

# The Largest port in the East

## Dialogue on History and Future

### 【Opening credits】

What is the "largest port in the East"?

With the friendship linked by the Maritime Silk Road, in the summer of 2025, media professionals from Southeast Asia come to Quanzhou, to search for the code that has enabled this city to thrive for thousands of years. Departing from the largest port in the East, on the sea level of history and the future, heading towards a new distant place.

### 【Interview】

**Hostess:** Hello everyone, welcome to Quanzhou, the Emporium of the world in Song-yuan China. I'm your hostess today Wendy Wu. Over a thousand years ago, Quanzhou earned the title of "the Largest port of the East" for thousands of years. It has served as a vital getaway and hub to connect China with the world. So today we are at the Quanzhou Maritime Museum, we are very happy to be joined with me our four media representatives from Southeast Asian countries, so let's meet them first.

Guest1: **Edmund**, Director of Yoywow Space of Singapore

Guest2: **Chong Joo Cheik**, journalist for Sin Chew Daily of Malaysia

Guest3: **Wilson Lee Flores**, Columnist for Philippine Star of Philippine

Guest4: **CHAMAIPORN SRIKHAYAN**, Columnist for the Krungthepturakij Newspaper of Thailand

**Hostess:** We are also very happy and delighted to welcome our guest scholar Mr Linhan.

Academic Guest: **Lin Han**, Director of Quanzhou Maritime Museum,  
Academic Research Interests: Maritime History, Ship History, and the History of the Southeast China Region

**Hostess:**For the past few days you have been touring Quanzhou to know exploring its history culture and trade,so I like to start by asking the first question:what has impressed you guys the most?Did you come across anything fun or interesting?

**Wilson Lee Flores:**I was so impressed that tourism is now very much alive. It's now a fast growing industry here,and I was delighted also to see in Kaiyuan temple even outside the introduction of Kaiyuan Temple. There's one entire Chinese history introduction and there's also English everywhere. Because the whole world should come to Quanzhou and everyone should experience the uniqueness of this great city.

**Chong Joo Cheik:**I saw one scene in Xunpu Village,they were wearing hairpins and surrounded by flowers on the heads,with Nyonya clothing,which is the traditional attire of the Nyonya.I think it's a great combination of two cultures,a cultural collision point.

**CHAMAIPORN SRIKHAYAN:**I really like that people in Quanzhou always have the optimistic,here have often rainy right,for me I don't like rainy much,because like hard to go outside ,travel difficult.But Quanzhou people are optimistic about the rain, give them lucky, give them money.They have the blank spared for receiving the rain receiving the money,receiving the lucky.I think it's very wow!It's very impressed for me.

**Hostess:**Thank you everyone for sharing your perspectives on the very interesting thing you encountered in Quanzhou.Every connection is very fascinating,some contemporary,some dating back centuries ago,but everything is closely tied to Quanzhou's position,the Largest port of the East.So right now we are in the Quanzhou Maritime Museumwhich documents the thousands of years history of the maritime trade between Quanzhou and the world.

### **【Explainer Video 1】**

Quanzhou, a city that coexists with the sea, is the starting point of the Maritime Silk Road,and the window through which ancient China in the Song and Yuan Dynasties communicated with the world.Quanzhou Maritime Museum is China's first thematic museum dedicated to ancient maritime transportation.With more than 9,000 precious collections centered around the history of the medieval Zayton Port, it tells the

glorious past of "the Largest port in the East".

Through holographic projection and interactive exhibits, you can become an ancient sea merchant and experience the prosperity of "the Largest port in the East". You can see the fleets of Zheng He's seven voyages to the Western Seas as well as its concept of peace, friendship, mutual exchange and integration, and feel the great feat in the history of human navigation. Here is not only a witness to history but also a vivid classroom for the mutual learning of human civilizations.

### **【Interview】**

**Hostess:** Here comes the question to Mr Lin: cause you know a port means openness and exchange, what the role has Quanzhou played in the centuries long friendship between China and the world?

