southeast coast of China where his fleets started oceangoing voyages? In Nanjing's "Historical Site of the Treasure Shipyards" there are three archaeologically excavated shipyards



Coffin Niushou Photo credit: Zhongping Chen

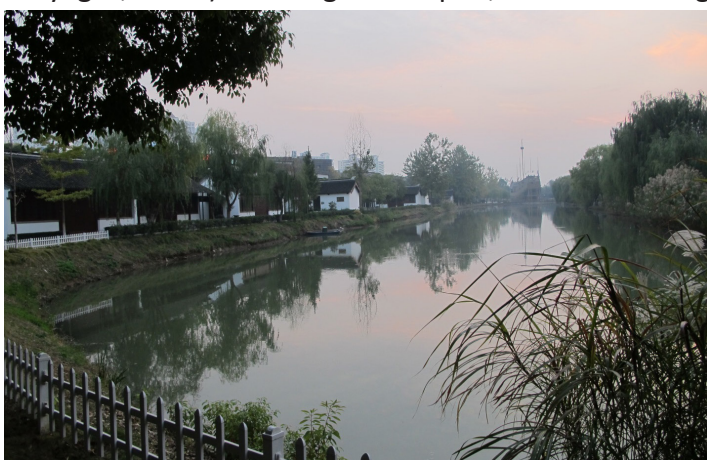
dated to early Ming China. Each of the three is 430 meters in length and 50-53 meters in width. Zheng He's largest treasure ships were said to be of 136 meters in length and 56 meters in width. In terms of the shipyard length it is possible this area was the location for building Zheng He's treasure ships, but questionable in terms of the shipyard's width.

One practical method to determine the hypothetical construction of the enormous ships is to build ships. Therefore, it was very interesting to witness a ratio-correct smaller-size (but still impressively large) treasure ship inside Nanjing's "Historical Site of the Treasure Shipyards." Moreover, I received a special invitation to visit a nearby factory where a larger treasure ship is currently under construction. This ship is designed at 71.1 meters in length and 14.05 meters in width, and there are plans to sail it around the world.

In northwest Nanjing are two more historiographical



sites of Zheng He: 1) the “Temple of the Heavenly Queen”, worshiped by Zheng He as a protector of his voyages; and 2) the “Jinghai Temple”, built for hosting



Shipyards. Photo credit: Zhongping Chen

the sacred tooth relic of Buddha that Zheng He’s fleets brought back from Ceylon. Inside the “Jinghai Temple” and the “Historical Site of Treasure Shipyards” are two museums in memory of Zheng He. I also visited the “Palace of Celestial Worship” in southwest Nanjing.

Overall, I observed that Zheng He’s statues in Nanjing numbered more than a dozen, there were one to two statues of Zheng He either half-length or full-length; as well as numerous large or small-sized replicas of his treasure ships in each place I visited. This outnumbers the remaining statues of Chairman Mao (these once stood in front of most universities, factories, governmental buildings and so on but were demolished after the Cultural Revolution). My overall impression of state-sponsored Zheng He studies in China is both excitement about the relevancy of our team’s project and a sense of worry about the governmental restorations, reproductions, and monumentalizing of these historical sites. All the historical sites I visited in 2012, together with their museums and other attached facilities, were recovered or built by the local governments. These authorities did not take full account of different scholarly opinions on Zheng He’s voyages. Within China official efforts promote Zheng He as a leader of China’s peaceful rise and friendly diplomacy from the past to the present. However, what puzzled me most, during and after my research

trip, is that I witnessed very few visitors to so many state-run museums or historical sites in memory of



Replica ship of Zheng He Treasure Ships.  
Photo credit: Zhongping Chen

Zheng He. This left me with a lingering question, was the lack of popular interest in these museums and historical sites due to people’s indifference to state propaganda or to the lack of true scholarship in Zheng He studies?

The outcome of this research trip in 2012 to Nanjing strengthened my resolve to hold a truly international academic conference on Zheng He’s voyages. The aim was to bring scholarly input together from people within and outside China in order to explore multi-perspectives of Zheng He’s voyages. My colleagues and I fulfilled this aim with the conference “Zheng He’s Maritime Voyages (1405-1433) and China’s Relations with the Indian Ocean World from Antiquity,” for more information see the first story of this Newsletter. As the conference report in this newsletter demonstrates, the symposium was the first of its kind in Canada, and it distinguished itself from dozens of similar conferences held in China because its participants engaged in critical examination and intensive debate

over different aspects of Zheng He's voyages, rather than unanimous praise of his navigation achievements and peaceful diplomacy. Gregory Blue and I have since been editing one Chinese volume and an English volume of the conference proceedings. This will be published by prestigious academic presses in China and North America.

