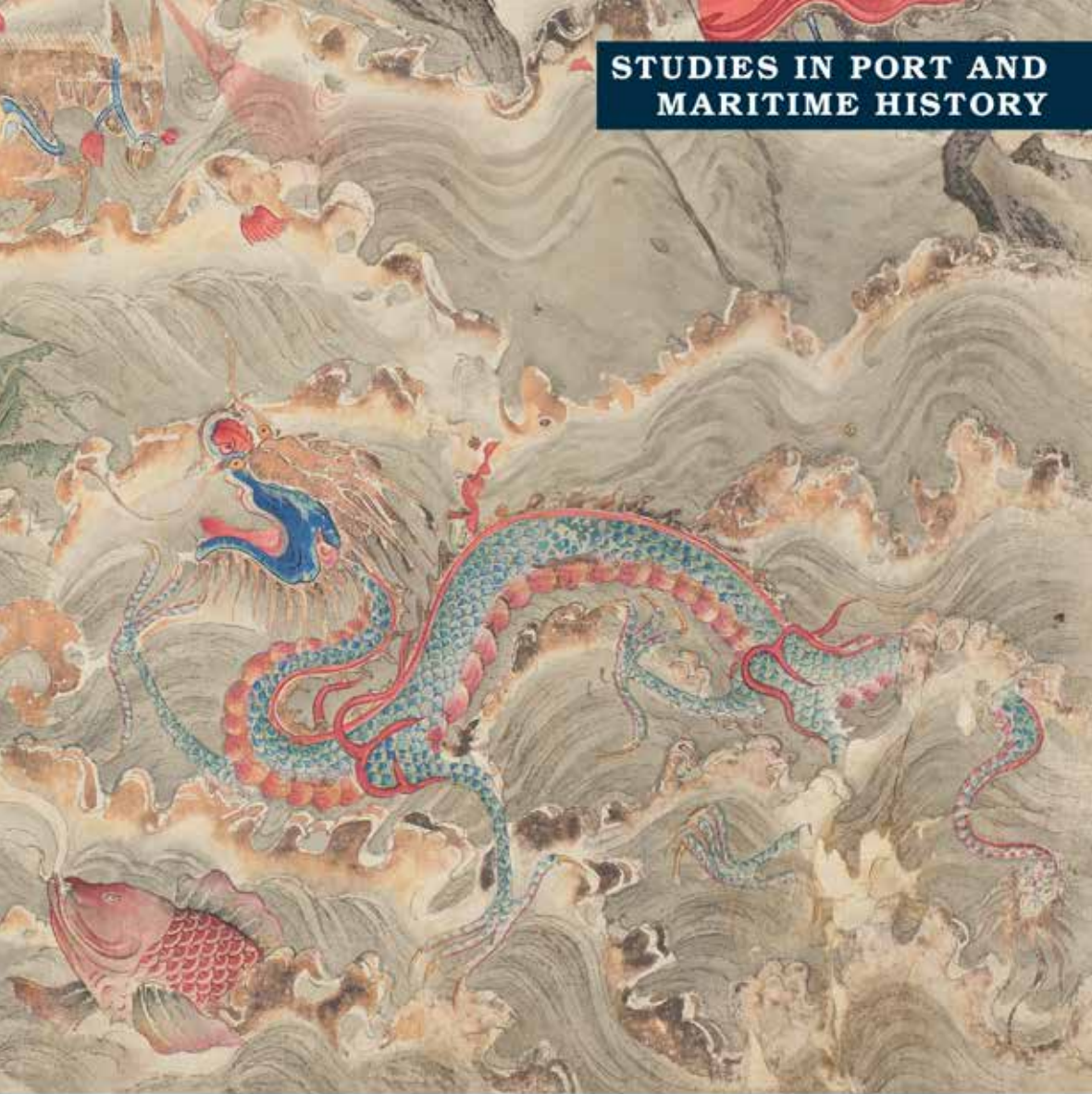




STUDIES IN PORT AND  
MARITIME HISTORY

# SHAPING THE BLUE DRAGON

*Maritime China in the Ming and  
Qing Dynasties*

RONALD C. PO

## Studies in Port and Maritime History

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# Shaping the Blue Dragon

*Maritime China in the Ming  
and Qing Dynasties*

Ronald C. Po

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# Contents

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Acknowledgements                 | vii |
| Chapter 1: Introduction          | 1   |
| Chapter 2: The Pirate King       | 25  |
| Chapter 3: The Private Advisor   | 53  |
| Chapter 4: The Cartographers     | 91  |
| Chapter 5: The Legendary Admiral | 125 |
| Chapter 6: The Master of the Sea | 157 |
| Chapter 7: The Envoy             | 203 |
| Chapter 8: The Traveller         | 237 |
| Chapter 9: Conclusion            | 269 |
| Glossary                         | 281 |
| Bibliography                     | 289 |
| Index                            | 321 |

*To Yolanda*

## Acknowledgements

In the autumnal glow of 2012, I had the privilege of introducing my doctoral project to a Dutch sinologist based in England. While we shared a fascination with maritime history, I was clearly on pins and needles at the beginning of our first encounter, but this amicable scholar was kind enough to offer me a few thoughtful nods and a cup of jasmine tea. In an attempt to ease tension and lighten the mood, he asked if I had ever sailed on a yacht or boat. Back then, my knowledge of sailing was non-existent; all I could offer by way of an answer was to confess my ignorance, which was in stark contrast to his evident passion for the subject. He proceeded to regale me with his seafaring experiences, and despite my limited familiarity, I found myself enthralled by his tales of adventure. Although our meeting started with a touch of hesitation, it evolved into an unforgettable experience. It felt as though he had seamlessly steered our intellectual exchange into a refreshing and soothing virtual voyage across the high sea. As he articulated, and if my interpretation of his perspective was accurate, a true grasp of maritime history remained elusive until one embarked on a voyage that ventured beyond the confines of a familiar coastline. Quite intriguingly, this notion lingered within me, cultivating an inherent yearning to personally encounter what he had so eloquently conveyed. The pages you are about to turn over serve as a condensed reflection of my journey across the ocean off the coast of Malta the year before the outbreak of the pandemic.

As I stepped aboard, the sea revealed itself in a manner distinct from the portrayals found in historical records, fiction, magazines, canvas, or on the silver screen. Being in the middle of the ocean provides a dual experience: on the one hand, the gentle breeze and rhythmic waves against your yacht were a source of pleasure and inspiration; on the other hand, I remained alert to potential dangers erupting from unpredictable currents and shifting winds. Psychologically, I was intimately bound to the sea and little else. My mindset became attuned to the ocean, embracing both the

delight and unforeseen challenges. I found myself driven by motivation and invigoration, yet simultaneously struggled to explain this particular blend of feelings. In brief, to me, the sea was no longer the same after this memorable jaunt.

This excursion also sent me back to the vast literature on maritime narratives compiled by writers in the Ming and Qing eras, some of which are featured in the upcoming chapters. I then came to realise that these individuals in the age of sail might have encountered some distinctive experiences that transcended their written accounts. Certain dimensions of their interactions with the sea during their voyages might have proven too challenging or convoluted to be fully unveiled. In other words, their narratives might only scratch the surface of the profound depth of their maritime journeys. This realisation opened up a whole new vista for my appreciation of maritime history, while I owe a debt of gratitude to Hans van de Ven, the Dutch sinologist who led me to this uncharted domain. He may not even remember the conversation I have recounted, as I have never had the chance to convey my feelings to him since. If anything, I find this to be a fitting occasion to etch this anecdote onto these pages.

I would also like to reserve my special gratitude to Dian Murray, who inspired me to explore the layered connections between late imperial China and the sea by employing the evocative metaphor of schizophrenia, which I have refined and moderated as capriciousness in the book. This seemingly audacious and uncanny concept will be expounded in the forthcoming introduction. Although our paths have yet to cross in person, I have held Dian in high esteem ever since my undergraduate years, primarily due to her impactful contributions to the study of piracy and secret societies in the long eighteenth century. Our actual connection took root only when we both participated in an online workshop organised by Royal Museums Greenwich to discuss the beguiling history of Madam Zheng (Zheng Yi Sao), one of the most successful pirates of all time. Following this event, Dian generously shared her insights into China's maritime history through Zoom meetings and a sequence of thought-provoking email exchanges. Her viewpoints precipitated a reconceptualisation of the present book project, while some of her observations were incorporated within. Nonetheless, I must declare that whatever errors or questionable interpretations that remain are solely mine alone. In the meantime, I look forward to the day we can meet in person, Dian, whether on this side of the pond or the other, before too long.

I am equally grateful to the students I have had the pleasure to teach at the London School of Economics as they have been a wellspring

of inspiring ideas and valuable suggestions. Their ceaseless enthusiasm, expansive interests, and unquenchable quest for knowledge consistently leave me astounded. Throughout our discussions and seminars, many of them have shared remarkably unique perspectives on the history of maritime China and Asia, encompassing topics ranging from bustling port cities and significant naval battles to intricate nautical charts and the dynamics of seaborne commerce. I think I gleaned far more from instructing them than they would ever acquire from me. It has also been a privilege to write this book while working in the Department of International History at the LSE and as a visiting fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies at Leiden University in 2021 and 2022. Meanwhile, I would like to acknowledge permission to draw upon the following previously published essays of mine: “Fortifying the Maritime Frontier: Diagrams of Coastal Garrisons (*Yingxun tu*) in the Qing Empire,” *Ming Qing Studies* (December 2022), pp. 67–100; “Hero or Villain? The Evolving Legacy of Shi Lang in China and Taiwan,” *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 53, issue 4 (September, 2019), pp. 1486–1515; and “Maritime Countries in the Far West: Western Europe in Xie Qinggao’s Records of the Sea,” *European Review of History*, vol. 21, no. 6 (December, 2014), pp. 857–871. All of these essays have been amended and revised in order to better align with the book.

In addition, the existence of this book is largely due to the generosity and support of several external funders, namely the Sino-British Fellowship Trust, the Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines, and the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation. All of them have played a pivotal role in enriching the content of the book, for which my gratitude knows no bounds. I must also express my heartfelt appreciation for the enthusiastic support provided by my editor, Alison Welsby, and her team at Liverpool University Press. Without them, the book would have never been conceived. Moreover, similar to many other authors, I have accumulated a debt of thanks to my partner Yolanda and my family, who have stood by me through the highs and lows of this journey. I promise, I will keep my nose to the grindstone.

It is not often that authors take the moment to convey their indebtedness within the Acknowledgements section to those who have purchased, gifted, borrowed, or downloaded their books. I would like to thank you – yes, you – each and every one of you who is now reading this paragraph. We might have already known each other, while for others, this might be your first encounter with a writer bearing a rather unusual Chinese surname, ‘Po’. In any event, I must admit that you are one of the driving

forces that propelled me to inquire into the past and present my findings and discoveries. As a small token of gratitude, allow me to wish you an enjoyable reading experience ahead. I hope that the subsequent chapters will captivate you as much as I have relished crafting them. Please also feel free to share your thoughts on whether you find this book an agreeable read. Your feedback matters, and you know how to find me.

## CHAPTER ONE

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# Introduction

### Prologue

If there were ever a country that could fascinate the renowned German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), it was not his motherland or any other seafaring power in Western Europe, but an ancient oriental civilisation nestled in the eastern reaches of Eurasia. The observant among us will note that Hegel saw China as a stable and flourishing empire in the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> To this founding figure of modern Western philosophy, China stood as a fully developed and industrialised society, wherein the populace and the state harmoniously pursued parallel objectives, aspirations, and values rooted in rational self-interest. According to Hegel, a contributing factor behind China's balanced and enduring progress rested in its status as an empire primarily tethered to its settled, terrestrial-based political and economic (super) structures. In one of his accounts pertaining to the so-called 'Chinese essence', Hegel articulated that China exhibited a disposition of hesitance towards the sea, or at the very least, an observable detachment, especially when measured against her European counterparts. Concomitantly, he exclusively associated the ocean with the European milieu, asserting that 'the European state is truly European only insofar as

1. It is well-known that Hegel regarded China as 'a wondrously unique empire', which is self-sustained and well-regulated to the highest degree. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel; Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (eds. and trans.), *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011) vol. 1, p. 212. It should be noted however that the German philosopher decided to present the 'Chinese as utterly degraded' and 'savage' after 1823. For details, see Robert Bernasconi, "China on Parade: Hegel's Manipulation of his Sources and his Change of Mind," in Bettina Brandt and Daniel Purdy (eds.), *China in the German Enlightenment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 172.

it has links with the sea'.<sup>2</sup> In stark contradiction, the sea held little historical relevance in Chinese history. Those who are principally interested in how this metaphysical philosopher came to respect China so much might find the aforementioned assertion inconsequential, but those who are curious about the very connections between imperial China and the maritime world might find themselves perturbed or even vexed by its implications. Although this German thinker made his comment in the eighteenth century and his reflection was somehow conditioned by a particular intellectual context, the powerfully embedded conception of an absolute agrarian, continental China continues to mislead us when we are examining imperial China's engagement with the sea.

In conventional and orthodox studies of Chinese or world history, China the 'sleeping dragon' is portrayed as a land-based power that remained ignorant of and indifferent to the ocean, particularly during its late imperial stage.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the extraordinary voyages led by the renowned admiral and eunuch Zheng He (1371–1433), who ventured across the Indian Ocean on seven occasions during the fifteenth century, and the numerous sea battles between China and her European counterparts in the mid- and late nineteenth century, it appears there is nothing else to talk about in relation to China and its associations with the maritime world. Meanwhile, following Zheng He's expeditions, a sense of inertia seems to have taken

2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel; T. H. B. Nisbet (trans.), *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 196.

3. Although scholars such as Gang Zhao, Angela Schottenhammer, Xing Hang, Ronald Po, Ma Guang, Melissa Macauley, and many others have shown that late imperial China should not be considered merely a land power, the idea that China, particularly the Manchu-Qing, was by no means a maritime power still prevails as a trend in recent historiography. See, for instance, S. C. M. Paine, "Imperial Failure in the Industrial Age: China, 1842–1911," in N. A. M. Rodger (ed.), *The Sea in History: The Modern World* (Martlesham: Boydell Press, 2017), p. 308. In one of his latest publications, Xing Hang rightly and succinctly argued that 'current scholarship on maritime China in the United States continues to be colored by a classical binary framework initially articulated by the late John King Fairbank. He juxtaposed this region, with its dynamic linkages to the outside world and its commercial vibrancy, to the agrarian and bureaucratic orientation of the continent. For him, the despotic autocracy, Confucian orthodoxy, and dynastic cycle of continental China constituted the mainstream of historical development. And Fairbank thought that it was precisely those aspects that severely restrained the potential of its maritime counterpart and relegated it to the position of a peripheral sideshow'. See Xing Hang, "The Evolution of Maritime Chinese Historiography in the United States: Toward a Transnational and Interdisciplinary Approach," *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, vol. 14 (June 2020), p. 152.

hold, suggesting that China displayed little inclination to actively engage with the ocean unless provoked by a seaborne invader. While trading junks could still be spotted navigating coastal China, they were considered peripheral, as maritime shipping held little significance compared to agricultural development and production. The Japanese historian Takeshi Hamashita once proposed an exploration of the growth and development of East Asia by examining the interactions between China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia through various 'maritime sub-systems'.<sup>4</sup> While this approach brought a fresh perspective to the history of late imperial China, it did not fully initiate a paradigm shift in our understanding of the intricacies of the respective conjuncture. Apart from a few maritime provinces in the Southeast, namely Fujian and Guangdong, China as a whole remained somewhat disengaged with the maritime world. The prevailing perception of the Ming after Zheng He and the Qing in the long eighteenth century as a land-based power with limited engagement with the sea continues to overshadow our insights into its layered connections with the maritime realm. Compared to those familiar seafaring powers in Western Europe, namely Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Great Britain, China in the early modern era is even perceived as an unyielding behemoth, distant and even isolated from the sea until its encounter with the British Empire during the First Opium War in 1839.

To put it metaphorically, it would probably not be improper to regard China as a red or yellow dragon (as these two colours always represent a land-oriented China, especially after the era of Mao). However, characterising it as a blue dragon would be rather uncommon, if not peculiar, given the historical emphasis on China's identity as primarily continental. In this book, however, I have elected to tell the story differently and attempt to colour the China of the late imperial era blue. This approach might resemble the six-part Chinese documentary *River Elegy*, released in 1988, which made the point that traditional China was continental and earth focused while the new era of the clip was pointing to the blue of the ocean. Yet this blue China, as I will elaborate in subsequent chapters, was not merely constructed by the state or its naval armaments and coastal fortifications but the individuals, ranging from sailors, writers, officials, travellers, and pirates, that shaped and formulated such historical context and complexity. By using different individuals and case studies as the bases

4. See Takeshi Hamashita; Linda Grove and Mark Selden (eds.), *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

of analysis, this book explores some of the perceptible ways in which the sea affected the shaping of an early modern China.

It is a matter of fact that China is not a landlocked country. Since its early imperial times, it has been associated with four adjacent seas (*sihai*), namely the Bohai, Yellow, and East and South China Seas. Numerous stories that date back to these times feature the maritime characteristics of China, or its *haiyang tese*, a phrase and concept that contemporary Chinese politicians fancy applying in various settings. For instance, the shipping technology pioneered by the *nanyue* people – a community that resided in South China during the Han Dynasty – was remarkable and representative of China's sea prowess.<sup>5</sup> However, going back nearly two millennia takes us such a distance from the present that this aspect of China's maritime connection might be less relevant to today. While the ancient Chinese were involved in various maritime activities, such as fishing, sea-salt cultivation, and warship construction, I find it more pertinent and useful to focus on a more recent era: the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) dynasties leading up to the First Opium War. Spanning six centuries, from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth, this period marked a significant increase in China's engagement with the maritime world compared to its preceding regimes, including the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties.

The glories of the Tang and Song are beyond question. Particularly noteworthy is the pioneering role of Tang traders who ventured onto the renowned maritime silk road, establishing crucial trade routes and fostering intercontinental commerce.<sup>6</sup> The Southern Song dynasty assumes a pivotal position in Chinese maritime history, marked by significant advancements in maritime activities and trade networks. Attentive readers are likely to be aware of the flourishing developments in shipping technology during this era, further catalysing maritime endeavours and facilitating global exchanges.<sup>7</sup> The magnetic compass, one of four Chinese inventions during

5. Jun Kimura, "Shipbuilding Traditions in East Asia: A New Perspective on Relationships and Cross-influences," in Jerzy Gawronski, André van Holk, and Joost Schokkenbroek (eds.), *Ships and Maritime Landscapes: Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology* (Eelde: Barkuis Publishing, 2017), p. 86.

6. Yan Chen; Haitao Mu, Caiyun Gao, and Chen Chen (trans.), *The Maritime Silk Road and Cultural Communication between China and the West* (London: Lexington Books, 2020), pp. 13–24.

7. Lo Jung-pang, *China as a Sea Power, 1127–1368: A Preliminary Survey of the Maritime Expansion and Naval Exploits of the Chinese People during the Southern Song and Yuan Periods* (Singapore and Hong Kong: NUS Press and Hong Kong University Press, 2012),

that era, was first used by Song sailors for maritime navigation.<sup>8</sup> The Song Chinese also invented watertight bulkhead compartments, which saved ships from potential damage to their hulls and prevented sinking after collisions with maritime hazards, such as reefs or other vessels.<sup>9</sup> In succeeding centuries, the wide application of these watertight compartments spread across the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic world. Although these are all magnificent achievements and discoveries, I consider the China of the twenty-first century to be far more the successor of the Ming and Qing eras than of the Song or Tang. In addition, some of the key maritime topics that helped shape the geopolitical and socio-economic outlook of contemporary maritime China, as we will briefly discuss in the subsequent section, were arguably originated from the Ming and Qing.

### The Taiwan Question

The Taiwan question is plausibly one of the trickiest problems PRC's leaders are concerned with these days. The issue is complex as international dynamics are involved, making it a global concern, and we would not be able to situate this tension within a global context without tracing the history of this island back to what was fundamentally not only a Sino-centric story but also one that was attached to part of a broader Pacific maritime picture. In fact, most of the remarkable events related to the maritime history of Taiwan began during the seventeenth century when the Spanish built their settlements in the north of the island, which lasted for a brief period of time (in 1642, the Dutch drove them out).<sup>10</sup> Twenty years later, Koxinga (1624–1662), a renowned loyalist of the Ming dynasty who had lost control of mainland China in 1644, decided to sail across

pp. 59–92. See also Lincoln Paine, *The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), esp. the chapter “China Looks Seaward.”

8. Barry Cunliffe, *On the Ocean: The Mediterranean and the Atlantic from Prehistory to AD 1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 69; Lynn Gamwell, *Exploring the Invisible: Art, Science, and the Spiritual* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 19.

9. William E. Burns (ed.), *Science and Technology in World History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2020), p. 367.

10. For details, see José Eugenio Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience in Taiwan, 1626–1642: The Baroque Ending of a Renaissance Endeavor* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

the Taiwan Strait, where he eventually defeated the Dutch and established his Zheng regime on the island.<sup>11</sup> Although the Qing court categorised the Zheng empire as consisting of nothing but a pirate gang, it was noteworthy in multiple ways, and, above all, it was truly maritime. Its connections and influences not only covered the coast of China but they extended to Japan, the Philippines, as well as a large part of Southeast Asia through various degrees of seaborne shipping and marine navigation.<sup>12</sup> The Zheng empire was perhaps the first kingdom established by a Chinese which, in Asian history, makes China inseparable from the maritime world. As Ho-fung Hung has argued, ‘over three generations, the Zheng familial enterprise had evolved from a decentralised trade network into a vertically integrated, bureaucratically managed business organisation with an economic size comparable to the VOC’,<sup>13</sup> while in the interpretation of John E. Wills Jr., the Zheng’s Taiwan was nothing more than a naval-cum-commercial power.<sup>14</sup>

In light of the extensive maritime connections established by the Zhengs, the geostrategic importance of Taiwan was quickly recognised by the Manchu authority. The Kangxi emperor (1654–1722), who reigned during that time, had no choice but to plan for a full-scale annexation of the island. In 1683, the Qing navy successfully destroyed the Zheng regime, whilst Taiwan was integrated into the Qing empire. In addition to the Manchu, the Japanese had also been keeping an eye on Taiwan, even before the Spaniards stepped foot on Cape Santiago. Residing more than 1,000 miles to the north of the city we know nowadays as Taipei, the Japanese had sought to claim sovereignty over the island early in 1592, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who was best known as the ‘Great Unifier of Japan’, undertook a policy of overseas expansion to its south and west. However, a

11. See Tonio Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China’s First Great Victory over the West* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011).

12. Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 146–175.

13. Ho-fung Hung, “Maritime Capitalism in Seventeenth-Century China: The Rise and Fall of Koxinga Revisited,” *IROWS Working Paper*, no. 72, available online at <https://irows.ucr.edu/papers/irows72/irows72.htm>.

14. John E. Wills Jr., “Maritime China from Wang Chih to Shih Lang [Shi Lang]: Themes in Peripheral History,” in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills Jr. (eds.), *From Ming to Ch’ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-century China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 204–206.

series of internal disruptions within the country prevented Hideyoshi from actualising his plan.<sup>15</sup> In 1616, Murayama Toan, the Japanese magistrate of the city of Nagasaki, launched an invasion of Taiwan, but his attempt was not successful either as his invading fleet was disastrously dispersed by a typhoon in the East China Sea.<sup>16</sup> It was not until the defeat of the Qing navy during the First Sino-Japanese War, in 1895, that Meiji Japan was able to gain possession of Taiwan during a time when it sought to modernise and westernise itself.