**Lin Han:** People from Fujian in history, especially those from Quanzhou, have the closest connection with Southeast Asia. Quanzhou, as the the Emporium of the world in Song-Yuan China, used to have frequent commercial exchanges with Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, to Europe and other places (frequent commercial exchanges). In <Chu-fan-chi (Records of Foreign Countries)> it recorded the history of exchanges between Quanzhou and 58 overseas countries and regions during the Southern Song Dynasty. At the same time, by the Yuan Dynasty, the number had increased to 99 countries recorded to Wang Dayuan's <Description of the Barbarians of the Isles>. Basically, it doubled during the Song and Yuan dynasties. We can also see it in these two important classic documents that the trade and commodity exchanges between Quanzhou and different countries and regions in Southeast Asia, and cultural exchange.

This year marks the 620th anniversary of Zheng He's voyages to the West Oceans. During this process, we can see in history, Zheng He set sail from China, passing through Southeast Asia, finally arrived in Africa. During this process, many Quanzhou people also participated in Zheng He's voyages to the Western Oceans, which has stimulated connections with different countries in Southeast Asia.

**Hostess:** Mr Li, so actually you are a Quanzhou descent right?

**Wilson Lee Flores:** Yes.

**Hostess:** So can you still speak Hokkien now?

**Wilson Lee Flores:**Yes,I could still speak Hokkien.I can speak Hokkien,everyone in the family speaks Hokkien.

**Hostess:**Can you tell about your story?

**Wilson Lee Flores:**Our family has been in the Philippines for 230 years.The first ancestor that went to Manila from Quanzhou city's Jinjiang county in a small village,that's why I was asking Mr Lin a while ago.I was asking Mr Lin,in the Qing Dynasty from Quanzhou to Manila,how long did it take to ride the junk boat?I was very curious.Mr Lin said it will take minimum one month during those days,during good weather,and bad weather it could take more than one month,maybe two or three months.

**Hostess:**So it's just like even if you have not been here before,but you still already master the Hokkien, master the language.

**Wilson Lee Flores:**Yes,and now it's almost 230 years we still speak Hokkien, we still speak Hokkien as my first language actually.So when I came to Quanzhou all the foods that we ate here,many of them have become very popular Filipino dishes all over the Philippines.

**Hostess:**Thank you.Before Mr Lin also talk about Zheng He right,we talk about Zheng He is a very respected figure in Southeast Asian countries.

### **【Preview of the next section】**

Zheng He's voyages to the Western Oceans:

A civilization messenger with goods around the world

### **【Explainer Video 2】**

Zheng He,a renowned navigator and diplomat of China's Ming Dynasty.A period of 28 years from 1405 to 1433,Zheng He led seven epic voyages to the Western Seas,Reaching over thirty countries across Asia and Africa,half acentury before Columbus's arrival in the Americas.

During Zheng He' s first voyage to the Western Seas,his fleet stopped at Luzon.Chinese goods such as silk and porcelain were then transported to the Americas via the Philippines.Driven by Zheng He's fleet, the three kings of the Sulu Archipelago led a mission to visit China in 1417,laying the foundation for the long-standing friendship between China and the Philippines. In September 2023, Princess Jaisel Kiram of the Sultanate of

Sulu in the Philippines visited the Tomb of the King of Sulu in China, commemorating the 606th anniversary of the friendly exchanges between our ancestors when they came to China.

According to the records in <Ming Veritable Records>, Zheng He stayed in the Malacca Strait five times without occupying an inch of land. He also helped build city walls and ensured maritime peace there. A large number of sailors and merchants settled in Malacca, participated in local development and spread agricultural techniques such as rice cultivation. Chinese merchant ships brought ironware and cloth in exchange for spices and tin ore, which promoted Malacca to become an international commercial port.