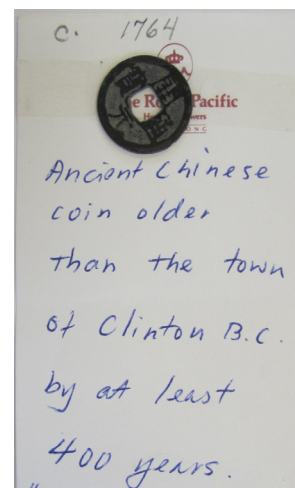


## Yan Wu, Zhejiang University

I am an associate professor of Islamic and Middle East History at Zhejiang University, China. In March 2015 I joined Professor Zhongping Chen's MCRI team. In recent years I worked on the history of Islam in China and Asia, especially the Islamic cultural dissemination in Asia through Zheng He's voyages across the Indian Ocean in the early fifteenth century. In particular I investigated how Zheng He's voyages played a part in the spread of Islam in China and Southeast Asia. Zheng He himself was a Chinese Muslim; his voyages coincided with the dissemination of Islam from West Asia to East and Southeast Asia in both time and space. My research supports the point of view that Chinese Muslim immigrants created a sphere of influence in both religion and trade with the strong support of Zheng He and the contemporary Emperors of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE).

I have long taught world history at Zhejiang University and from this experience I developed an interest in the increasing literature on the Chinese "discovery" of the Americas. After I arrived in British Columbia, I began work with Professor Zhongping Chen on a co-authored paper on the controversial issue of Zheng He's voyages and Chinese "discovery" of America. Broadly we are categorizing the many scholarly and popular publications that exist on this topic. We then evaluate the claims and evidences published in Chinese, English, French, and other languages. One example of the artifacts, with possible relation to this hypothesis, is a coin in the collections at the Clinton Museum (henceforth referred to as Museum, coin

access no. 1764). Professor Zhongping Chen translated the embossment on the coin identified as "Kai-Yuan tongbao," as reading 'universal currency of the Kai-Yuan Era'. This updated translation debunks the coin's original registry in the Museum collections as a metal currency of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 CE) and instead identifies the coin as a metal currency of the Kai-Yuan Era (713-741 CE). It is therefore of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) and was in use during the reign of Emperor Xianzong (r. 712-756 CE). This is now amongst the most ancient Chinese coins discovered in America. From this we raised the research question - can the Kai-Yuan tongbao coin be used to prove Chinese "discovery" of British Columbia before Columbus?



Clinton Coin  
Photo credit: Yan Wu



## Zhiping Liang, Shanghai University of Engineering Science

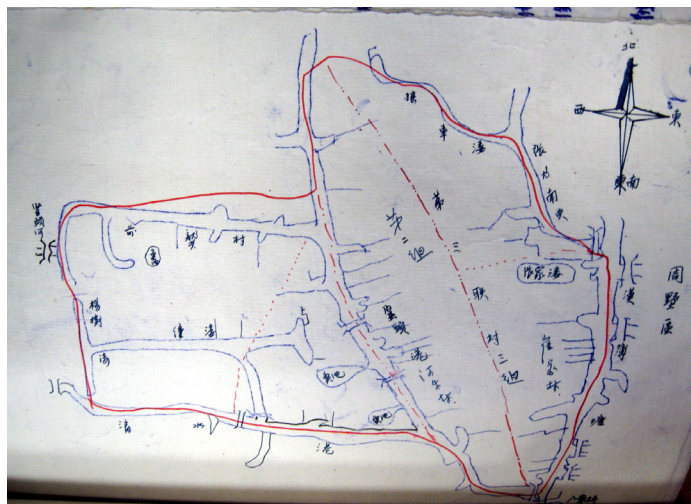
I joined Team 4 in August 2014 as a visiting scholar. One focus of my research is human-environment interaction in Chinese history, especially in the local history of Shanghai and the nearby Yangzi River Delta