As we shall see, Taiwan's importance as a strategic maritime corridor linking China to other parts of Asia was noticeably identified since the sixteenth century if not earlier. The island itself, particularly its western coast, experienced various kinds of developments related to a variety of marine activities, ranging from sea trade to naval battles. In other words, if we wanted to understand why the Chinese, Japanese, Americans, or some other Asian powers, such as India, regarded Taiwan as significant to the passage of transregional shipping as well as a critical piece of the puzzle of the geopolitical order in the wider Pacific,<sup>17</sup> it is essential to travel back to the Ming and Qing eras in order to flash out all the historical continuities and significations. In Chapter Five of this book, for example, we will look at the history of the legendary Qing admiral Shi Lang, who led the Qing fleet to conquer Taiwan, so as to highlight the layered maritime linkages between China, Taiwan, and the broader Pacific world. The reason I consider Shi Lang a legendary figure is because he was not only a gifted general in the navy but also, rather remarkably, his legacy has percolated throughout Chinese history since the Qing era and continues to hold a place in the present day. The story of Shi Lang would be particularly useful for permitting us to bridge the Qing dynasty and contemporary China from a maritime historical perspective. The PRC government, to a substantial extent, is still utilising such historical legacies to justify its legitimacy to unify the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

15. Robert Eskildsen, *Transforming Empire in Japan and East Asia: The Taiwan Expedition and the Birth of Japanese Imperialism* (London: Palgrave, 2019), p. 104, footnote 25.

16. Geoffrey C. Gunn, *World Trade Systems of the East and West: Nagasaki and the Asian Bullion Trade Networks* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 103.

17. I would like to highlight India's connections with Taiwan in the present century, which is an aspect that has long been overlooked in the field. For details, see D. P. Tripathi and B. R. Deepak (eds.), *India and Taiwan: From Benign Neglect to Pragmatism* (Delhi: Vij Books, 2016).

### The Pearl River Delta

Another example that might help us better comprehend maritime China in the contemporary world would be the early modern history of the Pearl River Delta, a critical region that has connected China with the global market, through the (in)famous Canton system, since the middle of the eighteenth century. The Pearl River Delta was, as outlined by David Faure, a distant enclave within the Chinese empire. It was during the period of economic prosperity spanning from the mid-Ming to the mid-Qing that extensive land-reclamation efforts fundamentally converted the delta into fertile farmland.<sup>18</sup> This transformation was further accentuated by the implementation of the Canton system, which profoundly reshaped the economic topography of the region. We have long been under the impression that this Canton system, modelled by the Yongzheng emperor (1678–1735) and then officially established by his son, the Qianlong emperor (1711–1799), was old-fashioned and monopolistic. The system, by its very nature, has long been featured in the way Europeans perceived themselves. It was not only backward and morbid but it was also designed contrary to the so-called universal idea of free trade and open markets. This assumption, to a substantial extent, owes its origins to the totemic letter the Qianlong emperor wrote to King George III (1738–1820) in 1793 – the only outcome brought on by the scandalous failure of the Macartney Mission. In his letter, the Qing emperor made it fairly clear that China was entirely self-sufficient and did not need to establish further trading contacts with the British Empire. Most of us who have studied Anglo-Chinese relations are quite familiar with this letter, but there are a few remarks that we should be particularly careful with in our interpretation of this piece of archival material. First, we need to understand that this was a diplomatic letter written at the highest level of bureaucracy in the Qing court, and the Manchu monarch had to ensure that he was representing a strong, wealthy, and potent Asian, if not world, empire to his European counterpart. It is therefore problematic to determine the Qing's attitude towards foreign trade simply by extracting one particular paragraph from this letter, let alone reading it with all of its biases and prejudices.<sup>19</sup>

18. David Faure, "The Emperor in the Village: Representing the State in South China," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 35 (1995), p. 75.

19. For an in-depth discussion on this matter, see Henrietta Harrison, "The Qianlong Emperor's Letter to George III and the Early Twentieth-Century Origins of Ideas about

In actuality, as a number of revisionist historians have argued over the past few years, the Qing court had always been reluctant to cut its ties with the global market.<sup>20</sup> And the Canton system had been deliberately created to better facilitate different sorts of trading matters that occurred between this port and the European merchants that plied their trade there. More importantly, the Qing court was not the only party to have favoured the establishment of the Canton system. To a substantial extent, most of the European traders of the time also endorsed it because they preferred conducting business in Canton.<sup>21</sup> Located on the southern coast of China, the city had long been considered a favourable location close enough to Southeast Asia, where most of the mercantile networks had been solidified. Foreign traders could also take advantage of the seasonal monsoon wind that blew them eastward to Canton and westward to the world surrounding the Indian Ocean across the South China Sea. Since trips were timed with the seasons during the age of sail, an appropriate wind pattern turned out to be extremely crucial as it would help ships sail faster in high seas. Meanwhile, Canton also provided the required infrastructural advantages. For instance, the ‘*cohong* merchants’, who were the principal and sole legal traders residing in a neighbourhood called the Thirteen Factories along the Pearl River, were more experienced in dealing with their foreign counterparts than those traders in the cities of Fuzhou or Ningbo.

Although the British attempted to open more port cities in the Lower Yangtze River Delta, a region where Shanghai is located, their requests were made towards the end of the eighteenth century, slightly before the Macartney Mission took place. In hindsight, if we look at the period between 1757, the year when the Canton system was put in place, and

Traditional China's Foreign Relations,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 122, issue 3 (June 2017), pp. 680–701.

20. See for instance, Paul van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005); *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); *Whampoa and the Canton Trade: Life and Death in a Chinese Port, 1700–1842* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020); John Wong, *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century: The House of Houqua and the Canton System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Susan E. Schopp, *Sino-French Trade at Canton, 1698–1842* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2021).

21. Leonard Blussé, “Review Article on Gang Zhao’s *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757*,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 119, no. 3 (June 2014), p. 869.

1792, when George Macartney (1737–1806) was appointed the first envoy of Britain to Qing China, Sino-Western relations on the Pearl River and Canton were fairly stable. In the words of John Carroll, the Canton system ‘was an encounter defined by mutual commitment to pecuniary gain, tension, and conflict but also accommodation and adaptation’.<sup>22</sup> As a result, we should put aside the conventional assumption that the Canton system was poorly structured and abortively functioned. More importantly, the Qing court did not attempt to suppress its sea trade with the external world.

Thanks to the Canton system, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Pearl River Delta even became a fertile region in China and was much more cosmopolitan than most people would have imagined. It was not only the place where the richest man on earth, Wu Bingjian (1769–1843), trading as Houqua, once resided and had established his enterprise but it was also the contact zone where various cultures converged and imbricated.<sup>23</sup> For example, the remarkable English painter George Chinnery (1774–1852), who based himself in Macau but made regular visits to Canton until 1832, serves as a point of cultural interaction. During his last years, a number of Chinese pupils in Canton studied art under him and learned to paint in the European style. Among his budding students were Lam Qua or Kwan Kiu Cheong (1801–1860) and Sunqua (1830–1870), who greatly admired the new style of painting after the ‘manner of Cosway’.<sup>24</sup> These artistic productions significantly differed from traditional Chinese paintings, and this band of Cantonese painters were arguably the first group of drawers who were able to master landscapes both in oil and watercolour in imperial China. Their artworks were even exported to European markets and were well received.<sup>25</sup>

These stories are not very well-known to most of the Chinese, let alone Western readers, but they are symbolic in that they demonstrate that the Qing empire, particularly in the Pearl River Delta, had already become integrated into the world well before the arrival of European gunboats.

22. John M. Carroll, “The Canton System: Conflict and Accommodation in The Contact Zone,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, vol. 50 (2010), p. 52.

23. Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America’s Preoccupation with China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 22.

24. “Works by George Chinnery,” Tate Britain website: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/works-george-chinnery>.

25. Carl L. Crossman, *The China Trade; Export Paintings, Furniture, Silver & Other Objects* (Princeton: Pyne Press, 1973), p. 57.

These integrations were mainly facilitated through the maritime world. In essence, although the Qianlong regime (1735–1796) during the early modern era might not be considered a superior sea power when compared to those Western giants in the sea, its variegated associations with the maritime world were always traceable. As a matter of fact, if we look at the history of late imperial China from a long-term historical perspective, its coastal communities could hardly isolate themselves from the blue domain that fed, protected, and nurtured their identities.

### The End of an Era

Despite the aforementioned connections that couple China and the sea, some readers might remain hesitant or reluctant to agree that China, particularly the Great Qing, was a maritime empire. This scepticism is, in fact, one of the reasons that prompted me to work on this project. First, I must make it clearer that this book is not intended to argue that the Ming or the Qing empires were sea powers; nor is it intended to compare them so as to determine which was more competent in mastering the ocean. Instead, I am more inclined to examine the diverse stories and linkages between China and the maritime world, featured by a group of marine actors, during a time when the Europeans had recently begun to venture into different oceans and seas across the globe. These are stories and linkages that, in my view, have been largely unheard in the Anglophone community. Meanwhile, I am also tempted to discern why China has always been regarded as a country with little interest in the sea not only in existing historiography but also among popular beliefs.

The fact that China, during its late imperial stage, had long been confined within a political, diplomatic, and rivalry discourse in which maritime history had been equated to contests between powers on the sea might explain why it was regarded as having little interest in this blue domain. Historically, the sea was all about the navy, sea power, and coastal defence. Without overseas expansion via the ocean, a country would never qualify as a sea power. In the case of Qing China, this country was seemingly determined to become a flimsy weakling at sea largely due to its defeats in a number of sea battles that occurred during the nineteenth century. Among these many Sino-foreign military encounters, the First Opium War was possibly the most totemic, even though it was not the most destructive when compared with the Arrow

War (1856–1860), the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), and the Boxer Uprising (1899–1901).<sup>26</sup>

Sparked by an explosive series of events that took place in Canton and South China, including Taiwan, the First Opium War was in many respects indicative in forging China's reputation as a lesser power, compared to other, European supremacies. Textbooks that feature modern Chinese history, for instance, consider this Opium War as the point at which China left behind its conventional past and was forced to join the age of new imperialism, dictated by the European imperialists. Although this war did not topple China's ruling dynasty, after the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing, which marked the end of the First Opium War, the outcome of this conflict continued to cast a shadow over China's place in modern history. As historians have already suggested, the First Opium War marked the point at which China laid bare its weakness before the world. This was also a time when China proved itself to be incapable of mastering the ocean; it marked the end of one era – when China was East Asia's leading power – and the dawn of another – when European conquerors saw it as a continental power that was unable to flex its military muscle on the sea.

Today, we are living in a world that is overshadowed by this memory. Readers of a newer generation might readily assume that China's maritime vulnerability has perpetually defined its identity – a notion seemingly ingrained in its character, with the Qing dynasty evoking sympathy as a passive recipient. Consequently, there has been some puzzlement among external observers regarding China's contemporary aspiration to emerge as a naval force in the twenty-first century. To these spectators, China's historical focus has often leaned heavily toward the land and its northern frontiers, downplaying the significance of its maritime engagements throughout history. This has led to a tendency to overlook not only its distressing losses in naval conflicts during the nineteenth century, but also the era of imperialism that accompanied them.<sup>27</sup> But what if we were to reinterpret those sea battles not as a starting point, but as a culmination?

26. As argued by Julia Lovell, 'for more than 170 years, the First Opium War and its afterlives have cast a shadow over Sino-Western relations, both sides tampering with the historical record for their own purposes'. See Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams, and the Making of China* (Basingstoke, Oxford: Picador, 2011), p. 359. Stephen Pratt also identified that the Opium War is often considered the beginning of the century of humiliation of China – see his *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age* (London: Atlantic Books, 2019), p. xxii.

27. Such bemusement, of course, is misplaced in light of a Chinese history that has always

What if, instead, we redirect our gaze to the period preceding those battles – before the familiar demarcation (such as the First Opium War) that divided traditional China from its modern iteration?<sup>28</sup> If we were to do so, then we would come across an empire that was prosperous, powerful, envied, and, above all, closely engaged with the maritime world. Those engagements with the ocean, as briefly mentioned earlier, extended far beyond political, diplomatic, or national realms, permeating various strata within its coastal society. China's inseparability from the sea is evident, and a deeper exploration reveals numerous unexplored associations, often unfamiliar to Western audiences. In the early modern era, China was intricately shaped by the maritime world, which coexisted and interacted closely with the continental, dominating Confucian model, influencing political, societal, and cultural developments in a symbiotic manner.

### The Capriciousness of Governance

In the broad scheme of things, the maritime world of the Ming and Qing was at the same time shaped by the continental Confucian world order. This world order, anchored at a distance from the sea, had historically maintained a cautious distance from its shores. Administrators of both the Ming and Qing periods endeavoured to exert control over coastal and maritime activities, often relegating native seafarers and coastal merchants to the realm of 'crafty villains' or 'mean people' (*jianmin*). These marginalised groups were systematically excluded from participating in the broader Confucian societal structure, even being denied access to imperial civil exams.

Simultaneously, the pressures of limited land pushed some individuals to embrace seafaring as their means of livelihood. Facing challenges to establish themselves within the Confucian world, others turned to illicit sea trade, particularly following the sea bans instituted by Emperor Hongwu (1328–1398). The cordon sanitaire had moved the coastal population inland (*haijin*) during most of the Ming and early Qing; those maps that

included maritime concerns and space in the Ming and Qing era. I will further substantiate this argument by using the stories of a cluster of historical characters in this book.

28. Stephen Pratt also suggested a similar approach to look at the Qing's relations with the imperialist West. My analysis here is very much inspired by his projection. See his *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age*.

claimed only the inner sea (*neihai*) as Chinese and basically excluded the outer sea from their administrative agenda further indicated the dynasties' ambivalence towards maritime spaces. Paradoxically, despite this ambivalence, the dynasties also sought to capitalise on the benefits that the sea offered. The result was that the state of paranoia around the sea and the difficulties of direct participation in the big Confucian world order caused maritime dwellers to devise their own creative strategies for negotiating and living within this realm.

Given the difficulties of making it in the Confucian world, some of the maritime dwellers featured in this book found themselves facing formidable barriers to flourishing, or even surviving, within its confines. In response, they embarked on an alternative trajectory, steering their efforts toward the sea. Motivated by the urgency to secure their survival, these maritime spirits undertook a strategic pivot, engaging in commerce – sometimes illicit and frequently transregional – and practising fishing. However, when the ocean's resources dwindled and the sustainability of fishing ventures came under scrutiny, a pivotal juncture emerged. At this crucial crossroads of necessity, some of the fishermen then turned to a more audacious path – the path of piracy. This shift, catalysed by adversity and the inherent struggle to eke out a livelihood, marked a transformational phase within their journeys. Consequently, a dichotomy took root – a maritime community, catalysed by the adversity of securing a livelihood, existing alongside the intricate framework of the Confucian order and ethos. Yet, the very tenets that rendered them outsiders within the Confucian establishment, such as their exclusion from civil exams, empowered them to navigate these realms with a liberated spirit, pioneering alternative avenues and forging their destinies on their own terms. Otherwise stated, this vibrant interplay between the two worlds weaves a captivating narrative of resilience and ingenuity.

The result was that these people needed to be reined in. Thus came the state, which attempted to control these freewheeling maritime traders, smugglers, and pirates. They did this by assigning the task to officials who were very much connected to the Confucian world and yet also had to figure out how to deal with the maritime world and its related matters, including fishing and shipping. In addition to exerting direct control over coastal communities, officials might also find it necessary to collaborate or even negotiate with merchants, fishermen, travellers, and, in some cases, pirates. In the course of doing so, these officers became shaped by a more transregional, if not international, milieu than the one that prevailed in

Nanjing, Beijing, and Manchuria. In summary, throughout the Ming and Qing eras, on the one hand, we had ‘mean people’ who were barred from direct participation in that world order, but who tried to figure out ways that would let them coexist within it, and, on occasion, even to participate in it. On the other hand, we had states that were not derived from a seaborne culture, but were anxious and determined to reap its potential benefits. The dynamics between bureaucracy, governing philosophy, and the Confucian model then gave rise to the shaping of a unique maritime world for some of the historical figures featured in the present book.

Viewed from this particular perspective, the two imperial powers, Ming and Qing, exhibited what might seem like a seemingly capricious relationship with the ocean. At some points with open arms, they encouraged commerce and travel across boundless waters, such as the Zheng He voyages and the initiation of the Canton system; yet at some other moments, they tried to completely cordon off the littoral and the waters beyond. This on-and-off-again approach, as I will further examine in this book, shaped and created in its wake a maritime community that over time was largely alienated from the Confucian world around them, resulting in coastal residents whose behaviour gave rise to problems for those who sought to rein them in, and each in turn shaped the other.

### The Narrative

The succeeding chapters in this book not only take place against the backdrops of Ming and Qing China prior to the First Opium War but also in a transregional context. In narrating these stories, I decided to focus them on particular settings, as much as possible – for example, on board a pirate ship that plundered the coast of South China and Southeast Asia; at a local office that was responsible for coastal and maritime matters; or through a treatise or record written by an intellectual or envoy. I will also try to give my readers a picture of China’s relationship with the maritime world and how its particular history with the sea may shape the present: the One Belt One Road initiative (BRI), for example. Given the fact that the Qing court never claimed the outer sea (*waihai*), which was usually a stone’s throw off the coast, as a real part of China or anything that had to be defended, the exercise of the BRI policy and the turn to the sea, particularly towards the South China Sea region, in the present century is comparatively new and bemusing. Or is it just a twenty-first-century recreation of the

Ming expanse under the 'one and only' Zheng He? These are all fascinating and stimulating connections that could be drawn throughout the book.

However, rather than parading readers across the Ming and Qing periods by marching them down the grand avenue of late imperial Chinese history, I will place some selected characters under the spotlight to exemplify how the maritime world mattered to China as well as how China mattered to the maritime world. As mentioned above, I am also interested in exploring how this may have shaped the ways in which those historical players that became caught between China and the sea managed the tensions of the time and made sense of their lives. Pirates, cartographers, administrators, naval generals, maritime writers, emperors, visionaries, envoys, and travellers. Most of their stories are understudied, if not unheard, both inside and outside the academy. Despite the range of their backgrounds and expertise, their cumulative lives were all bound to the ocean. They bared their own souls and mirrored their own logics and reflections in their actions, yet in doing so their characters, identities, and life histories were largely shaped by a maritime China that was in transition between the fourteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Most of the figures shaped around in *Shaping the Blue Dragon* are Chinese, even after the period when the Manchu took control of Beijing and established the Qing dynasty. The Manchus, understandably, occupied an essential role between the late seventeenth and early twentieth centuries. But they would not have been able to govern the country's coastal fringe without support from the Han-Chinese community, which largely outnumbered them. The Manchu had to rely on the Han-Chinese in order to actualise most of their maritime policies not only because the former were a sort of minority, despite their ruling class status, but also because the Han-Chinese had long accumulated maritime experience and extensive knowledge from engaging with the sea.

The Fujianese and Cantonese, for instance, traditionally lived by the ocean. As I delve into this more specifically in chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six, I will discuss how they excelled in shipping and fishing technologies and were also concise writers and attentive observers when it came to maritime discussions. They understood pirates, came up with their own strategies to interact with foreign traders, and migrated across the South China Sea to Southeast Asia. The Manchu authority had to collaborate with these maritime Chinese in order to facilitate and foster their way to ruling the waves. There existed an interdependency between the Manchu as the ruling class and the Han-Chinese as the ruled. Apparently, such a synergy

was not exclusive to coastal governance or maritime control. The Manchu had been skilfully collaborating not only with the Han-Chinese but also with some other minorities, including the Mongolians and Tibetans so as to consolidate its power across its inner Asian frontier.<sup>29</sup> This was especially so during the early eighteenth century, when they had not yet grasped power at every end of China's frontier.

In this book, I will demonstrate that when it came to managing the maritime frontier, the Manchu's reliance on the Han-Chinese was more significant than had been their reliance on other Asian communities when they were administering the inland frontier. After all, the Manchus, comparatively speaking, were more confident when riding horses and firing their arrows on land.<sup>30</sup> Such brilliant skills – *qishe*, in Chinese – were not easy to develop. It has been recorded that only capable warriors could master these two skills at the same time, and the Manchu were famous for these talents.<sup>31</sup> The sea, however, was not the most appropriate or ideal arena for the Manchus to exhibit their renowned abilities. Sensibly, they would need to collaborate with those who were more experienced in a series of maritime matters that ranged from establishing a navy, to devising tactics to trap the pirates that plied its coastal waters, to charting the coast and managing seaborne shipping. Although they were seldom considered a maritime entity, the Manchu, during the long eighteenth century, especially the emperors and some of the ruling elites, exhibited a strong interest in mastering the strategies of adeptly governing the maritime frontiers. Their objective was to ensure stability and stave off any potential threats coming from the sea. As we will see in chapters Six and Seven, in particular, the

29. See, for instance, Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Max Oidtmann, *Forging the Golden Urn: The Qing Empire and the Politics of Reincarnation in Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

30. According to Pamela Kyle Crossley, 'the Daoguang emperor Minning again chided the Canton bannermen in 1837, "Manchu speech and *qishe* are still the foundation of the Manchus, and every man must know it"'. See her *Orphan Warriors: Three Manchu Generations and the End of the Qing World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 236, footnote 36.

31. Evelyn Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 36–39; Pamela Kyle Crossley, "Manchu Education," in Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside (eds.), *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, reprinted in 2020), pp. 352–359.

Qing court never overlooked its blue frontier; rather, it considered it a significant part of an empire that China would not risk losing to any other forces.

So far, the narrative looks quite political, but I must admit that this book not only looks at the connections between China and the sea from a top-down approach. I am also interested in weaving a narrative of China's historical connection with the sea by bringing in the individuals who could help us examine this connection from a bottom-up perspective. Here, we have stories featuring crucial figures who each engaged with the sea according to their distinct characteristics. In Chapter Two, for instance, we will follow the path of an (in)famous Chinese pirate, Chen Zuyi (?–1407), who was very active in Southeast Asia during the early Ming dynasty. Although he was born and raised in China, this remarkable pirate leader successfully altered the seascape of China and East and Southeast Asia. His life history is more than captivating – as most pirate stories are – while his rise and fall can help us reconsider that China was not necessarily a land-based community bounded by Confucianism and all sorts of terrestrially oriented philosophies. And if we try to situate his stories within a broader, transregional context, we will also be surprised to learn that Chinese pirates were no less aggressive, ambitious, and enterprising than those of the Caribbean, Mediterranean, or Atlantic, who are often portrayed in Western novels and on the silver screen as having been powerful and formidable.

Although each of the following chapters in this book features a specific character, these characters are lined up chronologically, commencing with the audacious pirate king Chen Zuyi and the insightful maritime writer Zheng Ruoceng (1503–1570), during the Ming dynasty. Next, we encounter a cluster of anonymous cartographers from the eighteenth century. Continuing our journey, we meet the legendary admiral Shi Lang (1621–1696), in the early Qing, whose connection to contemporary China serves as a pivotal bridge, as previously mentioned. Following him are the esteemed 'master of the sea' Lan Dingyuan (1680–1733), during the Yongzheng era, and the imperial envoy Zhou Huang (1714–1785), who was commissioned by the Qianlong emperor (1711–1799) to visit the Ryukyu Kingdom. Ultimately, the book concludes with the compelling story of the intrepid traveller Xie Qinggao (1765–1821), who ventured across the vast ocean and documented his experiences and encounters in the Western world during the early nineteenth century. I have designed the book in this way because I think it will provide readers with a clear historical trajectory in which they can easily refer to the relevant historical events and the

changes that occurred over time. After all, linear chronology always makes for good popular storytelling. And by setting up my arguments around these maritime actors and placing them in the relevant scenes, I see my task as furnishing readers with seven stories they might use to construct a maritime China, particularly during the long eighteenth century, within a broader picture and not only a Sino-centric one but a transregional one that we are all part of.

### Shaping the Blue Dragon

To conclude this introduction, I should also explain the rationale for titling the book *Shaping the Blue Dragon*. From my perspective, which I have subtly hinted at earlier, when it comes to the many layered connections between coastal communities and the maritime world, the story is always about *shaping* and *being shaped*. In a nutshell, maritime China did shape and help construct the identity of the individuals I selected for this book.<sup>32</sup> These people's lives, times, identities, and conceptualisations of the ocean and the wider world were largely shaped by a maritime China and not a continental one. As for Chen Zuyi (Chapter Two), the pirate king, for example, his journey to becoming a pirate leader was shaped by a piratical, corrupted sea. China's troubled sea was an arena in which Chen could build his maritime enterprises and power base, while those seaborne shipping ventures were sources of his income, power, and influence. When the pirate king would not have been able to become an influential leader without attaching himself to the sea, which was also regarded as a platform from which to fight against his oppressors, the conventional norms of the day, and certain inequalities, in his view, that may have existed. As for some coastal officials, such as Zheng Ruoceng (Chapter Three), Lan Dingyuan (Chapter Six), and the anonymous cartographers whose work we study in Chapter Four, they were devoted to developing a set of comprehensive and effective ways to help the government better master and administrate the ocean. Their strategies, visions, and experience were mostly shaped

32. 'Maritime China' here is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct that encapsulates the intricate interplay between geographic, economic, cultural, and geopolitical elements within the coastal and maritime regions of China. It encompasses not only the physical geographical expanse along the coastline but also the socio-historical, economic, and cultural processes that have unfolded in relation to the maritime world.

by the many marine activities that took place along the coast of China, and not the continental-based cultural system late imperial China was presumably bound to. In the case of Xie Qinggao (Chapter Eight), who travelled to Europe, his identity was also shaped by a maritime China that was connected to the wider world. Although he had not intended to travel to Europe, the motivation that prompted him to compile the *Record of the Sea* after his European journey was largely because he saw the sea as a connecting space that linked maritime China on one side and the European continent on the other.