### **【Interview】**

**Hostess:** Are there any Zheng He sites in your countries? How is he remembered now?

**Chong Joo Cheik:** There is a location, during Zheng He's seven voyages to the West at least five of them were stopped in there. That location is Malacca. It was over 600 years ago, some relics of Zheng He were left behind in this state office in Malacca, including Bukit China, Sam Po Keng Temple, and Sam Po Well.

What's interesting is that the road next to Bukit China, Sam Po Keng Temple, and Sam Po Well is called Jalan Laksamana Zheng He. You probably don't know what it means.

Jalan means "road" in Malay, Laksamana is the "General", Zheng He is "Zheng He", so the road is called "Zheng He General Road". There is actually more than one Zheng He General Road in Malaysia. There are at least two "Zheng He General Roads" in other states as far as I know, there are three roads with the same name, including the one in Malacca.

Malacca established the Zheng He Cultural Museum over 20 years ago. The location of the Malacca Cultural Museum is the location of an official office established by Zheng He during his voyages to Malacca. Several hundred pieces of porcelain brought by Zheng He during his journey to Southeast Asia are displayed in the museum, including some seafood and many models. Last year, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China. Some people in local area even suggested changing the name of one Chinese school in Malacca to "Zheng He School". As you know that although it has been over 600 years, Zheng He went to

Southeast Asia for over 600 years, but he still has an impact on us in Malaysia.

**Wilson Lee Flores:** I want to add also to your stories about Zheng He. Zheng He's fleet, 600 years ago, went to the southern Philippines, the Sulu area. Sulu before was an independent kingdom. His person went there because of typhoon, then he stayed there became respected person in Sulu area. It's now called Sulu province and the tomb is still there. It is the most famous tomb in Sulu province, it's called "Poon tao kong tomb", the local people even built a Chinese style temple there, still the remains are there. It's a symbol of the connection of Zheng He's heritage with southern Philippines.

### 【Explainer Video 3】

When Zheng He's fleet passed through the Singapore Strait, they marked the key landmark "Longyamen", which also became one of the important mooring points for Zheng He's fleet. Inside the Singapore Maritime Experiential Museum, there is still a three-story-high replica of Zheng He's treasure ship built to the original size.

Zheng He's fleet spread China's advanced agricultural technologies, medical knowledge and culture to Thailand, and brought back special local products from Thailand such as spices and hardwoods to China. After Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas, a large number of immigrants from the southeastern coast of China crossed the sea to settle in Southeast Asia and intermarried with the locals, promoting the integration of cultures and folk customs.

To this day, Zheng He is still respected as "Sam Po Gong" in Southeast Asian regions. Many countries and regions have built "Sam Po Well" and "Sam Po Temple" to commemorate him. Zheng He, along with the "Zheng He Spirit" of peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit, is still highly esteemed today.

### 【Interview】

**Edmund:** I'm part of the design team that did the Zheng He experienced in Singapore. In those days (Chinese) were very modern because they are able to cut the ship to create compartments for different kinds of products on the ship. What I observe is that we are actually telling the world that the China was actually the commerce center.

**CHAMAIPORN SRIKHAYAN:**In Thailand we have the statue of him in Ayutthaya province. Ayutthaya is the old capital city back to the Ayutthaya kingdom. Zheng He came to Thailand to bring more modern goods in Thai. Thai people recognized Chinese as a professional about the new technology, and can help us to improve the economy by the technologies.

**Hostess:**You will be wondering why am I holding this durian here? Because we talk about Zheng He right, so actually it has something to do with him. If we want to talk about the first influencer, so we should say Zheng He should be the first one. Because he brought Chinese specialties and technologies to Southeast Asia, but also brought back the south exotic goods back to China including this Durian. So Mr Lin I bet you have some interesting stories to share with us.

**Lin Han:**Durian is closely related to Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas in history. During the research process of Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas, The latest achievement of Professor Zou Zhenhuan's research at Fudan University this year proposes a new concept called "Zheng He Exchange". Previously, academic research focused more on the "Columbian Exchange". After the Western Age of Discovery, it drove the spread of species in Europe and America. But before Columbus discovered the American continent during the Western Age of Discovery, Zheng He had already brought Chinese porcelain, silk, and local specialties to various parts of the world at that time.

