

A Study on Marco Polo's View of China

Project Background



Marco Polo (1254—1324) was an Italian merchant and traveler. At the age of 17, he embarked on a journey to the Orient with his father and uncle. During his 17-year stay in China, he explored many regions, including southwest mountain area and the southeastern coastal area. Upon his return to Italy, Marco Polo was captured in a battle and imprisoned. While in prison, he recounted his experiences and adventures during his travels. With the assistance of his cellmate Rustichello, he documented his travels in the famous book — *The Travels*.

Project Introduction

The objective of this project is to utilize ancient cartographic maps of China, dating back to the time of Marco Polo, to showcase the locations he visited during his travels in China and the concerns he expressed about them in his narratives. Unlike the travelogues of Chinese literati of the same period, Marco Polo's preoccupations were unique. As a merchant, he was naturally interested in local industries and specialties, and meticulously recorded the prices of goods in his books. Additionally, as a devout religious believer, he was also concerned about the state of faith of the local people. Therefore, we decided to present the cities mentioned in Marco Polo's travels in three areas: religion, specialties and economic activities,, which he frequently mentioned in his accounts. The website will provide an interactive and informative experience for users, enabling them to explore and comprehend the historical routes of Marco Polo's travels in China, while also gaining insight into the local customs he described.

Research Question(s)

This research project aims to investigate what Marco Polo's perception of China was like during his two missions in China.

By analyzing his accounts, the project seeks to reveal the social reality of the Yuan dynasty as perceived by Marco Polo.

Additionally, the project aims to verify the authenticity of Marco Polo's narratives by comparing his travels with historical books and expert opinions.

Workflow

1. Initially, we conducted a comprehensive compilation of Marco Polo's travels, focusing specifically on his two missions in China: From Beijing to Bengal and From Beijing to Quanzhou. Our compilation involved recording the conditions of the cities mentioned by Marco during his travels, including their religious beliefs, main industries, and products. Additionally, we analyzed the number of words that Marco used to describe each city.