The maritime policies of the Ming and Qing, in turn, were also very much shaped by these selected individuals, either directly or indirectly. The early Ming government had been keen to destroy the pirate Chen Zuyi and pacify the sea space that linked China and Southeast Asia. The Ming government was also determined to guard its coastal communities against the *wokou* or the Japanese pirates who marauded along its shores. Their coastal protection strategy was largely shaped by cartographers and intellectuals such as Zheng Ruoceng who had completed a set of mapping and surveying projects. Likewise, the Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors devised coastal policies that were shaped by Shi Lang, Lan Dingyuan, and some other coastal officials of similar ambition and repute. Although the writing of Xie Qinggao did not immediately stimulate the Jiaqing emperor to adjust China's maritime policies, largely because his work had not been widely circulated outside Guangdong province, his legacy is profound and symbolic because his work was cited recurrently by renowned scholar-officials Wei Yuan (1794–1857) and Lin Zexu (1785–1850) during the opium war era.

By extension, it is worth noting that some regional developments and transformations along the coast of China were shaped by those men and women who not only lived *by* the sea but lived *with* it. The Pearl River Delta, particularly the city of Canton, for example, would not have been able to flourish and become a remarkable port region without the noteworthy individuals and communities who had been bound to a maritime China. Some might not have been as famous as Houqua or Zheng Yi Sao, an (in)famous female pirate chieftain, but they nevertheless helped shape the maritime-ness of both the region and China. These people had been constructing a maritime China on their own terms. To the pirates, the merchants, and potentially the ambitious naval general Shi Lang, their maritime China was full of opportunities. This was where they could accumulate money, power, and other forms of capital such as human labour

and marine resources. To the scholar-officials, such as Zheng Ruoceng, Lan Dingyuan, and those anonymous cartographers, their maritime China was an essential strategic and economic belt that mattered a lot to the country's economy and stability, while it was also full of potential dangers and required proper and deliberate management. To Xie Qinggao, alongside some other maritime writers at the turn of the eighteenth century, maritime China was always about openness and connectedness. It was the gateway that channelled China to a wider world in which the Qing empire was no longer situated at the centre. In summary, all of these individuals shaped a maritime China that suited their aspirations, commitments, and objectives. Even the PRC government nowadays is using some of these historical connections in shaping a maritime China that is closely bound to the changing global order and, above all, one that could justify its sovereignty across the Taiwan Strait, as we can see from the Shi Lang story in Chapter Five.

In my other monograph, *The Blue Frontier: Maritime Vision and Power in the Qing Empire*, I argue that the Qing empire had engaged politically, economically, and conceptually with its maritime frontier prior to the outbreak of the First Opium War.<sup>33</sup> Some attentive readers might realise that there exist a few cohesions between the two books. But what I have done in *Shaping the Blue Dragon* is, first of all, to pay more attention to the historical continuities between the Ming and Qing empires in relation to the constantly changing maritime world. In addition to including more Ming figures and stories in this book, I also suggest that we should never draw easy or loose demarcations that would lead us to label the Ming as a sea power and the Qing as a land one. These demarcations are, in fact, unnecessary because these two empires each developed their own attempts to interreact with the ocean and govern their maritime frontier. It is also important to note that the conception of sea power in the early modern era differed from that of the late nineteenth century, when the American admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) widely shared this idea, first in the United States and then in Europe.

Furthermore, I believe the two dynasties were inextricable from a wide range of maritime affairs that proved to be essential to the survival of each empire. Even during the time when both the Ming and Qing governments issued respective policies on sea bans to block all kinds of marine activities,

33. Ronald C. Po, *The Blue Frontier: Maritime Vision and Power in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

neither administration was able to cut its ties with the ocean. No matter how harsh the consequences of these policies, the coastal region was never static or motionless. The shadow market as well as a series of piratical activities were always there and the Ming and Qing governors were compelled to remain alert and cautious at all times. In the present century, where the People's Republic of China is more than ready to project its maritime power across the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean World, the Global South, and beyond, it is perhaps not improper to recall the precedent to this ambition, when the blue domain was already integral to the Ming and Qing powers in multiple, layered ways.

### Sources

What follows is based on materials found in the archives of China, Taiwan, Japan, Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States. These sources have yielded rich information about the life and times of the main characters in the subsequent chapters. Some of the personal networks and activities of these protagonists, such as Chen Zuyi, Shi Lang, the Qianlong emperor, Zhou Huang, and Xie Qinggao, extended across China to East and Southeast Asia during the time when China was closely connected with a series of transregional interactions, most of them taking place via the maritime space. Chen Zuyi, for instance, played a role as the central node in the trans-Asian shadow market, while the Qianlong emperor was apparently the highest authority to set the country's maritime and diplomatic policies in motion. Although it seems that Shi Lang's story was set up against a Qing or China backdrop, the admiral had persuaded the British East India Company and the Dutch VOC to extend their trading routes to Fujian as a way to protect his personal interest in the region in the 1670s. He even came up with a secret plan of selling Taiwan back to the Dutch, as disclosed in his letter written to Alexander van Gravenbroek, before the annexation took place in 1683.<sup>34</sup> All in all, the evidence consulted in this book demonstrates both intense and transboundary activities of these marine actors and reveals the manner and dynamism in which they (dis)engaged with Confucian

34. For details, see Wei-chung Cheng, "Admiral Shi Lang's Secret Proposal to Return Taiwan to the VOC," in Tonio Andrade and Xing Hang (eds.), *Sea Rovers, Silver, and Samurai: Maritime East Asia in Global History, 1550–1700* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2016), pp. 290–311.

order and the maritime world. Several primary materials documenting these revelations survive in the First Historical Archives of China, the Academia Sinica in Taipei, as well the British Library and National Archive in London.

The holdings of the Harvard Yenching Library, the Cambridge University Library, the Leiden University Library, as well as the Library of Congress proved indispensable to round up this study.<sup>35</sup> Additional investigations were conducted in Portugal, Macau, and Canton in order to follow Xie Qinggao's journey. Some field trips in Fujian and Tainan were also arranged when tracing the legacy of Shi Lang, which percolated throughout Chinese history. Needless to say, a number of sources mentioned above have been applied and cited in other studies that have focused on the history of Ming and Qing China. There is no intellectual effort that is not built upon the shoulders of academic giants of previous generations. The very intention of this book is to continue an inspiring journey, or should I say voyage, that has shaped the nature of a maritime China, past and present.

35. When translating and quoting from early modern sources written in Chinese and Japanese, however, modern punctuation and, occasionally, expression have been applied to ensure they are comprehensible to twenty-first-century readers.



## CHAPTER TWO

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# The Pirate King

### Once Upon a Time in Nanjing

In the year 1405, the city of Nanjing was replete with artisans, shipbuilders, ironsmiths, surveyors, sailors, and other skilled and semi-skilled labourers arriving from various parts of China. It has been recounted that these people amounted to more than 20,000 altogether.<sup>1</sup> Most of them were connoisseurs and workers recruited by the Ming government under the Yongle emperor at the time.<sup>2</sup> This emperor intended to build one of the grandest projects possible in Chinese history: the construction of a large-scale shipyard at the intersection of the Qinhuai and Yangtze Rivers, which is somewhere near a district then referred to as the Sanchahe of the Jiangdong residential district in Nanjing nowadays.<sup>3</sup> This shipyard was huge, extending close to 1,000 *mu*, which is equivalent to around 660,000 square metres. It consisted of seven long, large docks, where at least 100 vessels could be built at the same time. Suitable hand-cut lengths of timber were transported from the forests of Yunan, Jianxi, Huguang, and Sichuan through a transportation network of forestry resources that was wide, extensive, and plausibly unprecedented

1. In the words of Si-yen Fei, some of these craftsmen and service workers were in fact forced to go to the capital. See her *Negotiating Urban Space: Urbanization and Late Ming Nanjing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 135–136.

2. Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 43; Corona Brezina, *Zheng He: China's Greatest Explorer, Mariner, and Navigator* (New York: Rosen Publishing, 2016), p. 42.

3. Pim de Zwart and Jan Luiten van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization: World Trade in the Making of the Global Economy, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 17.

in Chinese history.<sup>4</sup> Workers on the site toiled day and night, under hot conditions, as they measured, cut, trimmed, planed, and assembled to meet the Yongle emperor's ambitious goal of establishing a gigantic fleet that could set sail on the high seas as a way to display his empire's imperial power (*shi Zhongguo fuqiang*).<sup>5</sup> As Timothy Brook and other scholars pointed out, Yongle, like the Kublai Khan of the Yuan Dynasty, was keen to announce to the maritime world that he was now the monarch of the Middle Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> In order to gain more recognition for the Ming court, the emperor had planned to launch a large diplomatic mission to send to the tributary states that were scattered across the Indian Ocean World, a maritime region the Chinese called the Western Sea (*xiyang*). The emperor had mobilised every device he could think of to make this happen.

By the summer of 1405, most of the naval hardware was ready but the mission required a capable captain to pull off this incredible expedition. The Yongle emperor had to choose a commander who was reliable and competent enough to lead his fleet. After much careful deliberation, the emperor handpicked one of his trusted followers: Zheng He, a eunuch he had known since childhood. Originally named Ma He, as he was born to a Muslim family in the district of Kunyang in the city of Kunming, Zheng He was captured as a ten-year-old by soldiers dispatched there by the first Ming emperor, who was intent on subduing the southwestern part of China, the last hold of the Yuan Dynasty. Ma He was then sent to the north to be trained in military ways. According to the *Gujin shijian* written by Yuan Zhongche (1377–1459), Ma was over six feet tall with a chest contemporaries said measured over five feet around.<sup>7</sup> In addition to this sturdy and muscular physique, he was smart, diligent, fearless (*ziyou you caizhi, fengqu weimao, bobian jimin, qiangong jinmi*), and, above all, extremely loyal to his master, Zhu Di, who later became the Yongle emperor.<sup>8</sup> Given all of these outstanding qualities, it should not come as a surprise that the emperor

4. Ian M. Miller, *Fir and Empire: The Transformation of Forests in Early Modern China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), p. 130.

5. Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), vol. 304, p. 7766.

6. Timothy Brook, *Great State: China and the World* (London: Profile Books, 2019), p. 85; Ayşe Zarakol, *Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 108; Geoff Wade, "The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment," *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series*, vol. 31 (2004), p. 11.

7. Yuan's description was cited from Xia Daizhong, Hu Yanwu, *Zheng He shishi* (Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 2005), p. 286.

8. 'Ziyou you caizhi' and 'bobian jimin' were words from the *Mingshu* compiled by Fu

had decided to assign this important undertaking to Ma He, despite his lack of any substantial sailing experience. By the time Ma He was officially commissioned with this task, the emperor had renamed him as Zheng He.<sup>9</sup> The reason he was given the surname Zheng and not Zhu, the last name of the Ming emperors, is subject to dispute. Some scholars speculated that it was because Ma He had performed impressively in the Battle of Zhengjiaba, a place located approximately 20 miles to the north of Beijing.<sup>10</sup> But this has never been confirmed due to the lack of historical evidence.

On 11 July 1405, a bright summer day, the first expedition of this mighty fleet was launched with great ceremony.<sup>11</sup> Comprising 317 vessels, including as many as 60 huge treasure ships, all armed with cannons, and nearly 28,000 men, including sailors, soldiers, diplomats, astronomers, interpreters, and doctors, the armada sailed past Vietnam, Siam, Brunei, Java, and the Straits of Malacca, and then proceeded to its final destination of Cochin and the kingdom of Calicut on the southwestern coast of India. Although the routes Zheng He followed were long-established and well-mapped by traders who had been plying the seas between China and the Arabian Peninsula since the Han Dynasty,<sup>12</sup> this mission proved to be

Weilun (1608–1667). See also Ma Xingdong, “Zheng He de kaifang yishi dui qi hanghai shiye de yingxiang,” *Yunnan minzu xueyuan xuebao*, vol. 4 (1992), p. 28.

9. The story of Zheng He has been told and retold many times in secondary literature published in English. See, for instance, Ying Liu, Zhongping Chen, and Gregory Blue (eds.), *Zheng He's Maritime Voyages (1405–1433) and China's Relations with the Indian Ocean World: A Multilingual Bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. xxiii–xxiv; Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405–1433* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty* (London: Pearson Longman, 2007). Moreover, Gavin Menzies's studies on Zheng He has also sparked Western interest in China's maritime history, despite being considered flawed or pseudo-history by many scholars. While his publications contain inaccuracies, they have nonetheless contributed to a broader awareness of China's maritime discovery, exploits, and global reach. See his *1421: The Year China Discovered the World* (Uxbridge: Bantam Book, 2002) and *1434: The Year a Magnificent Chinese Fleet Sailed to Italy and Ignited the Renaissance* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008).

10. Guo Chengkang, Wang Tianyou, and Cheng Chongde, *Yuan Ming Qing Shi* (Taipei: Wunan tushu chubanshe, 2002), p. 273; Li Shihou, *Zheng He xinchuan* (Kunming: Chenguang chubanshe, 2005), p. 52; Robert Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 218.

11. In order to celebrate the grand launching of the Zheng He's fleet, the PRC government officially named 11 July ‘national navigation day’ in 2005.

12. Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 151; Philip Ball, *The Water Kingdom: A Secret History of*

exceptional in early modern world history and has been widely celebrated in China and Southeast Asia even up to the present day, while Zheng He, 'the phenomenal navigator' (*da hanghaijia*),<sup>13</sup> was variously known as China's antecedent to the Italian navigator Christopher Columbus.<sup>14</sup>

Most of us are fairly familiar with the story of Zheng He as well as his first expedition, which took place on a grand scale and at great cost to the Ming government. Arguably, Zheng He's flotilla was the largest the world had ever seen or 'would see for the next five hundred years'.<sup>15</sup> It was generally acclaimed as having been gigantic, incredible, and formidable. Compared to any other war junks that could be found on the sea during the early fifteenth century, there were probably no other vessels or naval fleets comparable with this impressive squadron. Even the three renowned ships Columbus's captains sailed across the Atlantic Ocean a century later, namely the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*, were ten times smaller than the Ming's treasure ship, which measured 400 feet in length and 160 feet in width.<sup>16</sup> It was also believed that nobody on the sea at the time

*China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 155; Felipe Fernández-Armesto, "Exploration and Discovery," in Christopher Allmand (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), vol. VII, p. 177.

13. Liang Qichao, "Zuguo da hanghaijia Zheng He zhuan," first published in 1904, reprinted in Wang Tianyou and Wang Ming (eds.), *Zheng He yanjiu bainian lunwen xuan* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004), pp. 1–8.

14. See, for example, Huang Wenping, "Dui Zheng He, Gelunbu (Columbus) hanghai Shijian de linglei jie," *Zhujiang jingji*, vol. 4 (2004), pp. 72–74; "Weishenme buhui you Zhongguo Gelunbu? Shiwu shiji Zhongxi hanghai fazhan quxiang de duibi yu sisuo," collected in *History of America* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2009), pp. 103–130; Peng Shunsheng, "Zheng He yu Gelunbu bijiao yanjiu," *Guangdong shehui kexue*, vol. 6 (1995), pp. 64–69; Xin Yuan'ou, "Zheng He yu Gelunbu xianxiang de bijiao yanjiu," *Shanghai zaochuan*, vol. 1 (2005), pp. 67–74; Yao Guohua, "Zheng He yu Gelunbu: Liangge ouran jue, liangzhong biran mingyun," *Shehui kexue luntan*, vol. 4 (2006), pp. 128–134; Steve Sailer, "The Eunuch Columbus: Cheng Ho was Probably the Greatest Admiral of the Fifteenth Century," *National Post (Canada)*, dated 12 October 1999; Caroline Hsu, "The Chinese Columbus? Zheng He Ran One of the Greatest Fleets of All Time. Did He Discover the New World?" *U.S. News and World Report*, vol. 136, no. 7 (2004), pp. 56–60.

15. Paul S. Ropp, *China in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 88.  
16. It should be noted, however, that the actual size of those treasure ships is in dispute. See, for instance, Richard Barker, "The Size of the Treasure Ships and Other Chinese Vessels," *Mariner's Mirror*, vol. 75 (1989), pp. 273–275; Christopher Wake, "The Myth of Zheng He's Great Treasure Ships," *International Journal of Maritime History*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2004), pp. 59–75; Sally K. Church, "Zheng He: An Investigation into the Plausibility of 450-ft Treasure Ship," *Monumenta Serica*, vol. 53 (2005), pp. 1–43; A. W. Sleeswyk, "Maximum

would dare challenge Zheng He, who was proudly representing the Ming's naval power. However, a pirate leader who was based in the Malay world but was originally from China had decided to act otherwise in the Battle of Palembang, Sumatra, in what is now modern Indonesia. His name was Chen Zuyi, and he was one of the most feared pirates to terrorise the seas of Southeast Asia.

### Chen Zuyi and the Hongwu Emperor

A native of Guangdong, Chen Zuyi was born into a coastal family in Chaozhou, a city in the eastern part of the province. Compared to Zheng He, whose childhood had been recorded in fine detail, almost nothing is known about Chen. The first biographical entry we have of his life is an official document from the Ming court, recording that he migrated with his family to Southeast Asia in the 1380s and settled in Malacca.<sup>17</sup> However, we do not really know the exact year he arrived in Southeast Asia. It is fitting that there should be a certain blurriness to Chen's roots. There are palimpsests that provide narratives about almost all of China's eccentric pirates. These narratives recount these pirates' origins and chronicle different plots that have been layered and threaded together through rumour and hearsay.

We are nevertheless able to historicise the background that prompted Chen to embark on his journey to Southeast Asia. Unlike the era when the Yongle emperor had been eager to flex his empire's muscles on the sea, Chen had been brought up during the time when Yongle's father, the Hongwu emperor, had promulgated a set of laws, in 1371, that aimed to 'block the ocean' (*haijin*) as a way to prohibit seaborne shipping as well as to end most maritime relations with countries overseas.<sup>18</sup> In the words of the Hongwu

Lengths of Cheng Ho's Ships," *Mariner's Mirror*, vol. 91, no. 4 (2005), pp. 603–605; Shi Hequn, "Dui wandun ji baochuan de zhiyi," *Zheng He yanjiu*, no. 1 (2005), pp. 39–43.

17. Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi*, vol. 26, *juan* 304, p. 7767.

18. Lessons learned from the Mongol precedents were decisive in shaping this *haijin* policy set up by the Hongwu emperor. In his view, private sea trade during the Yuan era was largely uncontrolled and had become 'intermingled with the tributary trade of the court', which had given rise to the instability along the maritime frontier of the Yuan empire. See Wang Gungwu, "Ming Foreign Relations: Southeast Asia," in Denis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644: Part 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 303.

emperor, he could not even tolerate ‘a single plank of wood floating in the sea’ (*cunban buxu xiahai*).<sup>19</sup> And in his *Instructions of the Ancestor of the August Ming* (*Huang Ming zuxun*), a manuscript he had compiled in 1373 and devoted to his descendants, the emperor further stressed that the Ming empire should limit its contacts with foreign countries that ‘lay far away in a corner’ as much as possible in order to maintain peace and achieve stability.<sup>20</sup> In hindsight, the period between 1371 and 1373 was the beginning of an era during which coastal dwellers were forcibly pushed to the frontier of the Ming’s economic and societal developments. The initiation of the *haijin* policy served as a decisive turning point that ended a tradition of close to 450 years of private sea trade between China and the rest of the world without being under the direct and harsh intervention of the various central governments in the region. The Mongol rulers during the Yuan dynasty, for instance, had been promoting maritime trade for close to a century,<sup>21</sup> let alone the Tang and Song periods.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the Hongwu’s embargo, when it was put in practice, not only forbade most marine activities but

19. See Li Jinglung (ed.), *Ming Taizu shilu* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1966), vol. 70, p. 3; vol. 139, p. 2197.

20. Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang, “Huang Ming zuxun,” in *Xuxiu siku quanshu*, fasc. 264, 5b–6a. See also Gu Yingtai, *Mingshi jishi benmo*, in *Wenyuange siku quanshu* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), fasc. 364, *juan* 55, 10b. Translation in quote from Angela Schottenhammer, “Consolidating Southeast Asia and the Meaning of Force in History: Pax Ming and the Case of Chen Zuyi,” *China and Asia*, vol. 3 (2021), p. 131.

21. John W. Chaffee, *The Muslim Merchants of Premodern China: The History of a Maritime Asia Trade Diaspora, 750–1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 118, 132; Ho Chuimei, “The Ceramic Boom in Minnan during Song and Yuan Times,” in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *The Emporium of the World: Maritime Quanzhou, 1000–1400* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 237–282; Thomas T. Allsen, *The Steppe and the Sea: Pearls in the Mongol Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), pp. 142–166; Morris Rossabi, “Tabriz and Yuan China,” in Ralph Kauz (ed.), *Aspects of the Maritime Silk Road: From the Persian Gulf to the East China Sea* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), pp. 97–106.

22. Mark Edward Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 161–163; Wang Zhenping, “T’ang Maritime Trade Administration,” *Asia Major*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1991), pp. 7–38; Ng Chin-keong, *Boundaries and Beyond: China’s Maritime Southeast in Late Imperial Times* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), pp. 3–56; Geoff Wade, “An Early Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia, 900–1300 CE,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (June 2009), pp. 221–265; Lincoln Paine, *The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), pp. 262–315.

those who failed to comply with the severe regulations the emperor had set up were also treated as pirates or fugitives.<sup>23</sup>

In light of all these harsh and punitive regulations to block the sea, we have always been under the impression that the sea trade during the Ming was completely off limits. However, the embargo did not ban *all* types of sea trade. In the expression of Lung-kee Sun, ‘even after sealing off the coastal areas, the vibrant maritime trade with southeast, south, and west Asia was not discontinued; it simply became a state monopoly’.<sup>24</sup> According to the Ming laws, small-scale businesses could operate under proper official supervision. It was those ‘great businesses’, which were considered extremely profitable and could in turn do harm to the state and society that were suppressed.<sup>25</sup> In the view of the Hongwu emperor, small-scale sea trade should be governed by the tributary system; this was a Confucian worldview and model that regulated diplomatic relations between China and its tributary states, such as Cambodia (Chenla), Ceylon, the Philippines, and Vietnam.<sup>26</sup> As is probably well-known, China was situated at the centre of a world where its tributaries surrounded it and where these ‘inferior’ countries were supposed to pay tribute to the large, more superior, powerful, and civilised state in the centre. In return, the Chinese emperors would bestow gifts to these foreigners as a gesture of their generosity and superiority. This type of

23. Jiang Yonglin (trans.), *The Great Ming Code/Da Ming lü* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 140–141; Li Kangying, *The Ming Maritime Trade Policy in Transition, 1368–1567* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), pp. 3–4; Zheng Yangwen, *China on the Sea: How the Maritime World Shaped Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 49; José Luis Gasch-Tomás, *The Atlantic World and the Manila Galleons: Circulation, Market, and Consumption of Asian Goods in the Spanish Empire, 1565–1650* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 59; Manel Ollé, *La Empresa de China: De la Armada Invencible al Galeón de Manila* (Barcelona: Acanilado, 2005), pp. 9–25.

24. Lung-kee Sun, “The Ming Dynasty Comes to Power,” in Frank W. Thackeray and John E. Findling (eds.), *Events that Changed the World through the Sixteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 72.

25. Angela Schottenhammer, “The East Asian Maritime World, 1400–1800: Its Fabrics of Power and Dynamics of Exchanges: China and Her Neighbours,” in her edited volume with the same title as this book chapter (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), pp. 17–18.

26. Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 166. As for an overview of and recent trend in the studies of Sino-centric order and tributary trade, see Stephan Haggard and David C. Kang, “Introduction,” in their edited volume *East Asia in the World: Twelve Events that Shaped the Modern International Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 5–12.

diplomacy and trade relations, commonly known as *caogong* and *cefeng*, was not conducted on the basis of profit making, and according to the Hongwu emperor, should have been allowed, if not encouraged.<sup>27</sup> In the words of Timothy Brook, 'the Hongwu emperor cared deeply about receiving tribute embassies. Every visit confirmed his right to rule, to potentates beyond his borders as well as to his subjects watching the foreign embassies enter the capital',<sup>28</sup> while in Wang Gungwu's, 'the Chinese tributary system had been formally institutionalised during the Ming dynasty, partly in reaction against the Mongol urge to conquer vast areas of territory, acts of expansion that could only lead to eventual defeat, withdrawal, and exhaustion'.<sup>29</sup>

In essence, all sea trade was strictly operated and governed under the tributary system throughout the Hongwu reign (1368–1398), in a way that 'tribute relations were not to be undertaken for profit and were not to be conflated with private maritime trade'.<sup>30</sup> The Chinese emperor was also dedicated to irradicating all illegal activities on Chinese waters that could potentially challenge his sovereignty in ruling the waves. In a sense, as we shall see, the Hongwu monarch was clearly applying a Confucian attempt to manage most marine matters, and this is perhaps one of the illustrative examples that shows maritime China as largely having been shaped by the Confucian system of thought and traditional rites. Yet we must be careful not to rush to the conclusion that the Hongwu administration had been antagonistic towards the sea trade and commerce. As Angela Schottenhammer has persuasively asserted, economic considerations, either on land or sea, were always important for the state and security in the early Ming. 'In the face of possible dangers coming from wealthy, influential merchants, such as Zhang Shicheng and Fang Guozhen, who had become powerful enough to menace the court's authority, it is not surprising that Hongwu also sought to guard his dynasty against potential threats from abroad'.<sup>31</sup> To put it another way, the

27. Wang Gungwu, "Ming Foreign Relations: Southeast Asia," p. 311.

28. Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 220.

29. Wang Gungwu, "Empires and Anti-empires: Asia in World Politics," in Geir Lundestad (ed.), *The Fall of Great Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 239.

30. Wang Gungwu, "Ming Foreign Relations: Southeast Asia," p. 308. See also Roderich Ptak, "Ming Maritime Trade to Southeast Asia, 1368–1567: Visions of a System," in Claude Guillot, Denys Lombard, and Roderich Ptak (eds.), *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), pp. 157–191.

31. Angela Schottenhammer, "Consolidating Southeast Asia and the Meaning of Force in History," p. 134.

Hongwu emperor did not ban private sea trade out of his antipathy toward the maritime world; rather, this was a deliberate political move to guard his empire against the dangers posed by wealthy, influential traders and entrepreneurs. By and large, this was a direct intervention to restrain merchants whose goals were to maximise their profits and who might, in turn, become a threat to the Ming's stable, well-ordered communities.

The Hongwu's proposition was solid and effective enough to severely constrain businessmen from becoming too influential. However, one could predict that the coastal economy would have suffered drastic consequences and experienced decline due to a substantial degree of disengagement from an otherwise supportive administration. Coastal residents, ranging from boatmen (*danhu*), islanders (*daoren*), and traders (*gushu*) to fishermen (*yuding*), whose lives were bound to the sea but not to farming, were marginalised to the fringe of society.<sup>32</sup> The government even categorised some of them as 'mean people' or 'crafty villains', *jianmin* in Chinese, who could barely benefit from the existing system and climb up the ladder of success.<sup>33</sup> In order to survive and make a living, quite a sizeable number of these people opted to relocate their bases outside of China and continued to conduct sea trade, to various degrees, within the Asian maritime network, hence igniting a wave of migration from southeast China, particularly from Guangdong and Fujian to Southeast Asia in the late fourteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Chen Zuyi was among those who chose to leave the Ming dynasty and seek a radical change during a time when the European powers had yet to arrive in the region.

32. Chen Wenshi, "Ming Jiajing nianjian Zhe Fu yanhai kouluan yu sifan maoyi de guanxi," *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology*, vol. 36, no. 1 (December 1965), p. 376.

33. Lin Liyue, "Minnan shishen yu Jiajing nianjian de haishang zousi maoyi," *Bulletin of Historical Research*, vol. 6, no. 8 (1980), p. 91.

34. Zhu Guohong, "A Historical Demography of Chinese Migration," in Hong Liu (ed.), *The Chinese Overseas: Routledge Library of Modern China* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 149; Chang Pin-tsun, "The First Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century," in Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund (eds.), *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400–1750* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), pp. 13–28.

### Opportunities in Crisis

The area in Southeast Asia that caught the attention of Chen Zuyi is commonly known as Srivijaya, which was recorded as Shilifoshi in Tang documents, Sanfoqi in Song and Ming sources, and Zabaj in medieval Arabic records.<sup>35</sup> By the seventh century, Srivijaya had grown to become a considerable economic power in Southeast Asia, maintaining control of the Straits of Malacca and Sunda and claiming sovereignty over a large number of polities in Sumatra and along the Malay Peninsula. Srivijaya's strategic geographical location is one of the reasons it had become prosperous. The kingdom of Srivijaya was situated in the foremost aquatic corridor connecting the South China Sea and the eastern side of the Indian Ocean, where it basically controlled and oversaw all sorts of sea trade operating across the region.<sup>36</sup> Most of the shipping there was highly remunerative. There were two centres of power in Srivijaya, one in Palembang and the other in Muaro Jambi, both of which were remarkable port cities located on two navigable rivers, namely the Musi and the Batang, respectively.<sup>37</sup> In addition to these metropolises, Pekan, Lingga, Kota Kapur, Panai, and Lamuri were important to facilitating the transregional sea trade between China and the Indian Ocean World. All of these cities were under the control of the Srivijaya empire.

Thanks to its unbeatable natural geographic advantage, Srivijaya gradually became a popular terminus in Southeast Asia for the Chinese to settle in, either temporarily or permanently. This was especially so after the Tang period, when numerous cargo ships departed from Guangzhou

35. See So Kee-long, "Dissolving Hegemony or Changing Trade Pattern? Images of Srivijaya in the Chinese Sources of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2 (September 1998), p. 295.

36. O. W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of the Origins of Srivijaya* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Bin Nik Abd. Rahman, "The Kingdom of Srivijaya as Socio-Political and Cultural Entity," in J. Kathirithamby-Wells and J. Villiers (eds.), *The Southeast Asian Port and Polity* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), pp. 61–82; Kenneth R. Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia: Maritime Trade and Societal Development, 100–1500* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), p. 32.

37. Philip Bowring, *Empire of the Winds: The Global Role of Asia's Great Archipelago* (I. B. Tauris & Co., 2019), pp. 57–58, 76, 103; Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, *The Politics of Heritage in Indonesia: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 192.

and reached the Persian Gulf to trade in ceramics and luxury wares, such as jewellery boxes, mirrors, octagonal tea cups, and silver plates, across the so-called maritime silk road between Tang China and the Abbasid world.<sup>38</sup> Apparently, Srivijaya benefited a lot from the scale and sophistication of the trade that was conducted along this route. This was a lucrative corridor abundant in trading and working opportunities not only for the Chinese but also for Southeast Asians. After more than four centuries of glorification, however, the once-notable Srivijaya empire began to decline, having been weakened by constant attacks launched by the Chola Empire, a Tamil thalassocratic empire of Southern India, during the eleventh century.<sup>39</sup> Since then, Sumatra was never peaceful. All of these perceptible dangers weakened the foundations of the Srivijaya government. By the late thirteenth century, Srivijaya had experienced its final decline when the expansionist Javanese King Kertanegara of Singhasari dispatched his navy to sack Palembang and Muaro Jambi and conquer Sumatra.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, the battles on the Malay region did not end here. Throughout the long fourteenth century, numerous battles were fought between the Javanese, the Siamese, and the people from Singapura.<sup>41</sup> The region was in constant turmoil and in disarray in a situation that was perhaps not much different from the countless military conflicts that took place between the Chinese and the Mongols during Yuan–Ming transition on the other side of the South China Sea.

38. Simon Worrall, "China Made: A 1,200-Year-Old Shipwreck Opens a Window on the Ancient Global Trade," *National Geographic*, vol. 215, no. 6 (June 2009), pp. 112–122; John Guy, "The Belitung (Tang) Cargo and Early Asian Ceramic Trade," in *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, vol. 66 (2003), pp. 13–27; "Shipwrecks in Late First Millennium Southeast Asia: Southern China's Maritime Trade and the Emerging Role of Arab Merchants in Indian Ocean Exchange," in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *Early Global Interconnectivity across the Indian Ocean World: Commercial Structures and Exchanges* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), vol. 1, p. 129.

39. Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 67.

40. Robert Cribb, "Nation: Making Indonesia," in Donald K. Emmerson (ed.), *Indonesia beyond Suharto: Polity, Economy, Society, Transition* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 6–7; Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London: Macmillan, 1982; reprinted in 1991), p. 30. Pierre-Yves Manguin, "Srivijaya," in C. F. W. Higham and Nam C. Kim (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 812–813.

41. Bruce Gilley, *The Nature of Asian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 34; see also Craig A. Lockard, *Southeast Asia in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 34–51.

Yet order was very much restored in China after the Hongwu emperor successfully defeated the Mongols in 1368; whereas, in the Malay world, the problem continued and even became worse toward the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Rather surprisingly, however, none of this turbulence encouraged the overseas Chinese to leave Palembang or Sumatra. Some of these Chinese immigrants saw plenty of opportunities in these crises. And among this group, Chen Zuyi was one of those who believed in the opportunities that can come from crises.

According to the renowned *Survey of the Oceans* (*Yingya shenglan*), a detailed record written by Ma Huan, who accompanied Zheng He on several of his voyages, 'Chen Zuyi and many others decided to flee to Srivijaya with their money and households' during the Hongwu period. After a while, Chen declared himself chieftain of Palembang (the Old Port in Chinese). He became wealthy and powerful as he 'plundered ships and preyed on both native and foreign merchants for several years.'<sup>43</sup> This information, albeit brief, is helpful to us as it confirms that Chen Zuyi had moved to Srivijaya after he had been forced to move away from China as a consequence of the Hongwu's embargo. His departure was not a temporary one, otherwise he would not have brought his household and money. As the story goes, Chen set himself up as the leader of Palembang sometime during the year 1398, when King Parameswara of Singapura, the ruler of Sumatra at the time, fled Palembang after a Majapahit naval invasion.<sup>44</sup> In Chen's view, this was perfect timing as it allowed him to seize power in the midst of a crisis. Ma Huan also tells us that the reason Chen Zuyi became influential is because his piratical career had allowed him to accumulate money and resources, including human labourers and crewmen for his pirate ships.

Southeast Asia has been continually bothered by the vexing problem of piracy ever since Parameswara ascended the throne of the Singapura empire in 1389.<sup>45</sup> In fact, this problem persists even to this very day, with nearly 60% of all piratical incidents between 1993 and 2015 occurring in Southeast

42. Derek Heng, *Sino-Malay Trade and Diplomacy from the Tenth through the Fourteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), p. 207.

43. Ma Huan; J. V. G. Mills (trans.), *Ying-yai sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 99–100.

44. M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1300* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 19.

45. Stefan Eklöf Amirell, *Pirates of Empire: Colonisation and Maritime Violence in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 1; Anthony Reid, "Violence at Sea: Unpacking 'Piracy' in the Claims of States over Asian Seas," in Robert Antony (ed.), *Elusive*

Asia. The West Indian Ocean, which includes Somalia, accounted for 28% of global sea-related piracy, while the western coast of Africa accounts for 18%.<sup>46</sup> Two factors might explain why Southeast Asian waters have constituted such a troubling zone since the early modern era. First, this is a maritime space that consists of over 250 islands, atolls, cays, shoals, reefs, and sandbars.<sup>47</sup> All of these geographical features on the sea could easily be turned into hubs in which pirates can gather and hide. Navies also find it challenging to inspect all of these remote places year-long. Second, as mentioned earlier, stretching from the western-most corner of Malaysia to the tip of Indonesia's Bintan Island, the Straits of Malacca and Sunda are shipping superhighways, as well as bottlenecks, that connect China, the world's largest exporter and already a world factory at the time, and the rest of the world. These two strategic passages naturally offer extremely profitable maritime corridors in which pirates continue to rob and raid. Third, the climate in Southeast Asia has always been relatively favourable for pirates to set up their bases. The harbours in Southeast Asia never experienced the freeze-ups that come with extreme winter weather. This climatic advantage no doubt fuelled all sorts of piratical activities year-round and continues to do so. Last but certainly not least, the Malay world was hardly stable politically during the fourteenth century.<sup>48</sup> Although King Parameswara had initiated a series of reforms to develop trading ports and market facilities in the region, the coastal area of Sumatra was often disturbed by petty pirates and faced greater challenges from professional pirate fleets. To mitigate the problem, the king had to employ indigenous inhabitants of Malacca, called the Orang Laut, to patrol the region and suppress these pirates.<sup>49</sup> Yet, rather ironically, the Orang Laut themselves were also known

*Pirates, Pervasive Smugglers: Violence and Clandestine Trade in the Greater China Seas* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), pp. 15–26.

46. Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (ed.), *The Economics of Piracy in South East Asia* (Geneva: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2016), p. 4.

47. Sigfrido Burgos Cáceres, *China's Strategic Interests in the South China Sea: Power and Resources* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 74.

48. The same could be said for some of the modern regimes that rule states around the region. See Graham Gerard Ong-Webb, "Piracy in Maritime Asia: Current Trends," in Peter Lehr (ed.), *Violence at Sea: Piracy in the Age of Global Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 37–94.

49. Cynthia Chou, *The Orang Suku Laut of Riau, Indonesia: The Inalienable Gift of Territory* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 42–43.

in history to have been a group of ferocious pirates.<sup>50</sup> Taking all these factors into account, it shouldn't be hard to understand how this vast swath of sea space has long been considered the most pirated water in Asia if not the world; and given this historical background, it is not surprising to see that Chen Zuyi had eventually become a pirate. This was one of the quickest avenues for an overseas Chinese like him, who had been forced to leave his motherland and was marginalised by the mainstream, to wrest power from the locals in a foreign settlement that had been in constant turmoil over time and space. As Philip Kuhn has suggested, 'before the intrusion of European colonialism, Southeast Asia housed two kinds of Chinese settlement. One consisted of the merchants just described, valued as middlemen in commerce. The other consisted of self-governing, armed territorial regimes set up by outlaws or political refugees'.<sup>51</sup>

### Liang Daoming the Ruler of Srivijaya

Chen Zuyi was not the only Chinese to have established power on the island of Srivijaya. Around the same time King Parameswara was busy confronting the Majapahit army, in 1397, 'several thousand military personnel and civilians from Guangdong and Fujian' had chosen Liang Daoming as their figurehead. A Cantonese merchant originally from Nanhai in Guangdong who had migrated or 'absconded' to the Malay peninsula with his family during the early Hongwu years, Liang had remained in Palembang for many years.<sup>52</sup> After having been picked to represent expatriate military and civilian Chinese, Liang's fraternity had even accorded him the title of ruler of Srivijaya (*Sanfoqiawang*) and crowned him King Daoming

50. Peter Lehr, *Pirates: A New History, from Vikings to Somali Raiders* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 25; Y. H. Teddy Sim, "Studying Piracy and Surreptitious Activities in Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Period," in his edited volume *Piracy and Surreptitious Activities in the Malay Archipelago and Adjacent Sea, 1600–1840* (Singapore: Springer, 2014), p. 6.

51. Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), p. 56.

52. Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World: A Connected History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2017), p. 204; Dominique Lelièvre, *Voyageurs Chinois à la Découverte du Monde: De l'Antiquité au XIXe siècle* (Genève: Éditions Olizane, 2004), p. 269.

(*Daomingwang*).<sup>53</sup> In subsequent years, Liang's clan continued to enlarge from around 1,000 Chinese to several thousands.<sup>54</sup> His growing influence in the region was soon recognised by the Ming dynasty. At that time, the Hongwu emperor had recently passed away and Yongle now reigned. As recorded in the *Veritable Records of Ming Taizong [the Yongle Emperor]* (*Ming Taizong shilu*) and *The Official History of the Ming Dynasty* (*Mingshi*),

In the third year of the Yongle reign (1405), Chengzu (the Yongle emperor) dispatched his messenger Tan Shengshou, because he came from the same hometown as Liang Daoming, to accompany Battalion Commander Yang Xin and others, to deliver an imperial edict to Liang and his followers in the hope that they would subdue to China and pay tribute to the emperor of the Ming Dynasty. Daoming and his fellow, Zheng Boke, thereupon came to court to offer a tribute of local products. The emperor bestowed gifts upon them in return and the two sailed back to Sumatra.<sup>55</sup>

The Yongle emperor had dispatched the edict to Liang Daoming the same year the Treasure Fleet was built. We can presume that the emperor was consistent in actualising his goal of displaying the Ming's imperial power on the sea by obtaining support from overseas Chinese across the macro-region of Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, although Zheng He's expedition has always been regarded as having been a peaceful mission and by no means as an imperialistic or colonial expansion,<sup>56</sup> we should be aware that the Ming

53. In his "Biographies of Eight Great Men in Chinese Colonialism (*Bada Zhongguo zhimin weiren zhuan*)," Liang Qichao categorised Liang Daoming, together with some other overseas Chinese such as Zheng Zhao, Wu Yuansheng, Luo Da, and Ye Lai, as one of the prominent Chinese pirates in Southeast Asia. See his "Zhongguo zhimin bada weiren zhuan," in his *Yin Binshi heji* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), p. 4. I am, however, reluctant to label Liang as pirate, as I will further elaborate in my argument in this section.

54. Geoff Wade and Laichen Sun (eds.), *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), p. 320.

55. *Mingshilu* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962), *juan* 38, 4b. This and the following quotations from the *Ming shilu* are translated by Geoff Wade in his e-project entitled *Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-lu: An Open Access Resource* (Singapore: Asia Research Institute and the Singapore E-Press), which is available at <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/>.

56. For instance, Tan Ta Sen considered the 'islamization process' brought by Zheng He's voyages a peaceful one achieved not by war and violence – see his *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009). Similarly, James

court had been keen to project its maritime influence over strategic and profitable sea lanes and port towns, so one might possibly see this as resembling China's One Belt One Road Initiative of the present century. Unlike the Hongwu emperor, who saw the maritime frontier as a natural barrier that could protect his empire, his son Yongle regarded it as an arena on which to realise his ambitions. For him, the Ming dynasty was not only bound to a continental Asia but also to a maritime one. However, we should be aware that the merchants along the coast of China during the Yongle era did not fully enjoy the prospects brought by Zheng He's voyages. Private traders were still strictly forbidden from conducting business beyond the framework of China's 'tributary system'. Foreign traders could only 'privately' conduct business with the Chinese when they accompanied a diplomat on a tributary mission, while 'the size and frequency of [these] also were regulated'.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the sea was not open to free trade and even the emperor had in mind a plan for securing most of the commercial sea lanes that connected to China. His maritime vision and policies were, after all, confined within the Confucian system and mindset dictated by the tributary worldview. This vision had always been about political stability and cementing the existing structure in order to maintain order in Asia. Even if the South China Sea was already considered a sea space under the influence of the Ming empire, according to Yongle, it still had to be properly governed and regulated. Clearly the emperor was determined to assert

R. Holmes argued that the Zheng He's expeditions were a demonstration of China as a peaceful maritime power. See his "China Fashions a Maritime Identity," *Issues and Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2006), pp. 87–128. For some similar approaches, see Pereira Pinto and Paulo Antonio, "China – a ascensao pacifica e as comemoracoes dos 600 anos da viagem de Zheng He ao Sudeste Asiatico," *Meridiano 47: Bulletin of Conjunctural Analysis in International Relations*, vol. 62 (2005), pp. 5–7; Yang Hongwei, "Explorations into the Reasons behind Zheng He's Pursuit of Peaceful Diplomacy," *Zheng He yanjiu*, vol. 1 (2007), pp. 22–27; Zhao Dexing, Fu Qiyuan, and Li Huifen, "Heping cujin guo ji wenming jiaoliu de wenhua shizhe: Zheng He yu shiwu shiji chu Zhongwai wenhua jiaoliu," *Nanjing shehui kexue*, vol. 8 (2005), pp. 60–64; Mara Hvistendahl, "Rebuilding a Treasure Ship," *Archaeology*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2008), pp. 40–45; Hum Sin Hoon, *Zheng He's Art of Collaboration: Understanding the Legendary Chinese Admiral from a Management Perspective* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), pp. 26, 35, 50; Li Shengjiang, "Zheng He xia xiyang yu Zhongguo de heping jueqi," *Zheng He yanjiu*, vol. 3 (2004), pp. 5–8.

57. John E. Wills Jr., "Relations with Maritime Europeans," in Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8, *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644 part 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 334.

his superiority and not allow any challenge to his supreme and legitimate position in the universe, including both landscape and seascape.

While Liang Daoming and his followers were willing to comply with the Ming court, Chen Zuyi assumed a relatively different approach to dealing with the Yongle government. Once again in the *Official History of the Ming Dynasty*, it was recounted that

In the fourth year of the Yongle reign (1406), the chieftain of the Old Port, Chen Zuyi, sent his son, Shiliang, and Daoming sent his nephew, Guanzheng, to the Ming court. Zuyo was also a person from Guangdong. However, although he sent tributes to the court, he was plundering the seas and, thus, obstructing the comings and goings of the tribute's envoys.<sup>58</sup>

This passage is helpful as it provides us with a better picture of the tension between the Ming court and Chen Zuyi. On the one hand, Chen had been willing to become one of the tributaries of the Ming empire. This looks to have been a sensible decision because, in actuality, his clan had not been competent enough to fight against the Ming fleet alone. However, on the other hand, the Ming side apparently did not regard this as a sincere and genuine move. The officials had labelled Chen as a plunderer who attacked ships and even those tribute envoys on the sea. This is not something that a government that had put a lot of effort into maintaining the tributary system would possibly tolerate. It also reveals that there had been no room for discussion when it came to the problem of piracy. Unlike Liang Daoming, Chen was not only a threat to the Ming state but he was also an outlaw that brought trouble to the sea and, by extension, to the Ming's predominance across Southeast Asia. Here, we can confirm once more that the Yongle administration was paying attention to its maritime stability. Their way of achieving order was not to promote or encourage transregional sea trade but to stay with the tributary system. It was not until the late Ming era that the interdependency between maritime shipping and coastal security was elevated to a higher and more appropriate level of discussion.

The Manchu, to which we will shift our focus in the next few chapters, also saw the importance of developing a sea trade as a way of maintaining order along its coastal region. Yet rather coincidentally, both the Ming and Qing rulers only realised the effectiveness of such an approach after

58. Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi*, *juan* 324, p. 8408.

limiting the sea trade or ‘blocking the sea’ for a fairly long period of time. This is an interesting continuity that links the two empires from a maritime historical perspective and it is also one that should further substantiate my proposition in the introduction, where I note that ‘late imperial China had a capricious relationship with the sea’. It seemed that both governments had only considered revitalising their coastal economies when it had been brought to their attention that the coastal economy was in disastrous shape. Both regimes had strategic concerns about opening their coastline to free trade. Geographically speaking, the maritime frontier was in many ways different from some other inland frontiers that could be garrisoned and protected. It thus made sense to remain cautious all times. It is also reasonable to assume that the Qing would have adopted the Ming’s model of managing maritime affairs, at least to a certain extent and especially during its early years (c.1644–1683). The changing global order in the late seventeenth century, however, did not allow the Manchu authority to apply the same mindset when interregional and transregional shipping further tightened the global market. Consequently, the Qing empire had no choice but to engage with the sea more proactively and attentively than ever. With regard to this topic, from Chapter Three onwards we will continue our discussion of the Qing’s radical adjustment of its maritime policy.