Taihu River Basin



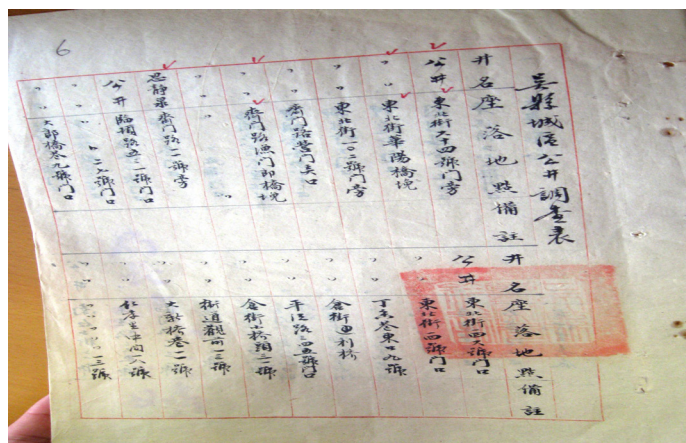
(henceforth referred to as Delta). During the past year, I worked at the University of Victoria to finalize my research project on the change in water-quality and social response in the Delta, the so-called region of rivers and lakes of China. The result is the book *The Thirst in the Region of Rivers and Lakes: Change in Water-quality Environment and Improvement of Drinking Water, 1840-1980*, Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, 2014. The book focuses on the Delta around Shanghai and the period from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, or from the late Qing Dynasty, through the Republic of China up to the Mao's Era of the People's Republic of China. Its central theme is the astonishing pollution of the Delta's drinking waters, as well as the resultant conflicts between the local governments and social organizations over the improvement and management of such precious natural resources. The references for this study are drawn from five different sources: local chronicles, archives, newspapers and journals, findings reports and travel notes and memoirs. First, *Tongzhi Shanghai xianzhi*. The Local Chronicles of Shanghai in the Tongzhi Reign-period of the Qing



Suzhou Archive. Photo Credit: Zhiping Liang

Dynasty]; second, Archives of the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China about Yangtze River Delta up to the 1980s; third, *Shenbao*, [Shanghai Daily], *Zhejiang minzhen yuekan*, [The Journal of Civil Affairs of Zhejiang Province], and *Zhonghua yixue zazhi*, [Chinese Medical Journal]; fourth, the most informative, Japanese reports from the East Asia Co-

culture College about south China in 1913-1917; fifth, Japanese and Westerners in China before 1949.



Suzhou Archive. Photo Credit: Zhiping Liang

This research has impressed on me the important need for understanding what past methods were employed for negotiating and informing policies between different offices responsible for China's natural resources. One result of this curiosity is the beginning of my investigation of environmental changes in the Delta during the voyages of Zheng He in the early fifteenth century. This required me to consider entirely different archives and references from what I had considered previously. The reason for this is because the Delta's environment was very different during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when Zheng He operated, from the later Delta of the Qing Dynasty and Mao's Era (1840-1980). In order to narrow the possible references to consider for research on river systems of the Delta during the period of Zheng He, I first conducted a preliminary study of all the literature available on this topic. I presented the result from this labor as a paper at the conference discussed in the first article of this Newsletter, titled "The Changes in the Jiangnan River System, the Rise and Fall of the Liuhe Port, as well as the Beginning and End of Zheng He's Maritime Voyages in Early Ming China". Its central theme is that the successive changes in the Delta's river system led first to the rise of the Liu Port as a starting point of Zheng He's voyages, and later to its silting and decline, but that the end of the epic voyages resulted mainly from civilian officials like Xia

Yuanjie, who were at one time in charge of the river system in the Delta. The references for this study are drawn from local chronicles and official history, such as *Jiajing Taicang zhouzhi*, *The Local Chronicles of Taicang in the Jiajing Reign-period of the Ming Dynasty*], and *Ming shilu*, *The Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty*.



## Ying Liu, University of Victoria

As the Asian Studies Librarian at the University of Victoria, I joined the MCRI project as a collaborator of Team 4 in 2010. The research focus of Team 4 is on the seven epic voyages led by Zheng He. His massive fleets sailed from the South China Sea to the western Indian Ocean, visiting locations in about 30 countries between 1405 and 1433. My major work has led to the compilation of a multilingual bibliography. The publications included are from around the world and about Zheng He's voyages and their profound influence on the interactions of China with the Indian Ocean World countries, especially on the maritime trade network, cultural exchange and human migration across the region around the early fifteenth century.

Compiling the bibliography was not an easy task. It assembles the corpus of literature on a range of disciplines in thirteen languages, including Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Indonesian, Italian, Malay, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Thai. It covers various types of sources. The publications listed include monograph books, journal articles, conference proceedings, dissertations, book reviews and websites.