Location	Religion	Specialty	Industry	Region	Currency	Funeral	Word Count
hejianfu (河间)	idolaters,christian	silk	trade,craft	Cathy	paper money	burn the bodies of	162
changlu (地图上为“沧”,	idolaters	salt,peach	salt	Cathy	paper money		180
jiangling (安德, 现山东德州)	idolaters		trade	Cathy	paper money		100
dongpingfu (地图显示为“鄆”, 现山东东平)		silk,fruit	trade		paper money		115
xinzhou matou (地图上“济	idolaters	small vessel	trade,craft,shipping		paper money		238
liucheng (现已不存在, 位于徐州以北的大运河)		animals,jujube,medium vessel	military,trade,handicraft,shipping				131
pizhou (邳州, 江苏古邳)		silk	trade,craft	entrance of Manzi			83
suqian (宿迁)		wheat,grain	agriculture		paper money	burn the bodies of	79
huai'anzhou (淮安)	idolaters	big vessel,salt	trade,salt,shipping	Manzi		burn the bodies of	155
huaiyin (淮阴)				Manzi			
baoying (扬州宝应县)	idolaters,turkish n	silk	trade,craft		paper money	burn the bodies of	114
gaoyou (高邮)	idolaters	animals,fish	trade,craft		paper money		89
taizhou (地图上“泰”, 泰州)	idolaters	vessel,animals	trade,craft,shipping		paper money		105
tongzhou (地图上“通”, 通	idolaters	salt	salt		paper money		71
yangzhou (地图上“扬”, 扬	idolaters	military accoutrements	trade,craft,military		paper money		171
anqing (地图显示为“舒”, 舒	idolaters	silk,grain,animals	trade,craft,agriculture	Manzi	paper money	burn the bodies of	110
xiangyangfu (湖北襄阳)	idolaters	silk,animals	trade,handicraft		paper money	burn the bodies of	862
zhenzhou (地图上“真”, 仪	idolaters	salt	shipping,trade		paper money		536
quanzhou (瓜州, 现扬州市)	idolaters	corn,rice	agriculture,shipping		paper money		273
zhenjiangfu (地图显示为“	idolaters, nestorian	silk,animals,com	trade,craft,agriculture	Manzi			168
changzhou (晋临, 江苏常州)	idolaters	silk,animals,wine	trade,craft		paper money		304
suzhou (地图显示为“苏”, 苏	idolaters	silk,rhubarb,ginger	trade,craft,literati,magician		paper money		293
wujiang (现苏州吴江区)			trade,industry				45
wuxing (无锡)	idolaters	silk	trade,craft		paper money		66