At the same time, we can also see that, during his return journey, Zheng He also brought some delicious foods, fruits, and products from countries along the route to China. So in this process we can see that, Zheng He in history we are now proposing a concept called "Zheng He Selection". We know he brought over some delicious food with discernment. Apart from the durian mentioned in <Yingya Shenglan>, we can also see that, in addition to other fruits such as mangosteen. The introduction of these fruits has further enriched our current lives.

In addition, there are spices that have spread from Southeast Asia. In 1974, the Quanzhou Maritime Museum excavated a Song Dynasty sea vessel in Houzhu Port, Quanzhou. This sea vessel is also the only wooden sailing ship that has returned from overseas and has been unearthed so far. Because we see a large number of excavated sunken ships now, which historically carried porcelain out. The uniqueness of this ancient ship lies

in the discovery of a large amount of spices on it. Many spices originate from Southeast Asia.

**Hostess:** Actually before Zheng He's voyages, Quanzhou is already a very bustling international port, so we call it "The Largest port of the East". So people and trade flowed freely here in China and also in Southeast Asians. Today at this museum we have a ship model gifted by the Philippines.

**Wilson Lee Flores:** I was very excited when I saw that ship model, when our media group of Southeast Asia, we were walking around, I said that's from the Philippines.

**Hostess:** How could you just tell it was from Philippines?

**Wilson Lee Flores:** This is a very famous design from the southern part of the Philippines. It's a very nice design, it's from Mindanao region, and this boat symbolizes the more than 1000 years of commerce trade and ships visiting China and Philippines.

**Hostess:** So we would like to talk about this ship model.

**Lin Han:** The ship model in my hand is received in May 2018, when the Palang fleet from the Philippines resumed their ancient route. When they visited the Quanzhou Maritime Museum at that time, they sent us a model in proportion to the Barangay ship used by the fleet and presented it to the Quanzhou Maritime Museum. In our exhibition hall, there is a ship model from Iran. They came to Quanzhou to do a program and then gave us an Iranian ship model. There are different ship models from the Arab region in the hall. We know that ancient boats were important carriers for connecting the East and the West or different seas, being able to represent this cultural exchange.

**Hostess:** Thank you for that. Whether on the maritime silk road or Zheng He's route, Quanzhou has always been an important waypoint and today it's finding new ways to connect to the world.

### **【Preview of the next section】**

Made in Quanzhou: The national tide goes overseas



#### **【Explainer Video 4】**

During the Song and Yuan dynasties,Fujian-style ships set sail from "The Largest port in the East", carrying Chinese treasures such as silk and porcelain. Today ," Made in Quanzhou" products are directly reaching the worldvia the new engine of cross- border e- commerce.The ancient wharf where Zheng He' s fleet once anchored is now filled with express parcels bound for Manila and Kuala Lumpur.From "the era of ships connecting all nations" to the current"digital surge"whether it' s the going global of national trends of Quanzhou- made products or the "secret code of traffic" in cross - border e - commerce,Quanzhou is continuing the genes of the Maritime Silk Road through the "Digital Silk Road" and writing new legends of the Maritime Silk Road spirit in the digital realm.

#### **【Interview】**

**Hostess:**Hello,this is the live stream sales again.So this is Dehua porcelain,so as you can see it's said to be a top sale in TikTok,so everyone can feel it and touch it.

**Chong Joo Cheik:**This is called"Blanc de Chine"?

**Hostess:**Yes.Those porcelains were produced here in Dehua Quanzhou and then shipped to Europe,and be purchased by the noble families of the Europe.But right now we can just buy it easily from the Internet, so have anyone bought the Quanzhou products online?

