ABSTRACT

Ma Huan’s (马欢) *Yingya Shenglan* (《瀛涯胜览》) is a book containing travel notes written in the early Ming Dynasty. It records various aspects of different places the author visited while serving as a translator in Zheng Ho’s (郑和) famous naval expeditions to the western oceans. These places include present-day Southeast Asia, India and Arabia. This seven-chapter dissertation looks specifically into Ma Huan’s records of Southeast Asian states in the early fifteenth century before the arrival of the Westerners, seeking to classify and analyze the information Ma Huan gives.

After a general introduction on Ma Huan and his book, *Yingya Shenglan*, in the first chapter, this thesis moves on to give a general historical background of China and Southeast Asia in the early fifteenth century and the relations between them in the second chapter.

The third chapter looks at the political relations between the early Southeast Asian states and China, as well as the political and social organizations of these states as recorded by Ma Huan. This is followed by a chapter on the economic aspect of early Southeast Asia, which includes a general overview of the trade relations between Southeast Asia and China and also more specific discussions on the systems of weights and measures and currencies used.

The fifth and sixth chapters examine the architecture and products as well as the social and cultural aspects of early Southeast Asia. It is found that Ma Huan gives a most detailed account of the socio-cultural aspect of the Southeast Asians, especially in terms of their lifestyle and customs. Most of these accounts are vivid and interesting, giving the whole book a touch of
liveliness. In addition, these are also very valuable accounts on the way of life in early Southeast Asia, which is lacking in most historical books.

Finally, this thesis proposes that Chinese works of such a nature be used as a source of historical information on early Southeast Asian states and societies because most historical books on Southeast Asia that are available today begin their narration from the arrival of the Westerners and the start of colonialism. Besides, very little is known about Southeast Asia before the advent of the West due to the exceeding lack of information. Thus, our Chinese informants from the Ming Dynasty may be able to help us fill in the gap on this part of history.