### The Battle of Palembang: Causes and Aftermath

Coming back to the story of Chen Zuyi, the above evidence also suggests that he had been a daring pirate and one that was not welcomed by the Ming court. Commanding more than 5,000 men and numerous vessels, Chen had been at least as strong as Liang Daoming in many regards. And compared to most of the petty pirates that had been suppressed by the Orang Laut, Chen did not limit his piratical activities to the Strait of Malacca. It was reported that his ships also raided the South China Sea, even marauding as far as the Taiwan Strait. We are not entirely sure whether there had been a fight between Liang and Chen, since both of their power bases were situated close to Palembang and, rather interestingly, both are mentioned as being the chieftains of this port city in the following record:

Shiliang, who had been sent by his father Chen Zuyi, a chieftain of the Old Port (Palembang), and Guangzheng, who had been sent by his uncle Liang Daoming, also a chieftain of the Old Port, as well as

the Muslim Hanzhi Mahemo from Xigandaliye, came to court. Paper money and silks, as appropriate, were conferred upon them.<sup>59</sup>

It is therefore possible that Chen and Liang had held power concurrently and had formulated their own clans at the same time. However, this specific entry is probably the last one where Liang is mentioned in the Ming archives. His name no longer appears in materials that were produced after 1406. Presumably, Chen had replaced him and gained the upper hand in Palembang. Whether or not there occurred a military confrontation between the two men has not been documented, but sources demonstrate that the two clans had not been on good terms. According to the *Yingya shenglan*,

In the fifth year of the Yongle period (1407), the court dispatched the grand eunuch Zheng He and others commanding the treasure ships of the great fleet going to the Western Ocean, and they arrived at this place (the Old Port). Shi Jinqing, who was also a man from Guangdong, came and reported acts of savagery and other acts committed by Chen Zuyi.<sup>60</sup>

Who is Shi Jinqing? Like Liang and Chen, Shi was also an emigrant from Guangdong who had decided to migrate to Palembang during the Hongwu years and had once been a faithful follower of Liang Daoming.<sup>61</sup> From the above excerpt it is pretty clear that Shi was the one who had informed Zheng He about the crimes Chen was committing on the sea. He had also demeaned Chen as a barbaric, cruel, and uncivilised figure. Although he did not spell out specifically what particular crimes Chen had been committing, Shi would have been referring to Chen's piratical activities at sea. Meanwhile, it is very likely that the tension between the two clans continued to mount even after Liang had stepped aside. We can also assume that Chen had had a hard time persuading the entire Liang camp to shift their loyalty to him. Apparently, Shi Jinqing had been more interested in

59. *Ming Taizongshilu*, juan 56, 7b. Translation by Angela Schottenhammer, "Consolidating Southeast Asia and the Meaning of Force in History," p. 150.

60. Ma Huan; J. V. G. Mills (trans.), *Ying-yai sheng-lan*, pp. 99–100.

61. John N. Miksic, *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), pp. 193–194; Tan Ta Sen, *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia*, p. 192; Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World: A Connected History*, p. 204.

subordinating himself to the Ming court, while Chen might be having other thoughts. It could also be possible that Shi did not view Chen as a chieftain who was as competent as Liang had been in Malay. If so, he would then have made use of the Ming forces in order to bring himself back into the game. Whatever the case, despite his (in)famous reputation as the fiercest pirate of the time, after he had replaced Liang, Chen failed to obtain full-scale support from all sides of the overseas Chinese community. This also gave the Ming court a more convincing reason, if not excuse, to intervene in the situation and, above all, to bring Chen Zuyi under control.

In the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty*, the campaign between Zheng He and Chen was recorded in quite some detail as follows:

Eunuch Director Zheng He, who had been sent to the various countries of the Western Ocean, returned, bringing the pirate Chen Zuyi and others in fetters. Previously, when he had arrived at the Old Port (Palembang), he came across Zuyi and others and sent people to bring them to negotiate pacification. Zuyi and the others feigned surrender but secretly plotted to attack the imperial army. Zheng He and the others found out about this and, marshalling the troops, prepared their defences. When the forces led by Zuyi attacked, Zheng He sent his troops out to do battle. Zuyi suffered a great defeat. Over 5,000 of the bandit gang were killed, while ten of the bandit ships were burnt and seven were captured. Further, two false bronze seals were seized and three prisoners, including Zuyi, were taken alive. When they arrived at the capital, it was ordered that all of the prisoners were to be beheaded.<sup>62</sup>

Based on the above description, it seems that Zheng He only *came across* Chen Zuyi's forces when his giant fleet had anchored somewhere near Palembang. But I suspect that the Ming court had already been familiar with Chen and his piratical activities, at least according to the other historical sources I brought forward earlier. He was fairly notorious along the South China Sea and in Southeast Asia, at least from the standpoint of the Ming court. In such a case, I will retain my earlier supposition that the Yongle emperor had sent Zheng He on a mission to secure all of the critical sea lanes in the Straits of Malacca and Sunda and, in so doing, he would then have needed to negotiate with Chen Zuyi and, hopefully, to persuade him to follow the Ming's order to stop pirating on the sea. Therefore, Zheng

62. *Ming Taizong shilu*, juan 71, 1a.

He did not simply run across Chen when he arrived in Sumatra. It is very likely that the mission to deal with him had been on the agenda from the moment the Treasure Fleet had set sail for the 'Western Ocean'.

This historical record is also worth examining because it reveals all too clearly that, at the outset, Zheng He had not planned to use military force to pacify Chen and his clan. His strategy had been to negotiate a deal with Chen. In other words, the so-called Battle of Palembang could have been avoided. And even more captivating, if not inexplicable, is the fact that Chen and his followers had pretended to surrender but had eventually plotted an attack on the Treasure Fleet. It is difficult to trace the reasons why Chen Zuyi had decided to make such a move because much has been left unsaid, but we can assume that Chen had been an (overly) ambitious pirate who would have dared to challenge an opponent whose forces clearly outnumbered his own. Another factor is that Chen's secret plan had been leaked prior to the attack. It remains unknown who had passed on this intelligence to Zheng He but, once again, Chen had probably failed to obtain the full support of his followers and potentially also of those who had remained close to him. Even now, I am still puzzled by Chen's ultimate decision as, instead of launching a blitzkrieg against Zheng He's impressive armada, it should have been clear to him that there were other options available for dealing with his situation. Earlier, Chen had even sent his son Shiliang to China to pay tribute to the Ming court. This somehow suggests that he was not totally against the idea of the tributary system; therefore, when he had the opportunity to negotiate with Zheng He, it seems odd that he had chosen to start a fight even without meeting the Ming's representative. It could have been a problem of miscommunication or a lack of reliable intelligence that prevented Chen from considering his secret plan more carefully, but it could also have been due to his arrogance and ignorance. Whatever the rationale, Chen might be an opportunist but was clearly not a proficient strategist.

The result of this military encounter was pretty much predictable: Chen suffered a humiliating loss, with more than 5,000 of his followers being killed in battle and most of his war junks going up in flames. The Ming forces captured Chen and his two associates alive and brought them back to Nanjing, where they were beheaded.<sup>63</sup> The story of Chen Zuyi had not been pleasant. Once a daunting and intimidating pirate king in Southeast

63. In addition to the *Mingshi*, the Ming writer Zhang Xie also recorded the aftermath of the battle in his *Dongxiyang kao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), *juan* 3, p. 62.

Asia, Chen made a critical mistake that led him and his clan to a disastrous result that could have been circumvented. Unlike some other pirate leaders in the Ming and Qing, such as Zheng Yi Sao and Chang Po-tsai, Chen had been unable to reach an agreement with those in power. It could be the case that Chen had never thought of subordinating himself to the Ming court, hence any settlement with the Yongle administration would have been worthless to him; but as I mentioned earlier, this cannot explain his motivation for sending his son to pay tribute to the Ming emperor only a few years before the Battle of Palembang. Could it have been the case that Zheng He insulted him and his followers? Or had Shi Jinqing tricked him? Sadly, these details of the story remain cloaked in mystery. But from the encounter between Zheng He and Chen Zuyi, we could perhaps better sort out the complexities between the Ming court and those who were being pushed away from a maritime China that had remained confined within a Confucian principle of governance.

Although like many other overseas Chinese in Sumatra, Chen had been forced to leave his hometown in Guangdong, the Yongle government lacked any plan or policy to encourage them to return to China, nor did it regard them as subjects of the Ming empire. It seemed that the Ming court took a non-interventionist approach toward these overseas Chinese. However, it also comes to our understanding that these emigrants had not been completely abandoned by the Ming empire. Unlike the Hongwu reign, as O. W. Wolters has argued, there was a lack of interest in the finer points of politics in maritime Southeast Asia;<sup>64</sup> in most cases during the Yongle era, the overseas Chinese had been treated as a community within the tributary system – as, in a way, these were similar to other tributary states. The Ming side would accept their tributes, except of course the one from Chen, and in return they bestowed on them not only a variety of actual gifts, such as a chest of porcelain vases or a bundle of refined silks woven in Suzhou, but also protection and recognition of sorts. This is not exactly identical to the conception of colonial rule in a Western European fashion but there are potentially some parallels therein. What happened after Chen Zuyi's beheading further strengthens such argument.

According to Ma Huan, after Chen Zuyi's execution, 'the emperor awarded a hat and a sash to Shi Jinqing'. In addition, Shi was given the

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64. See O. W. Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) and his *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of the Origin of Srivijaya* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

title principal chief to rule over the city of Palembang and ‘the territory that formerly belonged to Srivijaya’. He was also allowed to pass on this entitlement to his future generation. But as Ma Huan recounted, ‘when the man (Shi) died, the position did not descend to his son, it was his daughter Shi Erjie who became ruler and, in every case, rewards, punishments, and degradations, and promotions all depended on her decisions’.<sup>65</sup> Shi Erjie is, in fact, another fascinating female character in the history of maritime Asia, and the family feud that broke out between her, her sister, and their brother was also captivating,<sup>66</sup> but we should retain our focus on Shi Jinqing and his complete subservience to the Ming court. Upon receiving the edict from the Yongle emperor, Shi immediately summoned his son-in-law, Qiu Yancheng, to Nanjing:

Qiu Yancheng who had been sent by his father-in-law Shi Jinqing, the chieftain of the Old Port, came to court and offered tribute. The Old Port Pacification Superintendency was established, and it was ordered that Jinqing be appointed as the pacification superintendent. A seal, a title patent, headwear, and a belt, patterned fine silks and silk gauzes were conferred upon him.<sup>67</sup>

Noticeably, the Shi family, Shi Jinqing and his daughter, in particular, were the ones who benefitted a lot from the results of Chen’s defeat in Palembang. The fact the emperor chose Shi to serve as the ‘pacification commissioner (*xuanwei si*)’ to enforce law and order in the region might have had something to do with the shared commonality between him and Zheng He. As Tan Yeok Soun, L. Carrington Goodrich, and Chaoying Fang pointed out, Shi Jinqing was also a Chinese Muslim, which might

65. Ma Huan; J. V. G. Mills (trans.), *Ying-yai sheng-lan*, pp. 99–100; these quotations were slightly amended by the author.

66. Shi Erjie was also known as Shi Daniang, the Great Lady of Gresik, or Nyai Gede Pinatih. See Tan Yeok Seong, “Chinese Element in the Islamization of Southeast Asia: A Study of the Story of Njai Gede Pinatih, the Great Lady of Gresik,” in Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Admiral Cheng He and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), p. xv; Geoff Wade, “Southeast Asian Islam and Southern China in the Fourteenth Century,” in Geoff Wade and Li Tana (eds.), *Anthony Reid and the Study of the Southeast Asian Past* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), p. 137; Chen Shen, “Dongnanya yisilanhua zhong di huaren: Jinshi Shi Daniangzi binazhi kao,” *Nanyang ziliao jicong*, vol. 3 (1988), pp. 99–104.

67. *Ming Taizong shilu*, juan 71, 5a.

have resulted in Zheng He being 'promoted... to lend a ready ear to his words'.<sup>68</sup> Needless to say, he had also been the key figure who helped the Ming navy destroy Chen Zuyi. It is therefore understandable that he had been favourably rewarded. Yet we should not overlook some of the details of the aftermath here. It was the Ming court that had decided to grant the title of chieftain to Shi Jinqing, which meant he was to rule not only the city of Palembang but also the 'former territory belonging to Srivijaya'. The Southeast Asians were missing from the picture, which reflects that the Ming fleet had mostly consolidated its dominion across the region. In his *Xingcha shenglan*, Fei Xin (1388–1346), an interpreter who had also joined Zheng He's first expedition, had this to say:

The Grand Eunuch Zheng He and others were ordered to take supreme command of a fleet and to proceed to all of the foreign countries, the pirate Chen Zuyi and his followers met at Srivijaya, where they plundered foreign merchants and even attacked our ships. However, they became victims of a secret plan on the part of our principal envoy and, like brutes caught in a net, they were exterminated, their leaders being captured alive and sent as prisoners to the imperial palace. After this the seas were restored to imperial peace and order.<sup>69</sup>

Readers should now be familiar with the above record, but what we need to emphasise here is that, from Fei Xin's perspective, since then, the seas had been 'restored to imperial peace and order'. This is a manifestation of the fact that Zheng He, who had been representing the Yongle emperor, had pacified the trouble that had been occurring in Southeast Asia at the time. For the Ming dynasty, this had been clearly a projection and cementing of its power over the Straits of Malacca and Sunda, which then gave the emperor the sovereign right to appoint Shi Jinqing as the leader he stationed in Sumatra. In addition to entitling Shi, according to Lo Jung-pang, Zheng He also

68. Tan Yeok Seong, "Chinese Element in the Islamization of Southeast Asia," pp. 19–27; L. Carrington Goodrich, and Chaoying Fang (eds.), *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 2, p. 1200.

69. Fei Hsin (Fei Xin); J. V. G. Mills (trans.), *Hsing-ch'a Sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, collected in Roderich Ptak (ed.), *South China and Maritime Asia* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996), vol. 4, p. 53.

brought back as prisoners the king of Ceylon and the rulers of the Battaks in northern Sumatra... The Chinese also virtually created the kingdom of Malacca and made it the naval base for their activities in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Palembang was ruled by a Chinese governor and a Chinese official was sent to Luzon. Majapahit and Siam, the two strongest states in Southeast Asia, no longer dared to challenge the authority of China on the South China Sea.<sup>70</sup>

Taking into consideration all of these ‘achievements’ that resulted from the first expedition, the Yongle administration had basically been expanding itself in a seemingly colonial way, especially were we to situate these operations within Geoff Wade’s analysis of ‘maritime proto-colonialism’ or an ‘early form of maritime colonialism’, in which ‘a dominant maritime power took control, either through force or the threat thereof, of the main port polities along the major East–West maritime trade network, as well as the seas in between, thereby gaining economic and political benefits’.<sup>71</sup> However, Angela Schottenhammer did not agree that these manoeuvres were by any means colonial because ‘the specific politico-economic content that makes a power colonialist did not exist in Ming, or even more generally, in imperial China’.<sup>72</sup> In this chapter, I have no intention of delving into the very conception of colonialism, whether it be proto- or universal, but what I would like to point out is that the Ming court had been determined to keep all those sea lanes under its control and to consolidate the tributary system, where the maritime world of Southeast Asia had evidently been included in the picture. And I agree with Schottenhammer’s view that ‘the Ming rulers had an excellent command of translating subjective interests into objective necessities’ when it came to their ‘pacification’ engagements across the South China Sea.<sup>73</sup>

One additional thought that I would like to add is that the Yongle court, to a substantial extent, had been willing to extend its arm of governance

70. Lo Jung-pang, *China as a Sea Power, 1127–1368: A Preliminary Survey of the Maritime Expansion and Naval Exploits of the Chinese People During the Southern Song and Yuan Period* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2011), p. 338.

71. Geoff Wade, “Ming Chinese Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia,” in Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig (eds.), *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 77; see also his “The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 78, no. 1 (2005), p. 51.

72. Angela Schottenhammer, “Consolidating Southeast Asia and the Meaning of Force in History,” p. 136.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

to these coastal communities in Southeast Asia but had hesitated to allow them to develop their businesses off the coast of China. This is perhaps an example of their capricious attitude towards the sea, which implies that the Ming government would not have borne the risk of having these merchants accumulate power too close to the ruling centre. The Hongwu idea to administrate marine matters, which was to maintain a comfortable distance with the sea, had still been fairly prevalent in such a case. As for the overseas Chinese communities in Sumatra, they appeared to have been satisfied with the existing, invisible boundary beyond which they could only freely conduct a sea trade in Southeast Asia (*nanyang*), but not in China, and they were also quite willing to subordinate themselves to the Ming court. Except for Chen Zuyi and perhaps some of his 5,000 followers, the majority of Chinese in Southeast Asia, in retrospect, had not shown any grudges or anti-Ming sentiment after settling in Palembang or some other Southeast Asian port cities. As the example of Shi Jinqing and his clan has demonstrated, they had even been prepared to collaborate with the Ming so as to maintain peace and restore order on a foreign island. Somehow, it seems that they had forgotten about the pressure that had been exerted on them owing to the sea ban policy, not to mention the fact that they had once been pushed to the edge of society. Reasonably, these Chinese would have needed to seek protection from the Ming government in order to secure their benefits in front of any potential challenges, exploitations, or even attacks that might have come from other ethnic communities in Southeast Asia, or even from the wider Indian Ocean World. As a result, even though the Chinese diasporic communities in Southeast Asia ‘often occurred in defiance of dynastic law during the Ming period’,<sup>74</sup> the dynamic interplay between the Ming and those being pushed away from China was, in reality, far from simple, static, and straightforward.

### Concluding Remarks

Once a pirate king in the South China Seas, Chen Zuyi made a strategic mistake that led to his ultimate downfall. His fleet was almost completely destroyed in the Battle of Palembang and more than 5,000 of his soldiers, mostly from Guangdong, were either tortured or killed by the Ming force.

74. David M. Robinson, *Ming China and Its Allies: Imperial Rule in Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 5.

Throughout Asian maritime history this battle was one of the most tragic encounters to have taken place between the Great Ming and the overseas Chinese community. For the Yongle emperor, Chen Zuyi had to be either pacified or suppressed as a way to project his empire's power and to 'restore imperial peace and order' to the maritime world. Although Zheng He had been prepared to negotiate with Chen, before all else, in my view it was Chen who made the wrong move when he attacked the Yongle emperor's Treasure Fleet. Otherwise, the war could have been avoided and the tension between the two sides could have been eased at the negotiating table. It remains a mystery what prompted Chen to make such a decision, especially given the fact he had not been entirely against the idea of the tributary system and, by extension, the growing Ming influence in Southeast Asia. But at the end of the day, going to battle was the way he had chosen to respond to the Great Ming.

Although Chen was eventually defeated by Zheng He and was executed in Nanjing, his stories and his impact on the course of maritime China are significant and worth noting. From the point of view of the Ming administrators, Chen was a notorious pirate leader and his defeat was considered one of the most eventful and successful of Zheng He's many military achievements. If we juxtapose Chen's adventures with Zheng He's celebratory chronicles, the latter always stood in the centre of a positive spotlight, while the former was viewed as derisory and devilish, as if he had been someone that should have been pushed back into the shadow. However, we should not neglect the fact that Chen had also been a hero to the masses, or at least to his close-to-5,000 fellow crewmen who were being pushed away from a maritime China. In Sumatra, he had also been regarded as a powerful and competent figure, one who was able to rule over the region according to his own strategies. His 'crime', in other words, ultimately helped define the order that would come to dominate the shadow market that connected China and Southeast Asia across the sea. As a pirate leader, he had been willing to forge a life beyond the reach of the law and to pursue wealth and merriment, and the legends that grew around him were, in fact, quite captivating. His character served as the inspiration for a swashbuckling figure in a 2009 Chinese television series and also featured at Resorts World Sentosa's Maritime Experiential Museum in Singapore.<sup>75</sup>

75. The television series is entitled *Zheng He xia xiyang* and was produced by China Central Television (CCTV) in 2009 to mark the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's voyages.

Of course, we should not romanticise the populist image of Chen or, by extension, some of the other pirate figures in world history. Chen was unquestionably a rough leader who had killed men on a whim and had tortured others for purely mercenary ends. In commenting on the nature of capitalism, Karl Marx once reminded us that we have to think of it simultaneously as the best thing and the worst thing. To make sense of Chen, I suggest that we should adopt a similar split consciousness. While crowds had worshipped these pirate leaders, they had also been killers, criminals, thieves, and enemies of the respective ruling administrations that had been forced to deal with them.

In summary, in this chapter we have met a pirate leader and examined his ‘crimes’ and their aftermath in a transregional context, covering China, Southeast Asia, and part of the Indian Ocean. While, today, Chen Zuyi is not as famous as those iconic figures who terrorised the Caribbean Sea, his story serves as an enticing vantage point from which we can step into the variegated maritime world that China was a part of. It is not always about Zheng He’s voyages when it comes to the Ming dynasty and the sea; and the complicated relationship between the early Ming court and those overseas Chinese should not be overlooked. Although when viewed from the wider angle of history, Chen’s rise and fall was minor and peripheral, like a spark that ignited and then just as quickly died out. However, every now and then there are people who strike matches that can light up regions or even the whole planet. Chen Zuyi the pirate king is one of those matches that was struck in the history of maritime China and Southeast Asia.

## CHAPTER THREE

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# The Private Advisor

### Throw Them All into the Fire

The defeat of the pirate king Chen Zuyi did not mean that the Ming dynasty was now rid of its piracy problem. Reports kept pouring in from various port cities, calling for immediate military assistance to suppress bandits that continued to plunder at sea. Attentive readers might question how this situation suddenly and unexpectedly became out of control, especially after Zheng He's maritime expeditions brought triumph and glory. Zheng He's seven excursions were undoubtedly successful in maintaining order across maritime Asia. In 1433, however, the Ming government decided to halt these voyages. There were even orders to burn most of Zheng's fleet at their moorings and destroy historical records related to his adventures.<sup>1</sup> It appears that a deliberate effort was made to erase all traces of Zheng He from the collective memory of the Ming Court. A telling incident occurred in 1480, when Wang Zhi (?–1487), a highly influential eunuch during the Chenghua era (1464–1487), devised a plan to embark on a voyage to Annam (Vietnam). Despite his esteemed status, he was denied access to the logbooks and records left behind by Zheng He and his associates. Meticulous research by Thomas O. Höllmann revealed that the Ministry of War orchestrated the destruction of these documents.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously,

1. See J. J. L. Duyvendak, "The True Dates of the Chinese Maritime Expeditions in the Early Fifteenth Century," *T'oung Pao*, 2nd ser. 34, no. 5 (1939), p. 397.

2. Thomas O. Höllmann, "Das Reich ohne Horizont: Berührungen mit dem Fremden jenseits und diesseits der Meere (14. bis 19. Jahrhundert)," in Wolfgang Bauer (ed.), *China und die Fremden. 3000 Jahre Auseinandersetzung in Krieg und Frieden* (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1980), p. 170.

the emperor issued an order to locate records chronicling Zheng He's voyages into the South China Sea, which supposedly were housed within the Forbidden City. However, this endeavour yielded no results. To quote the words of Ming literati Yan Congzhou, 'Xiang Zhong, an official in the employ of the Ministry of War, was tasked with delving into the treasury to examine ancient cases, only to uncover no findings'.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the fact that these particular records had been lost, all materials related to Zheng He, from his sea charts to his personal writings, which were thought to have illustrated the coastal geography and his seafaring experience in the 'Western Ocean (*xiyang*)', were to be burned. According to Liu Daxia (1437–1516), the Minister of War (*bingbu shangshu*) during the Chenghua period, these records necessitated erasure, as they were presumed to harbour 'deceptive exaggerations of strange phenomena from distant lands', offering little value in terms of 'contributions to local understanding'.<sup>4</sup>

The incidents recounted above should be sufficient to expose the prevalent attitude among Ming officials towards the maritime domain post the Yongle era. The anomalous order of destroying all of the relevant papers pertaining to the enterprising Zheng He's voyages is another prime example revealing the capricious relationship between the Ming empire and the sea. What prompted the Ming court to avert its gaze from the sea and terminate maritime expeditions similar to those led by Zheng He? These questions have been a subject of relentless contemplation among maritime historians in both China and the Western world, spanning decades if not centuries. A consensus among scholars generally converges on three primary explanations. First, following the demise of the Yongle emperor in 1424, his successor, Hongxi, who ruled for a mere year, adopted a conservative approach akin to that of his grandfather, the Hongwu emperor. Both were inclined to integrate Confucian governance principles into the administration of the empire's coastal waters. Moreover, a majority of key officials in Beijing, much like the emperors themselves, held a continental-centric perspective. They did not regard maritime expeditions as substantial or fruitful endeavours. While the Xuande emperor, Hongxi's son, did sanction an additional voyage in 1430 with the aim of revitalising the

3. Yan Congzhou, *Shuyu zhoubi lu* (1574 version, reprinted in Beijing by Zhonghua shuju in 1993), *juan* 8, p. 307.

4. Angela Schottenhammer, "Consolidating Southeast Asia and the Meaning of Force in History: Pax Ming and the Case of Chen Zuyi," *China and Asia*, vol. 3 (2021), p. 157.

tributary relationships fostered during the Yongle reign, this undertaking was short-lived and lacked substantial support from his imperial advisors.