changxing (浙江湖州长兴县)	idolaters	silk(sendal),animals	trade,handicraft		paper money		69
xingzai (地图标为“杭”, 杭州)	idolaters,nestorian	silk,hot bath,salt,sugar	trade,prostitute,astrologer,doctor	Manzi	paper money		4904
ganpu (澈浦)		medium vessel	shipping				96
tonglu (杭州桐庐)	idolaters		trade,craft		paper money	burn the bodies of	76
wuzhou (金华)	idolaters		trade,craft				47
quzhou (浙江衢州)	idolaters	silk	trade,craft				80
suichang (遂昌 part of 浙江	idolaters		trade,craft		paper money		89
chuzhou 地图显示为“泉” (存	idolaters						57
fuzhou(kingdom) (元代江浙	idolaters	animals,ginger,galangal,saffron(look like	trade,craft				358
jianningfu (建宁, 今福建建瓯)		silk,ginger,galangal,cotton cloth,black si	trade,craft				198
houguan (侯官, 今福建闽侯)		sugar	sugar				148
fuzhou(city)	idolaters,christian	vessel,papiones,geese,lion,sugar,stones	trade,craft,military,shipbuilding	Manzi			1694
zayton	idolaters		trade,craft,shipping				521
Tingzhou (福建长汀)		porcelain					217
zhuozhou 地图标为“雄” (河北	idolaters	fabrics, sendal	trade, crafts				68
Aq-baliq 真定 (见小图, 现河北正定)		wild animals	emperor's hunting grounds,				133
Taiyuanfu (太原)		military equipment、wine、silk	trade, industry				119
Pingyangfu(地图上临汾)		silk	trade, crafts				42
Hezhongfu (地图显示为“蒲	idolaters	silk,spices	trade, industry				1065
Chang'anfu (京兆)	idolaters, Christian	silk,military equipment	trade, industry				304
Guangyuan (地图显示为“永	idolaters,Nestorian	wild animals	farming, hunting				149
Aq-baliq Manzi (地图显示为“	idolaters	ginger, grains	trade, crafts	on the border			132

Workflow

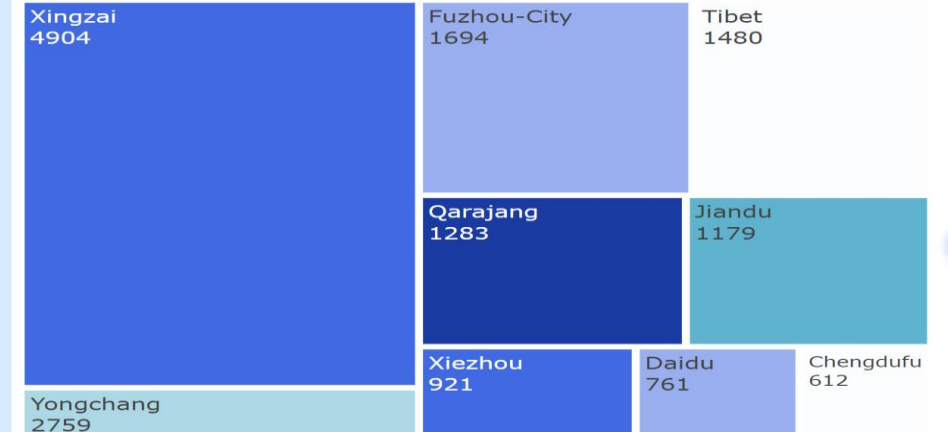
2. With the assistance of our teachers, we were able to locate a Song Dynasty map that closely aligns with the time of Marco Polo's visit to China. This map serves as a base map to display the places where he traveled. By utilizing this historical base map, users are able to visualize the geographical context of Marco Polo's travels, providing a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities he encountered.