The publication of the volume *Zheng He's Maritime Voyages (1405-1433) and China's Relations with the Indian Ocean World: A Multilingual Bibliography* is a successful story of hard work, cooperation, and efficient teamwork under pressure. The other two editors of the book, Dr. Zhongping Chen and Dr. Gregory Blue, contributed hugely in each stage of the

compilation. Dr. Chen kindly replaced me in leading the final preparation of the bibliography during my pregnancy. The administration of the University of Victoria Libraries supported the research by reducing my workload and directly providing staff support on the bibliography project. My librarian colleagues and library staff selflessly contributed their knowledge, time and skills to the work. It is not possible to list here all the research assistants and scholars that have worked on the bibliography. Every time when we see the book, we are reminded of the warm friendships developed and support received while producing the volume.



## Yen-kuang Kuo, University of Victoria

I am a PhD candidate under the supervision of Professor Zhongping Chen. I work on Chinese sources, especially governmental documents and unofficial records regarding Zheng He's voyages across the Indian Ocean in 1405-1433. Of these Chinese sources, the most important ones are two steles established by Zheng He; the three books written by Zheng He's crew members, namely Ma Huan's *Yingya shenglan*, Fei Xin's *Xingcha shenglan*, and Gong Zhen's *Xiyang fanguo zhi*; the nautical map "Zheng He hanghai tu;" and the *Veritable Record of Emperor Yongle* and the *Veritable Record of Emperor Xuanzong*, which were based on archival records of the emperors between 1403-1424, and between 1426-1435 respectively. In the conference our team hosted on Zheng He (see the first article of this Newsletter) I presented a paper in which I collaborated with Professor Chen. It is titled "The Epic Voyages of Zheng He's Fleets to Africa and the History of Early Globalization in the Indian Ocean World." In this paper we rebutted the viewpoints of a Taiwanese scholar, Chen Xinxiong, and his associates, who claimed that Zheng He's fleets did not reach East Africa. Our paper examined the significance of Zheng He's voyages to East Africa for the history of early globalization in the Indian Ocean World. In particular Zheng He's voyages used established sea

routes, and especially tribute system and tributary trade (the traditional diplomacy and trade of Chinese empire and its tributary states) to connect China with the Indian Ocean, and directly linked a majority of what Janet Abu-Lughod has called the thirteenth-century World System in her 1989 publication, *Before European Hegemony*. Further research on Zheng He's fleets to Africa is needed in order to attain more robust evidence of the impact of Zheng He, his crew and their ships. We'd like to investigate the influence of the voyages on the late-coming activities of the Portuguese, who entered the Indian World at the beginning of the 16th century, and other Europeans in the Indian Ocean after the 15th century. This can then expand to relate specific stories to the wider maritime history and its global expansion from the region. What we have done in this paper is only a further step of this kind of historical study.



## Yanshuo Liu, University of Victoria

I am a MA student under the supervision of Dr. Zhongping Chen. I research Late Imperial China's (Ming Dynasty to Qing Dynasty 1400s-1900sCE) maritime trade with sources by foreign voyagers. Since the beginning of 2015 I have developed my thesis which investigates how foreign traders perceived Whampoa, the port of Canton, as representative of the whole of China. This is recognized as the only foreign trade port from 1757CE of Qing Dynasty (1644 to 1912 CE) China. I ask the research question - how did the fur trade voyagers' (i.e. Peter Osbeck, James Colnett, Ivan Fedorovich Kruzenshtern, etc.) impressions of the port in 1750s to the 1850sCE affect the general European and American understanding of late imperial China? The sources I use are mainly the facsimile voyage journals of the traders, like *A Voyage to China and the East Indies*, by Peter Osbeck (Swedish naturalist), the voyage *Round the World*, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, & 1806 by Ivan Fedorovich Kruzenshtern (Baltic German and captain of Russian circumnavigation), and *The Journal of Captain James*

Colnett Aboard the *Argonaut* from April 26, 1789 to Nov. 3, 1791, by James Colnett (British officer).

Largely the voyagers were limited in their access to China to anchorage in the port city of Whampoa, at the Pearl River Delta and maritime entrance to Canton city. Thus, most of the artistic impressions of 'Canton' during this period are in fact of Whampoa. Such images were further amplified and distorted to encompass the whole of Qing Dynasty China. As a result, the voyagers' records from their time in Whampoa, when they traded with Chinese, and wrote their journals are important sources of Swedish, British and Russian studies about Canton and China.