The officials based in Beijing not only held 'continental mindsets' but also voiced apprehensions regarding the considerable financial burden these exorbitant voyages imposed on the Ming treasury. In truth, the maintenance of the treasure fleets had consumed vast sums of money. Given that these ventures had not been conceived and executed with the intention of fostering transregional maritime trade, China reaped minimal benefits from the tributary exchanges involving marketable items and natural resources. Moreover, during the eras of Hongxi and Xuande, a mounting threat emanated from the Mongols and certain other central Asian tribes along the northern and western borders of the Ming empire. This context provides a logical basis to contend that the Ming court redirected its focus away from the sea to fortify its inland frontiers. While some scholar-officials, exemplified by a Hainan intellectual, Qiu Jun (1420–1495), pointed out the significance of both domestic and transregional maritime trade between China and Southeast Asia, reservations lingered about maintaining excessive proximity to the sea due to security concerns.

As Qiu Jun eloquently expressed, 'A vessel in the sea could carry cargo weighing around 1,000 *shi*, which is three times more effective than a boat on the river... Meanwhile, it is also more economical and cost-efficient to transport goods by sea than along the river'. Nevertheless, Qiu remained acutely conscious of the perils associated with the sea. In his writings, he voiced this unease, stating that 'the ocean is as vast as the sky, and its inherent dangers are unpredictable and unforeseeable... The sea also serves as the sole corridor connecting various foreign nations. While most Southeast Asian countries did not pose harm to China, Japan had consistently targeted the Ming empire's coastline'.<sup>5</sup> As a result, it would have been prudent for the Ming government to establish a formidable naval presence capable of defending against a range of potential dangers. Regrettably, even though Qiu Jun presented a visionary proposition, his proposal failed to sway the emperor and the majority among the officials. The prevailing consensus predominantly favoured the adherence to the Hongwu policy of decisively cutting any potential links with Japan via maritime routes. In other words, they were convinced that China could be properly protected if a certain distance from the sea were maintained.

5. See Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanji bu*, compiled in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), volumes 712–713.

The Ming government's decision to keep the sea at arm's length created a vacuum in a political and governing agenda that had created even further economic hardship for China's coastal communities. Unlike individuals such as Chen Zuyi and Liang Daoming, who possessed the means to relocate to Southeast Asia, those lacking such resources and audacity had to remain in China and figure out a way to survive in what was unquestionably a terrible era for these coastal dwellers. What made the situation even worse is that the Ming court did not have sufficient funds to guard the coast and patrol the sea. A large portion of the Ming's money had been allocated to support the many military campaigns that took place along its northern and northwestern borders. The navy at the time was in no way comparable to the treasure fleets that had dominated maritime Asia. Although the original intent was to enhance control and impose restrictions on those setting sail on the sea, as recorded by Xie Jie (1536–1604), the actual outcome defined these intentions. 'Thousands of individuals embarked on their sea journeys, while hundreds of pirate vessels laden with cargo were spotted'.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, certain historians have indicated that the arrival of European war junks into Asian waters disrupted the established order sustained by the tributary system, thereby intensifying the challenges faced by China's coast.<sup>7</sup> Upon reflection, the mid-Ming era witnessed a frail and insufficient state of coastal security, leading to the rampage of terrifying pirate bands along the empire's shoreline. These 'froth floating on the sea'<sup>8</sup> were referred to as *wokou* in Chinese and pronounced as *waegu* in Korean.

6. Xie Jie, *Qiantai wozuan*, compiled in *Xuanlantang congshu xuji* (1947 version published by the National Central Library in Taipei), *juan* 1, 7b.

7. Roland Higgins, "Piracy and Coastal Defense in the Ming Period: Government Response to Coastal Disturbances, 1523–1549" (PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1981); Paola Calanca, *Piraterie et contrebande au Fujian: l'administration chinoise face aux problèmes d'illégalité maritime* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2011); and Lin Renchuan, *Mingmo Qingchu de siren haishang maoyi* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue, 1987).

8. This term was first used by Robert Antony in his book *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). However, Antony did not use this term specifically for *wokou* pirates, but for pirates in general. I am merely adopting this metaphorical term to illustrate how the administrators perceived them as troublemakers and gangsters of the sea.

## The Dwarf Raiders

The first character, *wo* (meaning dwarf), is the ancient name the people of China and Korea gave to Japan and reflects where they believed their tormentors came from. However, the piracy that pervaded the coast of China between the fifteenth and late sixteenth centuries was by no means attributed to one country. These individual pirate bands had in fact acquired a decidedly multinational character. Chinese, Korean, and even Portuguese sailors, merchants, and fishermen were involved in raiding coastal villages and port cities, pretending to be *wokou*. Hu Zongxian, the Commander-in-Chief responsible for coastal defence in Zhejiang, compiled a list encompassing leaders from over ten pirate factions. His scrutiny revealed a noteworthy revelation: none of these piratical entities were of foreign origin; rather, they were all Chinese merchants.<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, Jiang Bao (1514–1593) unveiled that both the proprietors of these unlawful pirate vessels and the providers of the cargo they carried were also of Chinese descent.<sup>10</sup> Michael Szonyi also pointed out that ‘one local official (in the mid-Ming) estimated that of the people who were labelled foreign bandits, actual foreigners accounted for fewer than one in ten, with perhaps another 20% coming from Okinawa’, which, at the time, was a Ming tributary.<sup>11</sup> Other than their complicated ethnicities, these *wokou* pirates often had multiple identities. In the words of Tang Shu (1497–1574), the Grand Coordinator of Fujian, ‘the individuals engaged in piracy and trade are one and the same. In times of authorized trade, these individuals adopt the mantle of merchants. Conversely, when trade is forbidden, these merchants shift their roles to become pirates’.<sup>12</sup> Such multiple identities made it even harder for officials to arrest these sea raiders.

The problem of piracy was not merely a coastal security problem during the mid-Ming; it also became a social problem within its coastal communities. A significant portion of those barely making ends meet, such as fishermen, boat traders, and low-ranking soldiers, found themselves

9. Hu’s report was cited in Wang Shizhen, “Wozhi,” in Chen Zilong (ed.), *Ming jingshi wenbian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), *juan* 332, 27a.

10. Jiang Bao, “Yi fangwo,” Chen Zilong (ed.), *Ming jingshi wenbian*, *juan* 1, 7a.

11. Tu Zhonglü, “Yuwo wushishu,” in Chen Zilong (ed.), *Ming jingshi wenbian*, *juan* 282, p. 2979.

12. Tang Shu, “Yuwo zazhu,” in Chen Zilong (ed.), *Ming jingshi wenbian*, vol. 270, *juan* 1, 4a.

more or less involved in the illegal sea trade and had some connections with pirate gangs. The economic structure of the coastal region was very much distorted and misshapen, while these locals' connections also helped enhance the dominance of the *wokou* community, not only by provisioning them with food, water, boats, and manpower but also by providing the regional intelligence they needed to plunder a village or a port town. At the height of their operations, these *wokou* pirates were even capable of challenging the local offices of southeast China. So successful were their campaigns that soon the central authority was clamouring for something more effective and comprehensive to be done.

In a bid to quell these marauding pirate gangs, the Ming court found itself compelled to bolster its military capabilities. The key strategy employed by the Ming government centred on reinforcing its coastal fortifications. When compared to the considerable expenses associated with expanding, strengthening, and maintaining a navy, not to mention constructing a formidable armada, like the one Zheng He had commanded in the early days, the decision was reached that establishing fortresses, beacons, and naval checkpoints along the coast proved more economically viable. In essence, the blueprint for coastal artillery fortifications mirrored that of land-based defences, occasionally incorporating land-based protective measures.<sup>13</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, four primary types of coastal fort had been erected, including bastion, star, polygonal, and sea forts. According to Mao Haijin, a majority of this infrastructure in the Ming consisted of small-scale fortifications, mostly at some distance from the sea.<sup>14</sup> This network of coastal fortifications now affords historians insight into the deliberate strategy adopted by the Ming, showcasing their concerted effort to withdraw from the sea and instead focus on safeguarding China's inland frontiers – a concern deemed more immediate and pertinent in the face of potential threats from the north and northwest. As recounted by the late John E. Wills Jr., the Ming court adopted a defensive leitmotif, employing it as the guiding principle to safeguard the empire's coastal frontier.<sup>15</sup>

Judging from a modern standard of defence, it seems that the construction of these coastal fortifications was a passive and futile strategy

13. Siu Kwok-kin, *Forts and Batteries: Coastal Defence in Guangdong During the Ming and Qing Dynasties* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1997), p. 27.

14. Mao Haijin, *The Qing Empire and the Opium War: The Collapse of the Heavenly Dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 121.

15. John E. Wills Jr., "Relations with Maritime Europeans."

against any sea raiders and other potential challenges from the ocean. We should, however, not forget that coastal fortification had proved to be quite effective in the early modern era. We can find other examples of erecting coastal and sea forts across the Eurasian continent and beyond. For instance, the Device Forts of Henry VIII were constructed between 1549 and 1544 as a series of coastal towers and sea forts intended to defend England's southern coast. The Garzes and Isopu towers were built between 1605 and 1667 in Malta. Similarly, the Valdivian fort system in Chile was created by the Spaniards in 1645, and Suomenlinna was a sea fortress built in eighteenth-century Finland. While these constructions may not have a direct connection and relevance to each other, we can at least situate the so-called protective strategy adopted by the Ming within a transregional context where other European powers were making similar efforts. In other words, it becomes evident that the Ming empire was not alone in adopting such military measures. It is also important not to conflate its coastal fortifications with the passive military strategy that prevailed from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. These approaches were not necessarily correlative. The tactic of building these fortifications was not a problematic military manoeuvre; the key to actualising this strategy's effectiveness was to choose the appropriate locations along the coastline to construct these forts and to set up a system to properly maintain these defences.<sup>16</sup>

Naturally, one would need to properly survey the coast in order to better maintain its coastal defence infrastructure. The Ming court needed surveyors and cartographers to help it plan its military enhancements and coastal defences. A number of patriotic mapmakers, including Zheng Ruoceng, Chou Ying (1494–1552), and Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), took on these tasks as a way to help mitigate the problem of piracy along the coast. Bear in mind that most of these cartographers were highly educated intellectuals, while some even held official titles in the Ming's bureaucracy. Their maps and writings, to a substantial extent, suggest the ineluctable connection between the maritime consciousness within the Ming's scholarly

16. Having said that, however, the design of the stationary cannons was also flawed. Western critiques of Qing fortifications during the Opium Wars may underscore the limitations of such weaponry. The inability to elevate or rotate the cannons meant that ships could avoid incoming fire by remaining beyond the fixed firing arc or moving swiftly through the effective range. Once out of the cannons' designated target zone, warships were safe due to the cannons' lack of pivot capability. Similarly, pirates capitalised on this weakness by employing smaller vessels and hugging the coastline, thus eroding the strategic value of the forts, irrespective of their design, due to the reliance on immovable artillery.

community and the projection of state power along its coast. In this chapter we will look at the Ming's coastal defence mechanism through the life of a single well-placed observer, Zheng Ruoceng, as well as his writings and cartographic productions.

Zheng was part of a cohort of insightful officials during the sixteenth century, who did not consider the coastal frontier to be of secondary importance. Among his cohorts, including Hu Zongxian (1512–1565), Xu Wei (1521–1593), Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), Tang Shunzhi, and Mao Kun (1512–1601), Zheng enjoyed an equally prominent reputation during that era. The first article-length study of Zheng's ideas and career I have seen is a brief yet succinct paper written in Chinese by Wang Xiangrong in 1983. Since then, an increasing number of articles have focused on Zheng and his work. Surprisingly, however, other than my own preliminary efforts, there are no studies that specifically focus on Zheng in any Western language. Although he did merit an individual entry in L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang's *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644*, and there is a paragraph or two in some specific secondary sources, we are still waiting for a comprehensive study on him in English.<sup>17</sup> Given the fact that there is a cluster of scholars who have now recognised Zheng Ruoceng's influential role in the matter of coastal defence during his day, it is time to devote at least an article or a chapter in a book to his life and times.

Past Chinese scholarship on Zheng addresses his significance in a variety of ways. In the 1990s, he was usually identified as having been a representative defender of China's coast, one who came up with a set of comprehensive tactics for resolving the problem of piracy. In the 2000s, Zheng was often credited as having been the cartographer who was the earliest to include Diaoyudao (the Senkaku Islands) in his sea charts. His

17. See, for instance, François Gipouloux, *Elusive Capital: Merchant Networks, Economic Institutions and Business Practices in Late Imperial China* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2022), p. 99; Li Bozhong, *An Early Modern Economy in China: The Yangzi Delta in the 1820s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 103; Takashi Kuba, "The Diffusion of Japanese Firearms in the Ming Dynasty at the End of the Sixteenth Century: From the Japanese Invasion of Korea to Yang Yinglong's Revolt in Bozhou," in Mihoko Oka (ed.), *War and Trade in Maritime East Asia* (Singapore: Palgrave, 2022), p. 198; Angela Schottenhammer, "The East Asian Mediterranean: A Medium of Flourishing Exchange Relations and Interaction in the East Asian World," in Peter N. Miller (ed.), *The Sea: Thalassography and Historiography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p. 125; Michael Marme, *Suzhou: Where the Goods of All the Provinces Converge* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 211.

productions were being applied as historical evidence Chinese scholars and politicians used to justify China's sovereign right over the region.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, Zheng and his works were heavily politicised for this reason, which also made him more visible and popular in Chinese academia and the public domain.<sup>19</sup> This chapter, however, does not focus on Zheng's legacy in the present century. Instead, I concentrate on many of the claims and characterisations that pertain to a perception that existed among a circle of Confucian elites, including Zheng, that a crisis had erupted from the sea. These thoughts had been very much shaped by the maritime frontier. My primary purpose is to contribute to an evaluation of the sixteenth century as having been a transformative era during the Ming–Qing's historical continuation as well as these two dynasties' collective project which aimed to rescue the empire from a set of maritime crises and challenges. In the process, I will suggest that Zheng, by professing the need for coastal security and power for the state, had participated in another potentially less insightful project to bring the Ming empire closer to the maritime world.

In addition to pointing out Zheng's central role in signifying Diaoyu island in his cartography, most Chinese scholarship celebrates his precocious ability to plan for coastal defence. He was even being revered as the most representative and pioneering 'maritime theorist from the lower class (*buyi junshixue jia*)' in late imperial China.<sup>20</sup> His concern for coastal governance was no doubt linked to his deep and clearly painful awareness of the piratical problem, but we have to understand that this was not expressed merely in a military sense. I would suggest that Zheng was one of the earliest literati to recognise that the Ming court at the time had now become closely

18. See, for instance, Zheng Hailun, *Cong lishi yu guojifa kan Diaoyutai zhuquan guishu* (Taipei: Haixia xueshu chubanshe, 2003), p. 95; Chen Jiexian, "Ping Zheng Hailun zhu Diaoyutai lieyu zhi lishi yu fali yanjiu," *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 6 (1996), pp. 165–169; Han I, "The Status of the Diaoyutai Islands in Historical Documents," *Shanyang luncong*, vol. 19 (2012), pp. 39–59; Qi Qizhang, "Dispute on Sovereignty and Ownership of Diaoyu Islands and Related Issues – The Southward Expansion Strategy of Meiji Regime and Mismanagement after WWII," *Academic Monthly*, vol. 42, no. 1 (January 2010), pp. 140–148.

19. One example proving that Zheng was prominent in the public domain is that his life story was often featured in various news agencies operated by the central government, such as the *Jiangsusheng wang*. Additionally, his work appeared in one of the questions of the Nationwide Unified Examination for Admissions to General Universities and Colleges, commonly abbreviated as *gaokao*, in 2013.

20. Chen Yi, "Buyi junxhi xuejia Zheng Ruoceng," *Jiangsu Local Chronicles*, vol. 6 (2019), p. 74.

engaged with the maritime world in multiple ways, ranging from political, economic, and even cultural; as such, his evaluation of the entire picture not only concerned the pirates along the coast. He extended his discussion to the inextricable connections between the tributary system, the sea blockade policy, and maritime order and stability. In order to better decode this intrinsicality, we need to probe into the interrelationship between Zheng's maritime strategy and his Confucian identity, an aspect historians have not yet specifically underlined. Throughout his career, Zheng remained a consistently Confucian voice. Similar to most of his contemporaries, he was steadfast in his faith in the effectiveness of the Confucian-centred tributary system. He was confident in the capacity of the Ming court to continue applying this worldview to eventually find practical solutions to the multitude of maritime problems the empire confronted. This line of thought placed him squarely in the mainstream of the Chinese intellectual tradition during the Ming dynasty. In a way, we should see him as a political activist who espoused a traditional faith in coastal management as being the fundamental basis of national security and nation-wide stability.

As we will see, Zheng had virtually no official titles. As he had failed to pass the final few phases of the civil service examination, he spent much of his time as a private advisor (*muyou*) to officials on the frontlines who were fighting against the *wokou*. However, his contribution to the Ming's coastal strategy was more significant than a typical *muyou* would have achieved. One of the underlying objectives of the coming sections, therefore, is to acquaint our Western readers with the significance of a pivotal political figure who held the role of a foremost authority in coastal defence and maritime governance. The essays and sea charts or marine diagrams (*haitu*) Zheng produced tell us, in an illustrative way, the extent to which these Ming intellectuals were engaged with the coastal rim of its empire. In fact, his work has also paved the way for later generations to study, examine, and chart the coast of the early and High Qing.

### The *Zhengs* of Kunshan

Zheng Ruoceng was born in 1503 in Kunshan, a medium-sized city located in the southeastern tip of Jiangsu province, bordering Shanghai to its east and Suzhou to its west. It was therefore not too far removed from those places of greater cultural and economic significance. During Zheng's time, Suzhou already had a long tradition of being a major hub where eminent

Qing scholars gathered.<sup>21</sup> Kunshan was not far from Nanjing, the former capital city of the Ming dynasty before the Yongle emperor relocated the centre of power to Beijing. Apart from having formerly been the capital, Nanjing along with the cities of Suzhou, Yangzhou, Hangzhou, Kunshan, and some other notable marketplaces constituted the core and most robust engine of the Lower Yangtze River Delta, a region that remained distinguished culturally and economically throughout most of Ming history. By the time Zheng was born, this triangle-shaped megalopolis was arguably the richest and most highly developed region in the empire. Strictly speaking, Kunshan is not a port city but is situated along the Wusong River, which winds through the city. Also known as the Suzhou Creek, the Wusong River is about 125 kilometres long and flows from Lake Tai, one of China's largest freshwater lakes, to the mouth of the Yangtze River and into the sea. The northern part of Kunshan is attached to a dense polder, while the southern part is dotted with other lakes, such as the Dianshan hu, Yangcheng hu, Cheng hu, and Kuilei hu. Although Kunshan is not as famous as Suzhou, Yangzhou, or Shanghai, it is unquestionably part of the wider Yangtze sphere and has benefitted from its ample cultural and economic linkages. It was also the hometown of some prominent scholars during the Ming and Qing, including the prolific writer Gui Youguang (1507–1571); Gong Xian (1618–1689), the leading painter of the Nanjing School; and Gu Yanwu (1613–1682), the founding father of geo-historical studies in China.

Zheng Ruoceng's family background was also fairly distinguished. His ancestors' history in Kunshan dates back to the Northern Song dynasty. In the sixteenth century, their clan had been notably named the Zhengs of Kunshan (*Kunshan Zhengshi*). The Zhengs had practised medicine for generations and were particularly famous for gynaecology.<sup>22</sup> According to the Zheng family genealogy, in 1448, Zheng Ruoceng's great grandfather, Zheng Wenkang (1413–1465), achieved the favourable rank of *jinshi* in the imperial examination and had the honour of being appointed to the Court of Judicature and Revision (*Dalisi*) when the Tianshun emperor was in

21. Tobie Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 28; Benjamin A. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550–1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 288.

22. Ma Yiping, "An Investigation on Gynaecology of Generations of Zheng's Medical Family in Kunshan," *Chinese Journal of Medical History*, vol. 30, no. 2 (April 2000), pp. 76–80.

power.<sup>23</sup> He was later immortalised as one of the five hundred promising figures that had been placed in a temple inside the Surging Wave Pavilion (*Canglang ting*), which is now recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.<sup>24</sup> Growing up in such a prestigious family meant Zheng Ruoceng had sufficient resources to have received what was considered a proper education. Compared to Chen Zuyi and Liang Daoming, the two characters we met in the previous chapter, Zheng was a typical Confucian scholar who was fortunate enough to have enjoyed most of the social privileges that his cultural status would have accorded at the time. He had been close to the centre of an elite network while, by contrast, Chen and Liang had been marginalised by the Confucian model, as we saw in Chapter Two.

Zheng's adolescent education, which he received both from his father and from Wei Xiao (1483–1543), a renowned Confucian scholar who managed a county school in Kunshan, was based on preparing him for the civil examination system.<sup>25</sup> If successful, he would have obtained an official government appointment. This was also the time during which he had befriended his classmate Gui Youguang, the famed writer whom I mentioned earlier. The two friends even married their teacher's daughters, which undoubtedly further consolidated their cultural influence and capital in the region. In 1536, at the age of 33, Zheng obtained the title of *xiucaí* after passing the licentiate (*shengyuan*) examination, but he failed to pass the provincial ones (*juren*) that were held in 1536 and 1540, respectively. And without having passed the *juren*, he could not move on to the metropolitan examination (*jinshi*), a level his great grandfather had achieved.<sup>26</sup> His purportedly poor record in these civil exams was, however, hardly the result of inherent incapacity. During the provincial exam, Zheng was frustrated with the abstruseness of the questions and, therefore, constantly

23. Zhang Dafu, "Zheng Jian xiansheng chuan," in *Meihua caotang ji Kunshan renwu chuan*, collected in *Siku quanshu cunmu conghsu* (Tainan: Zhuangyan wenhua chubangongsi, 1996), *juan* 4, 668a–668b.

24. Wang Jie, "Yidai Haifang junshi xuejia—Zheng Ruoceng," *Wenshi yue kan*, vol. A8 (2012), pp. 28–29.

25. Jiang Guozhu, *Zhongguo sixiang junshi tongshi: Mingdai juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), p. 143.

26. Zheng Dingyuan, "Xian liushi Zhenxiao xiansheng shishu," in Zheng Ruoceng, *Chouhai tubian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), p. 986. N.B. Within this chapter, there will be instances where I refer to the *Siku quanshu* version of the Chouhai tubian, as certain maps within that edition were created with better quality.

argued with the examiners.<sup>27</sup> His major focus then shifted away from the examination curriculum to lecturing in Kunshan. The depth of his knowledge was reflected in his teaching and Zheng gradually acquired a reputation as a talented and proficient scholar in the Lower Yangtze Delta. Local officials recommended him for government work, but he deliberately maintained a distance from officialdom largely because he was not satisfied with the senior grand secretary at the time, Yan Song (1480–1567), who was notorious for being corrupt, acquisitive, and nepotistic.<sup>28</sup> However, the piracy problem caused Zheng to change his mind and engage more closely with the government. Piracy not only troubled his hometown of Kunshan but also the broader coastline of the Ming empire. According to one of his friends, Hu Song,

Ambitious individuals (at the time), while striving to rectify the era's circumstances, sometimes find themselves constrained by fate. Personally witnessing the events of besieged cities, Zheng clandestinely observes the contemporary actions. Moved by these circumstances, he intends to record and document his thoughts, and thus, he shares these reflections.<sup>29</sup>

In short, Zheng's writings and propositions were greatly shaped by a quandary that derived from the maritime world. In order to tackle the problem of the *wokou*, Zheng believed that it was essential to understand Japan better. Whether those *wokou* were coming from this dwarf kingdom (*woguo*) to the east was another matter; the fundamental connections between China and Japan had to be properly addressed.