Workflow

3. Furthermore, we have identified the Top 12 Most Described Chinese Locations, based on the number of words used by Marco Polo in his narratives. These cities were chosen for further analysis due to their significance in Marco Polo's travels, which often focused on commercial, folklore, or religious information. Through this analysis, we aim to provide users with a deeper understanding of Marco Polo's view of Chinese cities.

The Top 12 Mostly described Chinese Locations(words)



Xingzai



In his narrative, Marco calls Xingzai "the city of Heaven". He gives a direct justification for the notation of Xingzai, "it is well worth recording, because this is without doubt the finest and noblest city in the world."

Marco Polo offers a comprehensive description of the city of xingzai, including its architecture, the arrangement of its streets, the state of its commerce and handicrafts, the wedding and funeral customs of its inhabitants, the city's fire protection system, and even the income of the Great Khan.

Project Demonstration

<http://10.79.165.26:5500/website.html>

Findings

Can Density of markers suggest the Level of Prosperity?

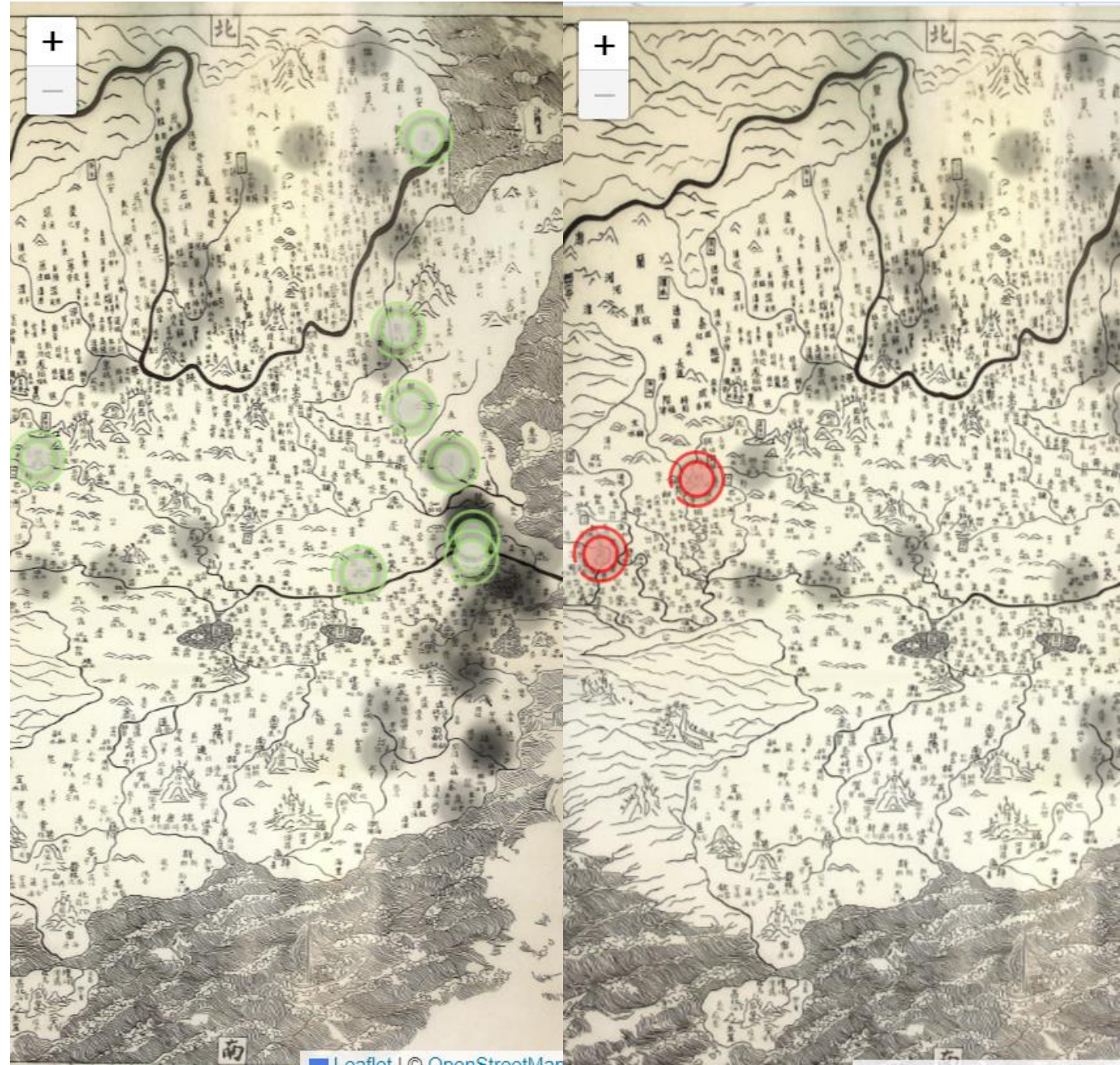
- 江浙行省 5882112戶
- 江西行省 2332811戶
- 湖廣行省 2770451戶
- 中書省 1355354戶
- 河南行省 800410戶
- 陝西行省 87690戶
- 四川行省 98538戶
- 甘肅行省 4691戶
- 《元代社會生活史》