**Chong Joo Cheik:**We often shop online to purchase some Chinese products.We all know it was made in China,I don't know clearly which Chinese city it was from.This"Blanc de Chine" is actually one of my favorite ceramics.I always feel it's very warm and moist,it's very beautiful and quiet,it's not flashy,and it can make you like it at first glance."Blanc de Chine" is actually produced here.Then I think the next time I shop online,I will pay more attention,where exactly is the product I purchased from in China.

**Edmund:**Porcelain tableware for food and drink and tea is all in my home, I have the all the sets. We have also used this Dehua porcelain for our government gifts, so Singapore government has used Luzerne,Dehua porcelain,as gifts to our other foreign guests comes to Singapore. If you

have a chance to go to Singapore and you have a chance to visit Luzerne, you will see a huge Dehua brand exhibition center there in the Singapore. So that's very interesting, because the commerce has already start from many years ago.

**Wilson Lee Flores:**Many people in the Philippines love to buy things online, mostly from China,and I'm sure many from Quanzhou,because of the garments the footwear,all kinds of fashion accessories.Philippines is one of the biggest buyers of your products,Quanzhou is very efficient. We went to the factories,the garment factory and others.We were very impressed:very high technology,very good design.Interesting.

**CHAMAIPORN SRIKHAYAN:**I am impressed the the Pengtai factory garments. I'm surprised about that technology to help that producing the clothes. I think that this solved my doubts about why China is the biggest hub of the manufacturing?Because they have a high technology and also AI.I think this is a good business model,like it's a one stop business net.So just you have money and have an idea and you can go to that factory,and they can do everything you want. It is a good visited module. I saw some interesting product,the shirt that have the fan. I think it's very good idea to add fan in the clothes.

**Hostess:**To cool down.

**CHAMAIPORN SRIKHAYAN:**Yeah.

**Wilson Lee Flores:**We need that in Southeast Asia.

**CHAMAIPORN SRIKHAYAN:**Yeah, because it is too hot.I think that if I come back to Thailand,I will find that shirt and shop online.

**Hostess:**Yeah,it's a very good idea.Quanzhou boasts a powerful manufacturing sector with nine industries, each generating over thirteen point nine billion USD annually combined with port logistics and overseas warehouses,it has built a global manufacture sales network.

### **【Explainer Video 5】**

In 2024,the GDP of Quanzhou reached 180.8 billion US dollars.The economic added- value of Quanzhou Port exceeded 27.8 billion US dollars for the first time,ranking it among the top echelon of port economies in China.In recent years,Quanzhou has actively explored new

paths for the development of port and industrial economies. A number of new shipping routes to Southeast Asia have been successively opened and continuously updated.

More than six hundred years ago, it took the Zheng He fleet several months to complete a shipping route while modern container shipping routes in Quanzhou can cover the same distance in only 7 days, with the freight volume increasing by more than a thousand times.

Especially in May 2025, Quanzhou Port entered the ranks of export ports for the "new three" and has the ability to handle the full-scale export business of new energy vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic modules. For example, when BYD's new-energy vehicles are exported from Quanzhou Port, the freight cost for each vehicle can be reduced by 281 US dollars.

Meanwhile, Quanzhou is accelerating the construction of a cross-border three-dimensional trade network, with hundreds of overseas warehouses spread across the globe.

(Representative of Quanzhou Superior Products Overseas Warehouses)  
Philippines: I am in the Philippines, where Quanzhou-made products create a better home life for the world.

Thailand: I am in Thailand, where high-quality Quanzhou products provide efficient and convenient one-stop global procurement.

Brazil: I am in Brazil, promoting win-win cooperation in overseas trade.

South Africa: I am at the Quanzhou Product Exhibition and Sales Center in South Africa, offering high quality, good prices, and fast service. Quanzhou let's go!

### **【Interview】**

**Hostess:** Southeast Asian is one of Quanzhou's most important trade partners. In 2025, Quanzhou's cross border ecommerce trade is expected to exceed three hundred billion yuan (about 42.15 billion US dollars), with over sixty percent involving Southeast Asian. So we talk about economy, what are the main corporations between China and your countries?