However, by 1552, it appeared to Zheng that there had not been much scholarship about Japan, while the few previous studies that did exist, such as the *Riben kaoliie* written by Xue Jun (1474–1524), were either inaccurate or irrelevant to the present alarming situation. Zheng saw the need to compile a more up-to-date examination of Japan as well as China's coastal condition,

27. Ibid.

28. John W. Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and His Times* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), p. 141; Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 191–192.

29. Hu Song, "Preface to the *Chouhai tubian*," in Zheng Ruoceng, *Chouhai tubian*, p. 990.

both textually and visually.<sup>30</sup> After nearly three years of intensive research and empirical field observations, Zheng successfully completed the first draft of his assessment, alongside 12 sea charts that depicted the contours of the Ming empire's coastline, which were soon collectively released as the *Yanhai tuben*. This *tuben* was then published and distributed in Jiangsu province with the help of Wang Daoxing (1531–?), the magistrate of Suzhou.<sup>31</sup> This *tuben* and 12 illustrations formed the basis of Zheng's two other classical treatises entitled *Chouhai tubian* and *Jiangnan jinglüe* published in 1561 and 1568, respectively. Zheng's contemporaries – among them, scholars and officials – eagerly read his analyses and considered them timely, critical, and practical.

The *tuben* was even brought to the attention of some higher-ranking officials, such as Hu Zongxian, the Governor of Zhejiang, who was an ardent figure in the fight against the *wokou* and often appreciated advice on a wide range of policy issues. Hu was impressed by Zheng's evaluations and found them opportune and heuristic; as a result, he soon appointed him as one of his personal advisors (*muyou*).<sup>32</sup> This recruitment had a deep impact on Zheng because he was now directly involved in the frontline service combating the problem of piracy. Here, on the issue of the *wokou*, the most salient and critical of their time, we can see that Zheng had joined a group of scholars, including Hu, Shao Fang, and Mao Kun, who took the matter of maritime affairs seriously. This specific group of Jiangnan intellectuals, who had been similarly brought up and trained in a scholarly manner, were led to very different policy stances towards the maritime world, compared to the officials who had embraced the aforementioned 'continental mindset'. Clearly, their responses had been shaped by a brewing coastal problem that was closely related to national security. For Zheng and those like-minded compatriots, the maritime world could not be kept at arm's length because the dangers were at the doorstep. To maintain order and stability, coastal defence had to be integrated into a grand strategy and no longer seen as a separate domain, either conceptually or geographically, located far away from the existing system.

In summary, Zheng Ruoceng hailed from a prestigious family situated close to the empire's cultural and economic heartland, the Lower Yangtze River Delta. He was educated primarily in the local school, but this training

30. Ibid.

31. Fan Weiyi, "Preface to the *Chouhai tubian*," in Zheng Ruoceng, *Chouhai tubian*, p. 992.

32. Ibid.

had been rigorous and apparently not inferior. After failing the provincial examinations twice, he opted to become a teacher as a way to dissimilate his knowledge to others in Kunshan. He did not sit for any further civil examinations, seemingly because he felt it was not the appropriate thing to do. He had even declined a few requests to take up official duties. It is pretty clear that he was trying to distance himself from what, in his view, was a corrupt officialdom dominated by Yan Song; but Zheng did not appear to have been distanced or omitted by the local scholarly elites. He continued to demonstrate his talent and ideas, which secured him influential recognition from his peers and superiors and eventually lead to him becoming a private advisor to Hu Zongxian. This brought him closer to formulating pragmatic solutions for a nation-wide problem. In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at how his evaluations and analyses translated into practice in a variety of coastal defence mechanisms. Here, we will focus on his treatise on maritime management: *The Illustrated Compendium of Maritime Strategy* (*Chouhai tubian*, hereafter the *tubian*).

### The Treatise

Almost a few centuries later the renowned historian and educator Liu Yizheng (1880–1956) had this to say about the *Chouhai tubian*:

According to the *Catalogue of The Complete Library in Four Sections* (*Sikuquanshu zongmu*), the *Chouhai tubian* was authored by Hu Zongxian, while the *Illustrative Analysis of Coastal Defence* (*Wanli haifang tulun*), attached to the *tubian*, was reprinted from the *writings by Zheng Ruoceng* (*Zheng Kaiyang zazhe*). As a matter of fact, this *tubian* was written by Zheng, but his writing and style had been refined and embellished by Shao Fangyi, both of them served as private advisors to Hu Zongxian. Once the draft of the *tubian* was completed, Hu was the one who put all of the chapters together.<sup>33</sup>

Liu was correct in noting that Hu Zongxian was not the author, let alone the only writer, of this *Chouhai tubian*, despite the fact we could not find

33. The quote is extracted from the postscript authored by Liu Yizheng in a particular edition of the *Chouhai Tubian*, first published by Taofenglou in 1932, and then reprinted by Chengwen chubanshe in 1971.

Zheng Ruoceng's name in two out of the three editions of the treatise. Three editions of the *Chouhai tubian* remain preserved in China and Japan today. The first was produced during the Jiajing era (1521–1567), the second during the Longqing (1567–1572), while the third was published during the Tianqi (1620–1627). Except for the Jiajing edition, which is now being preserved at the Beijing Library, Zheng Ruoceng has not been identified as an author or co-author.<sup>34</sup> We would only know that Zheng was the one who inspired Hu to pay particular attention to the *wokou* problem and coastal defence from the preface written by Mao Kun in the other two editions:

One day, the Duke (Hu Zongxian) heard that Zheng Boru (Zheng Ruoceng) of Kunshan, after completing his studies, had a keen interest in military matters. He was also displeased with how other generals failed to exercise proper discernment against the invaders. In response to various incidents involving *wokou* incursions, he evaluated the victories and losses experienced by both the enemy and his own troops. He exclaimed, 'Over a decade has passed since the onset of conflict, yet there has been scarcely a single word to anchor past events. Our comrades are ready to disperse, and the traces of battles are bound to fade away over time. However, those who light the beacon and ride forth in the future, will they not be similar to those who do so today?'<sup>35</sup>

The passage discusses how Hu Zongxian learned about Zheng's interest in military affairs and his frustration with other generals' critical judgement in battles and their willingness to face danger. Reflecting on past conflicts, he regretted the absence of documented history and anticipated that future generations could repeat the same mistakes. As a result, the compilation detailing strategies to combat pirates and maintain coastal security became profoundly significant. This excerpt reflects Hu's acknowledgement of Zheng Ruoceng as a key figure who spurred him to address this pressing concern.

Scholars in China and Taiwan have discussed possible reasons why Zheng's name has been misplaced. One possible answer is that Hu was the one who sponsored all of the publication costs, while Zheng was only one of

34. For a detailed discussion on this matter, see Song Kefu and Shao Jinjin, "Lun Hu Zongxian zai Chouhai tubian bianzhuan zhong di zhongyao zuoyong," *Journal of Central Southern University (Social Science)*, vol. 17, no. 6 (December 2011), pp. 161–165.

35. Mao Kun, *Maokun ji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1993), p. 427.

the *muyou* employed in his think tank. Some historians also suggest that it had not been Hu's intention to remove Zheng's name as a co-author but that someone in a later generation of Hu's family decided to do so. Whatever the case, it is now confirmed that Zheng was the master mind behind this *tubian* and the one who produced most of the work.<sup>36</sup> It is nonetheless worth pointing out that this *tubian* also included some incredible chapters that touched on the significance of coastal defence and of the Japanese pirates, such as the "Dufu Jiangnan zouyi" written by Weng Liuli, "Nanbei fengshilu" by Tang Shunzhi, "Pingwo shilüe" by Shi Sui, "Haifang yidan" by Wang Chonggu, "Haiyi" by Tang Shu, and so forth. In hindsight, a small part of the *tubian* reads like an edited volume compiled by remarkable authors during the sixteenth century. All of these contributors belonged to the 'scholarly circle' I introduced earlier. These were people who had been attentive enough to call for radical changes to coastal management and maritime governance. Similar to Zheng Ruoceng, most of their maritime visions were derived from and stimulated by the problem of piracy.

After clarifying the authorship of the *tubian*, we should now pay attention to the book's title. What does it mean by *Chouhai*? The first character, *chou*, may refer to an established literary genre of strategic planning, often on a military matter. The second, *hai*, means the sea. Yet the meaning of the character *hai*, here, could be both comprehensive and extensive, ranging from the geography of a seascape and the various marine creatures in the sea, to the management of coastal defence and the deployment of naval fleets. In some other essays that were published during the Ming and Qing dynasties and that also used the word *hai* in their titles, the idea of the sea was attached to all kinds of maritime affairs that might happen along the coast or in the ocean. However, when *chou* and *hai* are applied together, this usually links this term to the grand strategies that pertained to the maritime frontier, in this case, the enforcement of coastal fortifications, the military sea charting, the weapons practices on board military vessels, as well as the naval tactics in the sea. The *tubian* Zheng compiled essentially covered all of these topics, while the potential, if not the perceptible, enemies Zheng and his co-authors were targeting were, quite apparently, the *wokou* and the Japanese.

Consisting of 13 chapters, the *Chouhai tubian* begins with an analysis of the situation where the coast was being menaced by the problem of

36. Wang Yong, "Mingdai haifangtujilu," in Meng Sen, *Mingdai bianfang* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1968), p. 206.

piracy, in which Si Shen and Mao Kun, the two authors of the preface, were emphatic about this crisis being one of considerable magnitude. Evidently, Zheng had shared the same concern and had devised a lot of specific strategic recommendations for immediate remedies. First, he offered an illustrative overview of the empire's coastline as a way to visualise all the important checkpoints, including the port cities, harbours, river mouths, and offshore islands, for reorganising the state apparatus. The most-troubled region along the coast, in the wake of the *wokou*, was the coastline that stretched from the south of Guangdong to the north of Zhejiang. This was where those 'draft raiders' plundered and attacked. In the second chapter of the *tubian*, Zheng opened up his discussion by using two cartographic illustrations, namely 'The Map of Japan' (*Riben guotu*; see Figure 3.1) and the 'Map of Japanese pirate invasion' (*Riben daoyi rukou zhi tu*; see Figure 3.2), alongside a chronological account of the history of Japan since the Three Kingdoms period. The two maps Zheng drew are impressive and informative. The 'invasion map', for example, clearly identifies the respective places of concern, most of which were major cities either situated by the sea or along the river, and these were being disturbed by the Japanese pirates while the *wokou* had been marauding along the routes they travelled at the time. Altogether, 14 seaways were highlighted, while Zheng also recognised the bases where these Japanese pirates came from. A map like this depicting the overall picture is always useful to enhance the argument as a whole. Zheng had made good use of this visualising technique throughout his work in order to signal the scale of a problem that had been affecting almost the entire coastline of the Ming empire. Nonetheless, Zheng made it pretty clear in another section titled "Shiwo zhenjing tushuo" that his readers should exercise caution when interpreting this 'invasion map':

The routes (on the map) have been traced back to the distant past, including the original pathways used by envoys of this dynasty to travel to the foreign lands (Japan). In recent years, the frequent incursions of Japanese pirates have taken alternative routes. Their actions have been particularly audacious. I have already made some sketches and notes regarding their invasion plans, but I am reluctant to put them into writing. I fear that if such information is circulated, it might fall into the wrong hands and result in unintended hostilities.

Those who aspire to contribute to the affairs of the state should understand this through their own interpretation and insight. Therefore,



Figure 3.1: *Riben guotu* (The Map of Japan) in Zheng Ruoceng's *Chouhai tubian*

I have refrained from explicitly detailing it in writing. This is to prevent any possible misinterpretation and avoid provoking unnecessary conflicts. Those who have the aspiration to serve the country and its people should grasp this concept intuitively, and by doing so, they will indeed act wisely.<sup>37</sup>

In short, Zheng made sketches and notes about these invasion plans held by the Japanese but refrained from putting them in writing due to fear of unintended consequences and potential misuse. Instead, he encouraged those interested in serving the state to grasp the situation through their own intuition and insight. According to him, this prudent approach was considered wise and suitable to prevent potential negative outcomes.

In the subsequent six chapters (from *juan* 3 to *juan* 8), Zheng then moved on to specifically discuss the regional tensions that existed between

37. Zheng Ruoceng; Li Zhizhong (ed.), “Shiwo zhenjing tushuo,” in *Chouhai tubian*, *juan* 2 *shang*, p. 161.

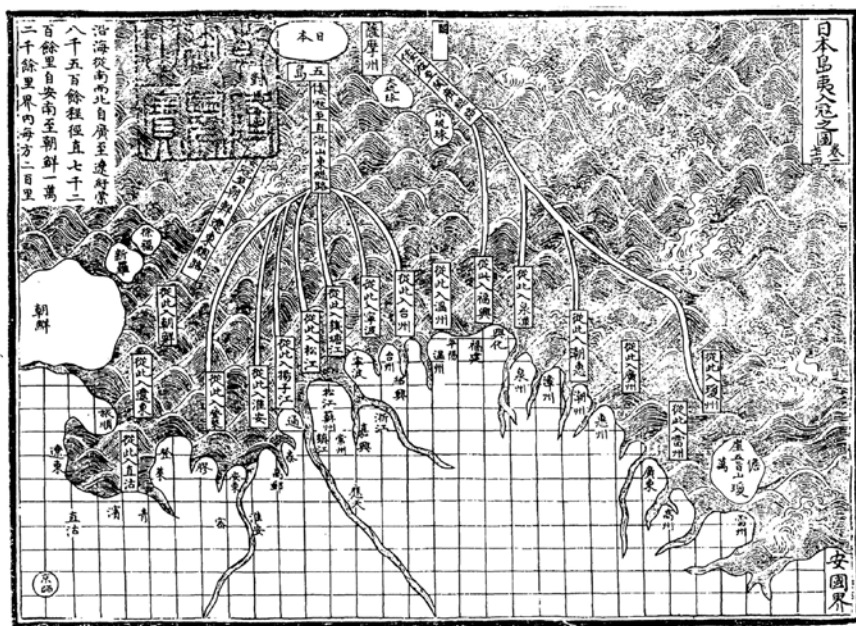


Figure 3.2: *Riben daoyi rukou zhi tu* (Map of Japanese pirate invasion) in Zheng Ruoceng's *Chouhai tubian*

those *wokou* pirates and the coastal communities. He talked about the situations in the provinces of Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, Zhili (Jiangsu/Anhui region), Shandong, and Liaoyang, while at the same time proposing substantial plans to guard against these pirates. For instance, in Chapter 4, which featured the coastal geography and naval conditions of Guangdong, Zheng pinpointed a few strategic islands and harbours of utmost importance that had to be securely patrolled and garrisoned. In the section entitled *The wokou in Guangdong over time* (*Guangdong wobian ji*), he commented briefly but tellingly on these *wokou* pirates' patterns of attack, which dated back to the Hongwu era, specifying seven battles where they had been 'heavily defeated' (*dapo zhi*) by the Ming.<sup>38</sup> By reflecting on some of those victories against the *wokou*, Zheng believed that his contemporaries would then be able to learn from these previous military successes.

Similar to the first two chapters, Zheng also began his discussions by using several regional maps that depicted the coastal contours of the key

38. Zheng Ruoceng, *Chouhai tubian* (the *Qinding siku quanshu* version), *juan* 3, 17a–20a.

counties in these aforementioned provinces. According to him, formulating a compatible strategy demanded a comprehensive understanding of the coastal geography. When commenting on the direction of the Guangdong navy's defence, for example, he stated that 'Guangdong is troubled by the *wokou* from three sides, namely the eastern path, the middle path, and the western path. The eastern path is the one that requires immediate action, while the problem coming from the western side is comparatively less severe'.<sup>39</sup> Without a proper grasp of the geography, readers would not have been able to effectively map out these three invading routes. From the structure of the *Chouhai tubian* we can conclude that Zheng considered this approach inevitable. It leant pragmatic recognition to the fact that virtue and coercive force would be of little import without a solid geographical base. Although Zheng was not the first cartographer or scholar to have raised a similar concern, he was the one who paid particular attention to the importance of producing these sea charts in order to put the relevant naval defence theories and tactics into practice.

In order to better historicise the encounters between the Ming court and the *wokou* since the Jiajing era, Zheng compiled a chronological table entitled *Jiajing yilai wonu rukou zongbiannian biao* in Chapter 8 of the *tubian*. As Daniel Woolf has argued, Chinese historians paid careful attention to chronology, while 'Chinese historiography regarded the annal as the highest form, the distillation of knowledge from other sources'.<sup>40</sup> Zheng was clearly part of this tradition and was aware of the importance of laying out previous events in a precise and orderly manner. In addition to this table, he also produced a specific diagram titled *Kouzong fenhe shimo tupu* (see Figure 3.3), which traced the origins of those principle *wokou* leaders, all of whom were Chinese, and mapped their piratical activities along the coast of China. For instance, there was a pirate named as Xu Hailü who set up a few bases in Satsuma, Higo, Izumi, and Tsushima, in Japan. In January 1556, as we shall see in Figure 3.4, Xu had decided to plunder the cities of Zhapu and Chongde, in Zhejiang province. In February, he then subsequently attacked the nearby cities of Huzhou, Jinshan, and Jiaxing. In April the same year, he ordered his crewmen to loot the cities of Suzhou, Changshu, and Chongming and to conduct a series of attacks on Pinghu, Hangzhou, Zhenjiang, and Songjiang from March to May 1557. By skilfully

39. Ibid., 21a.

40. Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 53.

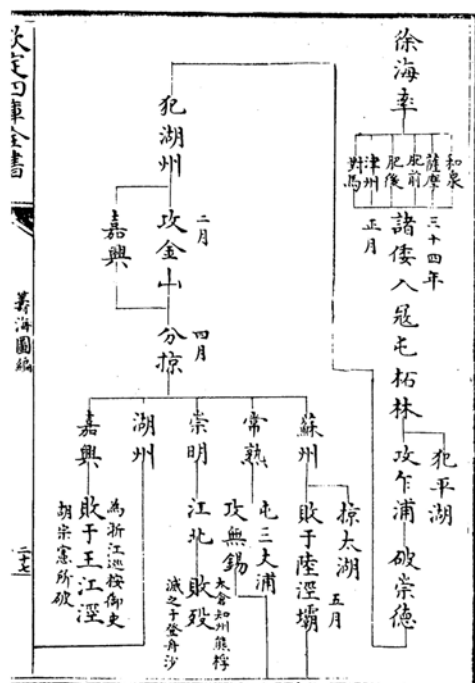
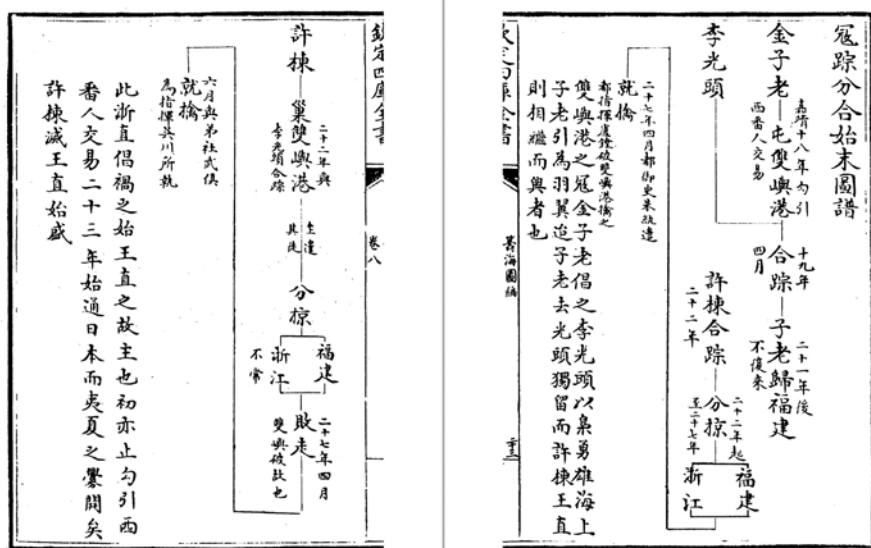


Figure 3.4: Kouzong fenhe shimo tupu (featuring Xu Hailü)

and vividly charting Xu's activities, in this table, Zheng has successfully provided us with a clear picture of these piratical operations, all of which were highly mobile, efficient, destructive, and wide-ranging. The practice of drawing such diagrams is not common in Chinese historical writings, but this respective style has eclectically incorporated elements from the various historical records Zheng had gathered and studied. The above story featuring Xu Hailü is only one of the 22 examples that systematically reveal the most significant invasions stirred up by these *wokou* headmen over the Jiajing period, covering 46 years altogether.

One way to demean the *wokou* but to honour the Ming court is to celebrate victories. In Chapter 9 of the *tubian*, Zheng selected to write about 13 spectacular Ming triumphs over the *wokou* that had occurred throughout the Jiajing era. This ritual, as demonstrated in Zheng's writing, represented a profound manifestation of the Ming's military might and offered one of the means through which these military successes could be made tangible for the treatise's readers. Zheng's narratives, in general, display the Ming's military deeds in selected campaigns, mostly on land, against the pirates, thus pointing to the Ming army's versatility in confronting various situations with a proper plan of attack and disposition of troops on the battlefield. According to Zheng, most of the victories were assured by the might and support of the Heavens (*tianwei*), which guided the actions of the Ming emperor and the military generals' well-planned troop mobilisations on the tactical and strategic side. In this chapter, the Ming troops never lost, except in very rare examples. The campaign's 13 battles were also represented in a similar fashion. Except for the details of the military encounters themselves, the landscape, seascape, and riverscape where the fighting occurred, the characteristics of the *wokou*, and the rendering and narration of their defeats seem to follow a regular, pre-established pattern with consequent and obvious outcomes. Here is one of the examples featuring the Battle of Huaiyang in 1556:

Starting from the Jiajing year of the 35th Emperor's reign, the northern regions along the Yangtze River, including Huai'an and Yangzhou, have been dealing with the Japanese threat. Large merchants, wealthy households, and bandits frequently arrived and departed, causing much trouble. Since then, such incidents have become commonplace. In the summer of the Yisi year (1557), the bandits, numbering over a thousand, deeply infiltrated Tianchang and Sizhou, nearly reaching the ancestral tombs of the emperors. The court held discussions and appointed a

supervising censor to address the matter. Li Gong from Fengcheng was appointed to this role. Upon his arrival, he implemented a ten-to-five organization, organized local forces, strengthened armaments, appointed officers, built city walls, and constructed warships for both land and water defence. The bandits, realizing our preparations, avoided landing their ships in the harbours and departed. Thanks to these measures, the northern regions remained calm.<sup>41</sup>

Since ancient times, China's history has been one of a fundamental ideology of triumph inextricably connected to the practice of political, imperial, or royal propaganda. As in many other civilisations, such as those of Egypt, Greece, and the Roman Empire, Chinese rulers and intellectuals have frequently felt the need to proclaim their military victories as a way to properly (re)construct, enact, and gel their collective memory and solidarity within the country. As Jeremy Armstrong and Anthony Spalinger argue, triumphs 'represent a nexus point between civilian and military ideologies and as such offer unique insight into the cultures involved'.<sup>42</sup> Zheng no doubt designed this chapter out of a similar motivation. Yet I would argue that, to him, the Ming's triumph over the *wokou* was much more than a simple victory celebration or parade in honour of those successful elites, generals, and admirals. At its core, the triumph Zheng elaborated was a cultural demarcation, with strong political and economic associations, that differentiated the Ming's subjects from those dwarf raiders from the sea. In most of Zheng's presentations of these military campaigns, he described the *wo* people as barbaric and cunning (*guangjiao bushun*) people who failed to show any proper manners (*fei suyong liyi zhixi*), while he represented the Ming state as a strong, fertile, and fluorescent side of the dichotomy. He also insisted on using derogatory terms, such as thieves (*zei*), slaves (*nu*), and bandits (*kou*), to label these sea rovers. As a result, these triumphant results were largely cultural productions, constructed by scholars such as Zheng, that included a wide range of functions and connotations in the military, political, and social spheres. There also appears to have been rituals to celebrate these victories in the context of the complex relationships that existed between the civilised Ming court on land and those barbarous raiders who 'erupted from' the troubling sea.