Findings

Can Density of markers suggest the Level of Prosperity of Different Economic Activities - e.g. Agriculture?

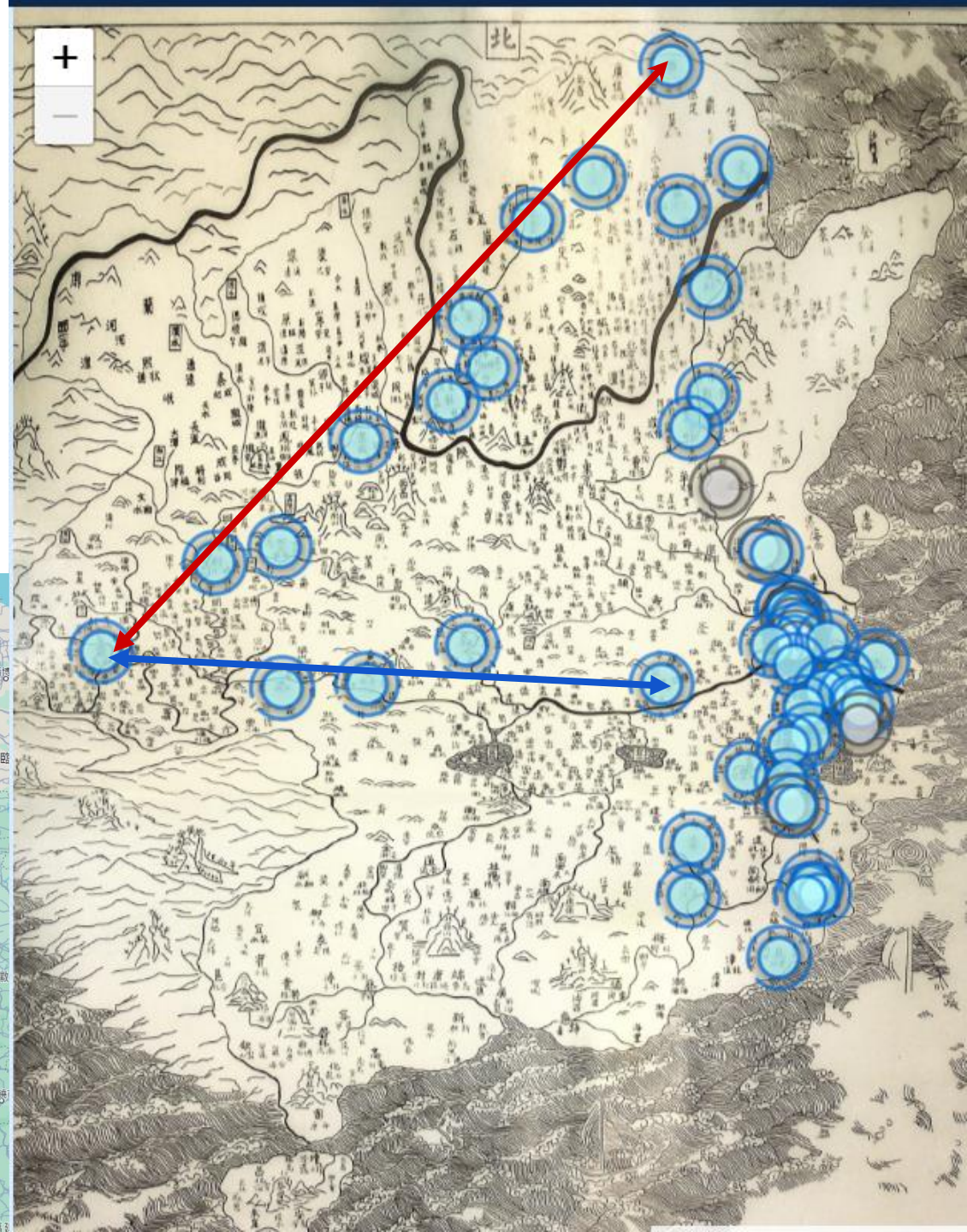
- Left: agriculture products Right: agriculture
- 天下歲入糧數，總計一千二百十一萬四千七百八石。腹裏，二百二十七萬一千四百四十九石。行省，九百八十四萬三千二百五十八石。遼陽省七萬二千六十六石。河南省二百五十九萬一千二百六十九石。陝西省二十二萬九千二十三石。四川省一十一萬六千五百七十四石。甘肅省六萬五百八十六石。雲南省二十七萬七千七百一十九石。江浙省四百四十九萬四千七百八十三石。江西省一百一十五萬七千四百四十八石。湖廣省八十四萬三千七百八十七石。（元史-《卷九十三》）