## Team 7 Vinita Damodaran, Mick Frogley, James Hamilton, Rob Allan (MET Office), Dominic Kniveton, Yi Wang, Melissa Lazenby and Natsanet Alameriew University of Sussex

We collect data on climate and the environment in the *Longue Durée* from archives and are interested in making this information clear to the public in terms of understanding the climate and how we engage with it in the Indian Ocean World. The potential to bring together our data within the MCRI database, the integration of the database to GIS, and the tools in development for ICRA are all exciting.

To aid visualisation we hope to create models concerning the periods surrounding two major volcanic eruptions, reconstructing wind directions and shipping routes with the help of Philip Brohan (Met Office). The result will show the composite of all ships routes for the 2 years before and after the volcanic eruptions. It will be displayed through a movie loop that shows each new route as it progresses but keeps



past routes on the image, with new routes changing colour after the volcanic eruptions. There will be two separate movies for the two volcanic eruptions. This visualization will be completed by two graduate students on the project, Melissa Lazenby and Netsanet Alamirew.

Vinita Damodaran is an environmental historian specialised in South Asia. She is involved in the AHRC network on the botanical and meteorological history of the Indian Ocean, a 90 people strong international collaboration. She is currently building a large database of archival sources for the environmental history of India and the Indian Ocean for the period 1500-1900. This data will be an important contribution of Indian historical data for the MCRI database.

Mick Frogley, Dominic Kniveton, and Yi Wang have amassed data with high resolution across the Indian Ocean from East Africa, South India, Nepal, middle China and Indonesia on the climatic variances over the last 2000 years. This data is currently being entered into a database. It is expected to package this data in testable 'windows' so as to trial predictive models of climatic patterns. Yi Wang is developing climate models simulating wind current direction changes over the course of the time of data held in the 2000 year database. The database of the MCRI would be an excellent connection point for this area of work as the team's data would benefit from their humanities and social science data.

James Hamilton is working in the British Library and India Archives to gather information to be organized and used as a seed project to understand the breadth of data available within these institutions and how to connect these with visualizations

expected to be produced from the team members' environment data.

Rob Allan is a climatologist at the Met office. His interest is using past weather records to simulate past climate. He is developing data collection of image digitization from both land and sea surface observations. Most of his data is from maritime sources, so the more terrestrially orientated data of the MCRI is appealing. His data are of synoptic observations of barometer (temperature) data. He is also working with US colleagues to assimilate rig analyses in which the variables from modern weather forecast entries can be used to produce models of past environment. These are sourced from aircraft, balloons, satellite. Synoptic, monthly sea temperatures are another area of his research. He has 200 years of data with quality dimensions, in the form of IMMA. Along with US colleagues he has 56 observations in an hour of previous data to check consistency and irregularities of the gathered data. They have data as early as from the 1830s, 1840s, 1850s and 1870s with a number of observations for reconstructions over North America.



Team 7: (from left to right) Yi Wang, Netsanet Alamirew, Vinita Damodaran, Mick Frogley, Melissa Lazenby

There is also an 1815 project in which it is possible to understand the impact of the volcanic eruption of Tambora over Indonesia, and the data will be made freely available on internet. The potential of this project is to go as far back as 1600. A lot of Rob's data is from the Taunton Hydrographic Office, but he also has data from the Citizen data project of 'old weathering', in which citizens have collected over 7000 entries of digitized WWI observations. He also has ties with a project in Oxford on Zooniverse. With thousands of people involved, the potential for this project to share data on drawings of boats to help the ICRA team with boat identification is strong. Rob is also conducting a reconstruction of the shipwreck Endurance, Shkelton's ship from 1915, which Damodaran noted was a year of protracted El Nino and La Nina events.



Conference Presenters: Angela Schottenhammer and Tansen Sen



Conference Presenters: Gwyn Campbell and Yingsheng Liu



Conference Presenters: Clifford Pereira, Jennifer Craig, and Alexander Wain

**T**he IOWC-MCRI database assembles data on the incidence and impact of significant human and natural “events” (e.g. conflicts, volcanism, droughts, floods and disease) in the Indian Ocean World (IOW) throughout history. Entries are gathered from any useful source, but especially from IOW-related archives of states and organizations. The entries thus gathered (currently about 15,000) are organized into five subsets: environmental events, human migration, exchange, disease and conflict. Using Dynamic Bayesian Network Analysis, a method of statistical interference, researchers can use the data to test correlations and hypotheses concerning human-environment interaction in the IOW. Additionally, through the website, researches can query the database and have the results outputted to spreadsheets and visualized on maps, with further tools in the process of being added and developed.

**T**he database is accessible through <http://iowp.geog.mcgill.ca>. To get a username and password, please contact Dr. Pablo Arroyo at the McGill GIC.