**Edmund:** People in Singapore are beginning to appreciate the products from Quanzhou. I think if we were to do more, maybe Quanzhou week in

Singapore or something to bring more Quanzhou culture and Quanzhou products to display in Singapore. I think that we have more people who will then buy the products from Quanzhou, and Quanzhou have very good quality products, so I think there's a lot of room for improvement.

**CHAMAIPORN SRIKHAYAN:** I think if Thai government have learned more about this good mode, they can help Thai entrepreneur to do business more. As my generation, a new generation want to do the business too. I think that if we have a good mode, we can improve our business and also improve our economy too.

**Wilson Lee Flores:** This year is also the 50th anniversary of China Philippine diplomatic relations, but more important than the diplomatic relations, the trade relations is booming, non stop. China has been the number one biggest trade partner of the Philippines continuously for many years, and I discovered recently also that the whole ASEAN Region, the ten countries has become the number one biggest market for China exports, bigger than Europe, bigger than North America. So I'm very excited when I saw this museum in Quanzhou about trade. This is not a new phenomenon, this has been going on for centuries.

**Chong Joo Cheik:** The cooperation between Malaysia and Quanzhou is beyond doubt. In terms of education, I would like to briefly mention that there is a university in Quanzhou called Liming Vocational University, it often collaborates with some Chinese community organizations in Malaysia, including Chinese independent high school, it has to communicate and recruit students. As far as I know, they have reserved a certain quota for Chinese students from Malaysia to come and study here even offering scholarships. There are some guild halls in Malaysia, They will organize high school students to come to Quanzhou to participate in a winter camp in December. This is a form of communication in education. It's our media delegation's turn to come over here, get to know Quanzhou and exchange ideas with each other.

Do you actually know, I ran into someone while having breakfast at the hotel this morning. It's Lin Fushan, the President of the Federation of Fujian Societies in Malaysia, He brought his team to Quanzhou. As far as I know, they will meet with the mayor of Quanzhou, conduct in-depth discussions on some collaborative topics. When I was reading the Malaysian newspaper <Sin Chew Daily> online, I realized that they have

been maintaining quite close contact with Quanzhou. I believe the efforts made by such grassroots organizations in promoting China-Malaysia cooperation across various fields are of great significance. Yes, it is also a symbol of friendship between the two peoples.

**Hostess:** 2025 China Internet Development Conference was just held in Quanzhou. The plan was to build Quanzhou into a global digital Maritime Silk Road Hub. From port of the East in ancient times to cloud port in the digital area, Quanzhou is reimagining the global connectivity. So finally I would like to ask Mr Lin: we have this concept like Quanzhou is the biggest port of the East, so do you think that under this landscape under our contemporary time, so this concept has taken on new meaning?

**Lin Han:** The "Largest port in the East" is not only a function and positioning, but also an important urban spirit of Quanzhou. The spirit of mutual benefit and reciprocity in human communication from ancient times to the present, from the Maritime Silk Road to the present day. Whether it's the ancient Maritime Silk Road a thousand years ago or today's digital platforms, Quanzhou continues to play an important role as a port on the ancient Maritime Silk Road. We believe that under the national "the Belt and Road" initiative, Quanzhou, as "the largest port in the East", can be further inherited and developed.

**Hostess:** Thank you everyone, thank you for visiting Quanzhou in person. We really hope that you can bring back your wonderful memories back to your home countries. As a media to let more people know about this hidden gem Quanzhou, know about this World Heritage city. Just like we have talked earlier about Zheng He, like the first navigators to build spirit of peace, so we also would like to be the ambassadors to continue his mission. Thank you everyone for sharing this wonderful time with us at this Quanzhou Maritime Museum. I hope to see you again in this beautiful Quanzhou.

**Guests:** Thank you. Bye.

### **【End credits】**

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