Findings

Chengdufu-Zhuozhou: 1460km/10marks=146km/marks

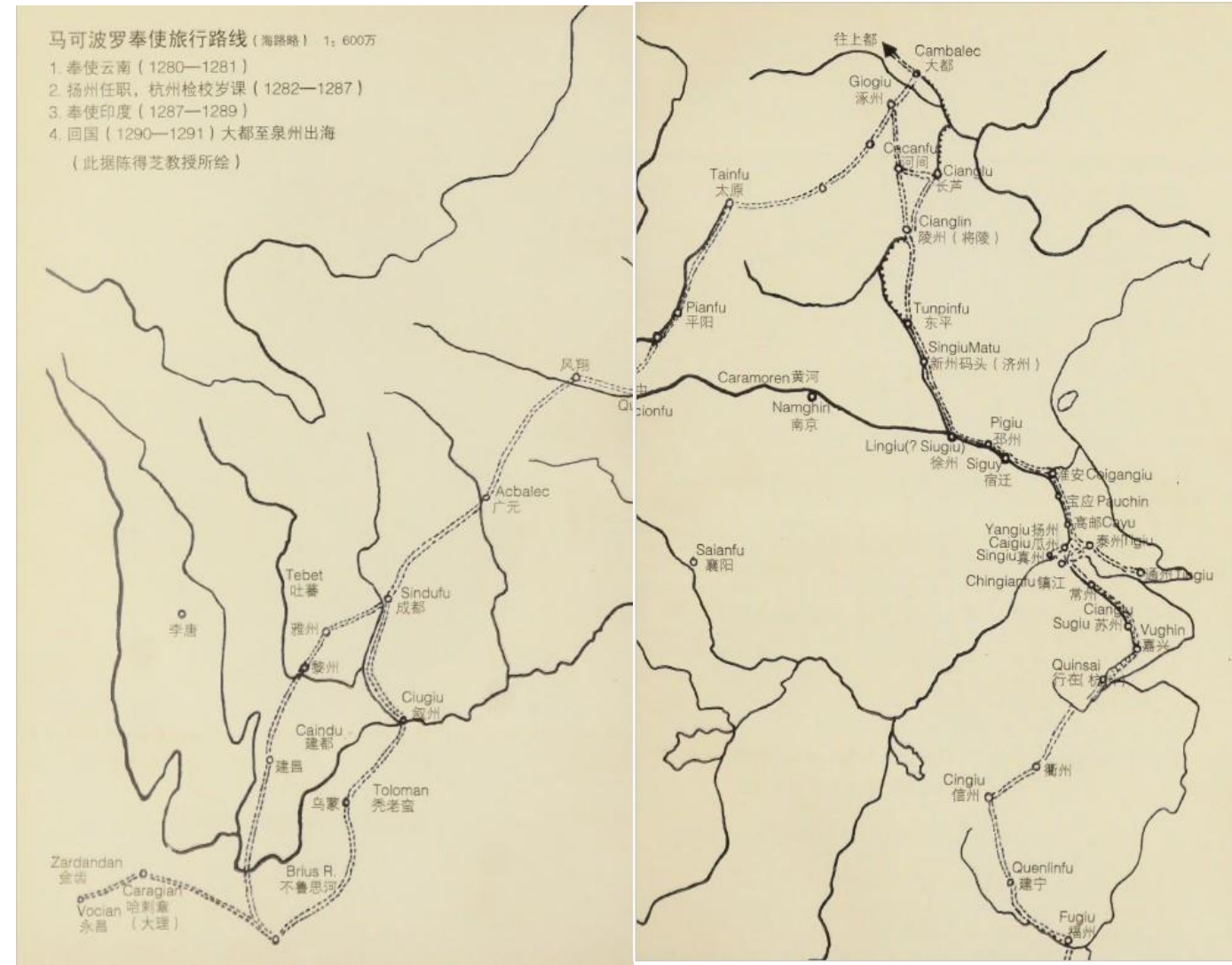
Chengdufu-Anqing: 1238km/5marks=247.6km/marks



Findings

- Marco Polo left his route suddenly to talk about Anqing and Xiangyangfu (Yangzhou-Anqing-Xiangyangfu-zhenzhou)
- **Xiangyangfu**: The story told by Marco Polo includes intentional changes
- **Anqing**: mixing up Nanjing and anqing
- **Kuizhou**: only mentioned its geographical location

What could be the reasons for such narratives?



Challenges

1. Marco Polo also provide narratives for places between two cities. While, it is difficult to locate them on the map as the route of Marco Polo is not clear. The lack of Location Name identifying these places could also lead to confusion when people viewing and studying the map on the website.

After setting out from the city of Pizhou, the traveller heads south for two days through glorious countryside teeming with all good things and well stocked with game of all kinds, both beasts and birds. And at the end of this two-day journey he reaches the city of Suqian, which is very large and

Challenges

2. Overlaying the historical map on the modern map: As the historical map may not match the modern geography due to technology limitation of that time, the accuracy of overlaying the two map is estimated to be low.

Future Enhancement

1. Expansion of the study to include additional cities: The research can be expanded to include cities belonging to present-day China that Marco Polo mentioned on his way to China. This would provide users with a more comprehensive understanding of Marco Polo's travels and the regions he visited.
2. Translation of the website into Chinese: The website can be translated into Chinese to make it accessible to a wider audience. This would enable Chinese users to learn about Marco Polo's travels in China and gain insight into the local customs and traditions he described.
3. Expansion of the website's content: The website can be expanded to include more information about the historical and cultural significance of the cities and landmarks mentioned in the travels. This would provide users with a more comprehensive understanding of the historical and cultural context of Marco Polo's travels.