41. Zheng Ruoceng, *Chouhai tubian* (the *Qinding siku quanshu* version), *juan* 9, 40a–40b.

42. Anthony Spalinger and Jeremy Armstrong (eds.), *Rituals of Triumph in the Mediterranean World* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 2.

Apart from celebrating accomplishments, Zheng Ruoceng also paid considerable tribute to those who fought against the *wokou* and died while defending the coast of China. These battles, after all, were contests of life and death. In *juan* 10 of the *tubian*, Zheng devoted the whole chapter to preserving the memory of these heroes and victims. This substantial chapter is exceptional because it is rare to see both extraordinary and ordinary people, ranging from naval generals and commanders to provincial officials and filial sons (*xiaozhi*), being immortalised in specific writing that focuses on coastal defence and the problem of piracy. For some of the heroes recorded in this chapter, Zheng also included rather sophisticated biographical descriptions, which in turn serve as valuable primary materials that help us more thoroughly weave together the local history of these troubling years. In the following entry entitled *Zhihui Min Rong yishi Wu Desi Wu Deliu yu zei zhanyu Zhoushan sizhi*, for example, it is recorded that

Wu Desi and Wu Deliu were brothers, both of them lived by the sea as farmers. When they were young, the two Wus were masculine and could carry heavy weight. One day when the raiders (*wokou*) passed by their farmhouse in the region called Pingshi, the pirates stole their livestock. Wu Desi witnessed this on his way back to the hut from the farmstead, he then attacked the pirates with his sharp hoe. One of the robbers was hit by Wu on the head and passed out immediately. Wu Deliu then picked up the weapon left by the pirate and assisted his brother in fighting against the intruders. The pirates then ran away. The Wu brothers became famous in the region because of this incident. Both of them were then recruited by a military leader named Du Huai. The two of them proved to be courageous and resilient in the army. In most campaigns they would be the first to volunteer to fight the enemy on the frontline. In a battle in a place called Zhoushan, Wu Desi was as brave as usual in combatting the *wokou*, however, he was beheaded by the opponents in the fight. After noticing this disappointing news, Wu Deliu showed no mercy to the pirates who had killed his brother. But sadly, he was also slayed by the raiders in the same battle.<sup>43</sup>

The story of the Wu brothers is unknown to many of us, but Zheng Ruoceng portrayed it in fine detail. For those familiar with Chinese history, we can also see biographical entries commemorating well-known figures, both men

43. Zheng Ruoceng, *Chouhai tubian* (the *Qinding siku quanshu* version), *juan* 10, 11b.

and women, in local gazetteers (*xianzhi*); what is striking, in this *tubian*, is that most of the characters listed in *juan* 10, such as the Wu brothers, were not always notable and prominent. Some were even only given a sentence or two, indicating that they died in a specific combat against the *wokou*, such as ‘A Confucian scholar named Jin Yingyang died in the Battle of Wuboliang (*Rushi Jin Yingyang yuzei zhanyu Mupoling si zhi*)’ or ‘The commander Cheng Lu died when the raiders attacked the city of Jiaxing (*Zei fan Jiaxing zhihui Cheng Lu sizhi*)’. Whether or not these figures were renowned and illustrious, Zheng placed them in the same sections as more famous figures, chronologically and not according to their official titles or social status. Although he did not specify the reason for doing so, I suspect that this was a deliberate move to treat everyone who took up arms against the *wokou* gangsters equally. This commemoration and representation of the deceased was not solely a means of honouring and glorifying their lives lost, but also served as a deliberate effort to fortify the determination and evoke strong emotions within the elite class, officers, soldiers, sailors, farmers, fishermen, and ordinary inhabitants residing in the coastal communities of the Ming dynasty. By collectively remembering the sacrifices made and the hardships endured in countering the *wokou*, it aimed to foster a sense of unity and resilience among the populace. Looking back, this particular aspect remains an emotionally stirring and thought-provoking chapter of the *tubian*, one that has not yet received the thorough examination it truly deserves from scholars.

In fact, based on Chapter 10 of the *tubian*, we can even deploy recent methodologies from the history of emotions to offer a new reading of Zheng. Over the past few decades or so, cultural historians have moved away from understanding emotions as either essentially biological universals (nature) or cultural constructs (nurture);<sup>44</sup> both phenomena were the nonrational excessive response to stimuli. Scholars are now more inclined to interpret emotions as deliberate responses orientated from cognitive systems, which were involved in ‘perception, feeling, interpretation, and sense making’.<sup>45</sup> Such a perspective is useful because it provides a fascinating angle for historians to revisit the interrelations between ‘the motivation, intention, dissemination,

44. Alexander Laban Hinton (ed.), *Biocultural Approaches to Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 318.

45. Barend van Heusden, “Perception, Action and Sense Making: The Three Realms of the Aesthetic,” *Biosemiotics*, vol. 15 (2022), p. 379.

and reception of ideas'.<sup>46</sup> In such a case, if we were to situate arguments within a framework that emotions are generated from our cognitive systems, this approach would then enable an examination of Zheng's interpretations of the less notable figures and their noble demise campaigning against the *wokou* pirates. Apparently, Zheng was sympathetic towards those ordinary characters like the Wu brothers – it is pretty obvious that he was projecting his sympathy and condolences for their deceases. For him, their bravery and devotion to confront the *wokou* made him and his contemporaries feel ashamed because it somehow revealed the incapability of the Ming force to eradicate piratical crime along the coast. Sympathy, condolences, and ashamedness therefore opened a path to an alternative interpretation of Zheng's writing, if we agree that an intellectual argument was, to a substantial extent, amenable to emotional concerns or introspections.

### The Ultimate Question

In the midst of the *wokou* crisis, around the year 1555, there had been countless debates in the capital and local offices over the causality between these pirates and the existing sea blockade (*haijin*) policy. The ultimate question was whether to open the sea in the wake of such a predicament, and the Ming court was in a quandary not only in terms of its coastal security but also due to its financial structure. The government was in fact sacrificing its potential tax income by limiting most of those marine businesses while also being subject to the liability associated with pouring extra money into the fight against the pirates. For some Ming observers, the *wokou* problem was a direct and inevitable result of the enforcement of the *haijin*. Since this policy was forcing the Ming's coastal communities to the margins of society, these people had no choice but to join the bands of the *wokou* in order to earn a livelihood. According to *The Collection of Writings about Statecraft in the Ming period* (*Ming jingshi wenbian*), 'a sizable number of men who originated from Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shaoxing joined the *wokou* raids' for a similar reason.<sup>47</sup> Most of their leaders were not Japanese but powerful Chinese merchants, such as Wang

46. Simon Susen and Patrick Baert, *The Sociology of Intellectuals: After the Existentialist Movement* (Cham: Palgrave, 2017), p. 19.

47. Chen Zilong (ed.), *Ming jingshi wenbian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), *juan* 282, 4a.

Zhi, Xu Hai, and Ma Ye.<sup>48</sup> The above correlation looks sensible and causal and it seems the problem of piracy could have been properly sorted out were the Ming court to have adjusted or even abolished the *haijin* restriction. In his assessment of the situation, the Ming official Zheng Xiao (1499–1566) noted that ‘If we refused to open the sea, the *wo* people won’t stop trading with us, they won’t stop making profits by troubling the coast... the only way to halt their activities is to reopen the sea to trade with them’. In other words, the coastal residents would not have had any reason to continue participating in these piratical activities if the *haijin* policy had been lifted. According to another officer, Zhao Wenhua (?–1557), who had been acting as the Minister of Works during the 1550s, ‘the Chinese *wokou* leaders would lose their crewmen, who would no longer see plundering as necessary once the sea was open (*kaihai*)’.<sup>49</sup> As a result, the government could have gathered taxes from these coastal residents to bolster its treasury. This approach had the potential to address two objectives concurrently, offering a logical and persuasive solution.

Other scholar-officials, such as Tang Shunzhi and Tang Shu, both of them from the aforementioned Zheng’s circle, were also pragmatic enough to have evaluated the danger inherent in restricting the sea trade in the long run. Drawing a parallel between the development of coal mining and coastal management, Tang Shunzhi expounded that it would not be effective to prevent private mining activities by closing the mines because private parties would not stop excavating, due to the loss of considerable profits. The best option for the Ming court to handle the situation, therefore, would have been to allow private mining to operate under thorough governmental supervision. In such a case, the state could have benefitted from collecting mining taxes and businesses would not have had to shut down.<sup>50</sup> In Tang’s assessment, the last thing the Ming court would have liked to have seen was private traders continuing to make profits from illegal mining, since those mines had been ordered to close, while the government earned no benefits

48. Yuanfei Wang, *Writing Pirates: Vernacular Fiction and Oceans in Late Ming China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), p. 153.

49. Both quotations cited from Ivy Lim, “From *Haijin* to *Kaihai*: The Jiajing Court’s Search for a Modus Operandi along the South-eastern Coast (1522–1567),” *Journal of the British Association for Chinese Studies*, vol. 2 (July 2013), p. 18. For details, see So Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1975).

50. Tang Shunzhi’s analysis was collected in Chen Zilong (ed.), *Ming jingshi wenbian*, juan 260, 10b.

from these illicit activities but instead remained constantly occupied with suppressing unlawful merchants and traders.

In Tang Shu's opinion, restraining private sea trade had proven exceedingly challenging due to the consistent demand for foreign goods. Tang Shu also surmised that, considering the prevailing conditions, the Hongwu emperor, who had initially implemented the policy, might need to reconsider his sea blockade approach.<sup>51</sup> Tang Shu concurred with Shunzhi's viewpoint that the Ming court stood to gain by implementing prudent management of sea trade. As an illustration, he advocated for the establishment of a licensing system for both inbound and outbound traders engaged in commerce with Southeast Asia. Additionally, he submitted a plea to the emperor, proposing the selection of a dedicated port city to oversee affairs connected to overseas trade.<sup>52</sup> His proposal was, in fact, actualised in the city of Yuegang (Moon Harbour) at a later time. The system put in place was fairly similar to the Canton system the Qing dynasty later instituted during the eighteenth century. This is perhaps one of the continuations between the Ming and the Qing that we should not overlook.

Not everyone at the time found the above solutions agreeable. For instance, the Ningbo intellectual Wan Biao (1498–1556) saw the problem of piracy as growing more severe because the *haijin* policy had not been properly enacted:

In earlier times, only fishing boats dared to venture out for fishing and gathering firewood, while contact with foreigners arriving by sea was unheard of. However, due to the inadequate enforcement of the policy, we began to witness breaches in the system. A handful of families in Fujian and Guangdong managed to engage in foreign trade, utilizing the assistance of local officials to facilitate their activities. As the enforcement of the *haijin* policy became lax, opportunistic individuals enticed foreign vessels, leading to an upsurge in maritime interactions. Simultaneously, instances of piracy on the seas also escalated. Initially, each ship had its distinct owner, carrying trade goods and returning individually.

51. Ibid., *juan* 270, 4b.

52. Ibid. I should mention that Ivy Lim has conducted an extensive analysis of these arguments in her "From *Haijin* to *Kaihai*," as cited above. This passage draws inspiration from her insightful findings and observations.

It was only when these traders clashed, preying on one another, that they formed alliances and sought the protection of more influential figures as their leaders. These alliances consisted of fifty to a hundred ships, anchoring at various harbours and utilizing smaller vessels for trade and piracy along the coastline. Consequently, a state of chaos gradually emerged.<sup>53</sup>

Similar to Wan Biao, other scholar-officials such as Zhu Wan also shared the concern that the Chinese traders were not following the sea ban policy and that this is what had led to the problem of piracy. He also suggested that in order to get rid of the *wokou*, the Ming court should enact stricter regulations to limit interactions between Chinese merchants and the sea trade.<sup>54</sup> In light of these debates, Zheng Ruoceng likewise was not convinced that the problem of the *wokou* was a direct consequence of the *haijin* policy. First, he posited that the Hongwu policy of imposing strict enforcement on the private sea trade should not be terminated without careful evaluation. Second, according to his elaboration, the private sea trade had already been forbidden since the early Ming, but the country had not been troubled by the *wokou* back then. Fundamentally, the tribute trade and the tributary system had been operating fairly well since then, while the *haijin* policy had been effective enough to secure the maritime frontier from various forms of foreign disturbance, including those coming from the *wo* bandits. For Zheng, ‘tolerance or the prohibition of trade should not be the focal point of the discussion because the sea trade was permitted under the tributary system (*Jinzhilun yukouzhe, yize yue shibo dangkai, yize yue shibo budangkai. Yu yiwei jie weiye*)’, as he elaborated in very fine detail as follows:

The current discussions on maritime relations are divided into two viewpoints: one argues for the opening of market ships, while the other opposes it. In my humble opinion, both of these perspectives are not entirely accurate. Why is that? Because they fail to consider the distinction between tribute ships and trading ships, as well as the mingling of foreign commerce and piratical activities.

53. Wan Biao, *Haikou yi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), p. 1.

54. Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 205, pp. 5404–5405.

Tribute ships and market ships are separate matters within the context of foreign nations' offerings. In Guangdong, dedicated ships are set up for handling Champa, Siam, and other tributary states. Similarly, in Fujian, ships are designated for dealings with Ryukyu, and in Zhejiang, ships are employed for interactions with Japan. This arrangement involves exchanging goods for official items, and engaging in trade with civilians, which is referred to as mutual commerce. It is evident that if there are tribute ships, there can also be mutual commerce. It is not the case that mutual commerce is only permitted when tribute ships are involved.

Regarding Western nations and Ryukyu, they have never been antagonistic, so their tribute journeys are not in question. As for Japan, due to their craftiness and occasional rebellions, their interactions are restricted to ten-year periods, with two hundred people and two ships. Although the numerical limits may be relaxed later, the ten-year cycle remains unchanged. Now, if we advocate for opening market ships, without considering the timing, whether it is a tribute or not, then the distinction between tribute offerings and mutual commerce would be blurred, and mutual commerce could take place without waiting for the tributary process.

Can this upheaval of ancestral regulations be justified? This brings me to my second point. Tribute ships are governed by imperial laws and entrusted to the bureau overseeing trade, making it a public trading activity. On the other hand, maritime merchants are not permitted by imperial laws, and their activities are not overseen by the market ship authorities, indicating their involvement in private trading.

Japan originally had no trading ships. Trading ships emerged from the Western nations originally sending tribute missions. These vessels transported goods and paid taxes in Guangdong. However, over time, they wished to avoid taxes, eliminate land transportation, and reduce costs. They were guided by the Fujianese to anchor at Haicang and later by the people from Zhejiang to anchor at Shuangyu. These ships arrived every summer and left in winter. Can they be mixed up with tribute ships?

Now to my second point. Maritime merchants always fear encountering pirates, and pirates fear not encountering them. They are as opposite

as day and night. Merchants have never considered naval actions. Since the year Jiashen, when the respective region became congested with cargo and Japanese tribute envoys arrived, maritime merchants suffered losses and resorted to selling to the Japanese pirates to protect themselves. Despite official prohibition, Western ships still returned to private anchorages, while Eastern ships traversed the oceans freely. All merchant ships were converted into piratical activities.

However, the Japanese pirates were diverse, including the poor and the wealthy, the virtuous and the wicked. The wealthy secretly communicated with the Fujianese and congregated at Nan'ao. This practice continues today. Although naval actions attempt to curtail them, they persist. Even though they engage in mutual commerce, this issue is not solely due to the opening of trading ships. The problem of the Japanese pirates arose not only from the absence of open trading ships but also from the denial of their tribute missions. Allowing their tribute missions and facilitating trading ships would bring benefits domestically and abroad, leading to the decline of naval actions. Those who don't understand this situation attribute the issue to the failure to open trading ships. Those who comprehend it find such an explanation inadequate.

Regarding tribute, foreign monarchs send envoys with fixed schedules and verification documents such as 'gold leaves' and tally sheets to confirm their legitimacy. Our nation has never denied their arrival if the verification is timely and truthful. If tribute is not denied, then trading ships would naturally be able to pass through. However, if tribute is not allowed, how can trading ships be exclusively opened?

There are those who contend that the circumstances in Japan are intricate due to ongoing conflicts between Yamaguchi and Buzen. The gold leaves and tally sheets, which are used for verification in Japan, have been lost due to warfare. If we were to impose strict requirements on their schedule and verification, it's likely that they would be unable to fulfil their tribute obligations. In such a case, the possibility of opening trading ships could be hampered. In this context, we need to carefully weigh the extent of our benevolence.

As a general principle, demonstrating strength before offering favours is the path to extending benevolence. Currently, pirates have been

breaching our borders for several years, achieving victories without showing signs of deterrence. The Japanese pirates remain undeterred. Our first step should be to restore order and await their apologies and requests for tribute. Similar to the early years of the Yongle era when we captured and executed officials from Tsushima and Taegu, we can contemplate such actions once this restoration is achieved. This approach ensures benevolence for our people and upholds righteousness for our leaders, resulting in a twofold benefit.<sup>55</sup>

In this long quotation, Zheng eloquently elucidated the clear distinction between tribute trade, a determinant of national security, and foreign sea trade. He emphasised that these were separate issues not to be conflated. The significance of coastal security and the regulations surrounding sea trade required independent considerations. The emergence of piracy during the Jiajing era, Zheng argued, could be attributed to the coastal populations in Fujian and Zhejiang exacerbating the situation. According to his analysis, the coastal traders in Fujian guided illegal foreign traders to engage in commerce in the region. These traders were then influenced by Zhejiang merchants to operate in Shuangyu harbour, where collaboration with armed Japanese merchants occurred via the tributary system. Zheng attributed the system's fracture to such interactions, which led to the leakage of coastal information including sea routes and conditions between China and Japan, providing openings for pirates. The failure of the system due to Fujian and Zhejiang traders created significant vulnerabilities exploited by maritime bandits. To rectify the situation, Zheng advocated for a deliberate, assertive, and strategic response by the Ming court to maintain order in maritime Asia. He stressed that the crux lay not in the binary choice of fully opening or closing the seas, but rather in the imperative for a purpose-driven approach to the bilateral relationship between the two states, thereby facilitating the resolution of the *wokou* crisis.

Zheng was not alone in arguing against the contention that strict enforcement of the *haijin* policy was the direct cause of the *wokou* crisis. Zhang Shiche (1500–1577), the Minister of War during that time, also challenged officials who advocated for extensive sea trade, highlighting their misunderstanding of the distinction between the tribute trade and foreign commerce. Zhang even questioned whether relaxing the prohibition

55. Zheng Ruoceng, *Chouhai tubian* (the *Qinding siku quanshu* version), *juan* 12, 109b–110a.

regulations and permitting unscheduled tribute trade would quell the turmoil or exacerbate it further. As documented in the *tubian*, Zhang Shiche expressed doubts about the efficacy of opening the sea: 'Even if tributes were allowed, could it truly prevent the island state (Japan) from plundering the coastline?'<sup>56</sup> Similarly, another scholar, Feng Zhang, echoed the sentiments of Zheng and Zhang in his writing:

The traders primarily bring goods like pepper and sapanwood, which are not highly marketable. With the significant influx of these imports, the traders might find their profits dwindling within a few years, potentially giving rise to issues. Thus, I fail to discern the advantages of easing the prohibition and replacing it with taxation. Furthermore, we couldn't effectively prevent cunning merchants from exporting valuable Chinese goods such as silks and iron, trading them for gold and silver, and evading taxes by returning covertly after disposing of their vessels. In such a scenario, where will the tax revenue come from? The open trade could also lead to foreigners acquiring firearms and gunpowder that they might turn against us. ... It is not prudent to forsake established policies for short-term gains or to disregard ancestral doctrines for minor profits. Once the damage is done, restoring the law might become impossible, and it might pave the way for enduring troubles in the future.<sup>57</sup>

Considering the above arguments, Ivy Lim eloquently argued that 'The conservatives', including Zheng Ruoceng in this case, 'were not opposed to the idea of trade *per se*. Their opposition to the opening of China's ports to trade, whether licensed private trade or not, was largely predicated on their reading of the situation and the security concerns. To them, the *wokou* crisis had been created by the Chinese traders and their Japanese collaborators who had flagrantly flouted the *haijin*'.<sup>58</sup> Based on Ivy's perceptive contention, I propose that we avoid oversimplifying the characterisation of scholar-officials who advocated for sea opening as exclusively open-minded or 'maritime-focused', and those who opposed it as solely driven by continental concerns. In the context of Zheng Ruoceng's arguments, his reluctance

56. Ibid., *juan* 12, 98b.

57. Chen Zhilong, *Ming jingshi wenbian*, *juan* 280, 17b–20a. This modified translation draws from Ivy Lim's rendition. See her "From *Haijin* to *Kaihai*," pp. 12–13.

58. Ivy Lim, "From *Haijin* to *Kaihai*," p. 13.

to endorse complete sea opening should not lead us to the conclusion that he disregarded maritime matters altogether. Instead, his perspective encompassed a pragmatic approach to address coastal security and sustain the tributary system within a Confucian-centred worldview. His inclination was to seek practical remedies that would ensure the careful and appropriate execution of both the tribute sea trade and the associated private trade (*hushi*). In other words, Zheng did not abandon the Confucian framework of governance when formulating his maritime vision and strategy. The tenets of Confucianism, as evidenced by the tributary system, served as a guiding force throughout his endeavour to compile *tubian* and devise a pragmatic remedy for the pressing problem. Much like the contemporaries in his intellectual circle, Zheng's maritime consciousness was shaped by a blend of Confucian ideology and the practical complexities of the coastal environment, particularly the enduring piracy challenges along southeast China's coastline at that time. This amalgamation of Confucian thought and local maritime context played a significant role in shaping his approach to addressing the problem at hand.

Ultimately, the Jiajing emperor decided to stick to the *haijin* policy largely because he was reluctant to overturn the original intention established by the Hongwu emperor. It was not until 1567, the year following the publication of the *tubian*, that the Longqing emperor finally granted approval to relax the maritime restrictions. This authorisation allowed for 'sea trade with the eastern and western oceans', encompassing countries such as Luzon, Sulu, Champa, and Siam, to be conducted in the city of Yuegang (Moon Harbour), which was renamed as Haicheng, meaning 'purifying the sea', the same year.<sup>59</sup> Once the embargo policy was loosened, the *wokou* problem was drastically mitigated. It is, however, worth noting that only the merchants from Quanzhou and Zhangzhou were permitted to conduct those authorised sea trades, whereas Sino-Japanese commerce via the sea continued to be prohibited even after the maritime border had been partially reopened. The Japanese were still strictly forbidden from trading with the Chinese, due to security concerns. Throughout the debate over the 'sea blockade' (*jinhai*) and the 'open the sea' (*kaihai*), Zheng Ruoceng had not been a central character to the respective discussions nor was he a notable participant in the debate, but his comments on the *haijin* policy provide us with an alternative angle from which to look at the debate itself,

59. Robert J. Antony, *The Golden Age of Piracy in China, 1520–1810: A Short History with Documents* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), p. 10.

as well as the complexities between the embargo strategy and the problem of piracy. It is oversimplifying to label those who had refused to open the sea, including Zheng himself, as purely 'land-bounded' or conservative. The circumstances back then were more complicated than we might have anticipated.

### Concluding Remarks

A prominent writer, literatus, and cartographer, Zheng Ruoceng was the scion of a notable family of metropolitan officials and renowned Confucian intellectuals in the Jiangnan area. At the same time, he was also an eyewitness to the immediate and deepening crisis in Ming China during the mid-sixteenth century. He officially began his career as a private advisor in a renowned think tank at the battlefront of the *wokou* disturbance, where he worked collegially and corresponded with a few high officials, most of whom had been assigned duties in the Lower Yangtze region. At the same time, he also experienced first-hand the alarming encroachment of the region's *wo* enemies, the dysfunction of its coastal defence, and the collapse of bureaucratic morale due to Yan Song's corruption. Thankfully, Zheng Ruoceng had been surrounded by a cohort of Jiangnan elites who were keen to restore coastal stability and did not regard maritime defence as a trivial matter. Zheng was optimistic that activists such as himself were capable of correcting these dysfunctions. They were clear-sighted enough to identify the problems and adept enough to plan and implement managerial strategy.

Although Zheng and his intellectual circle had been brought up according to a traditional Confucian mode of thought, their vision had been simultaneously shaped by a maritime world where the long-standing favourable balance between the Ming dynasty and the order in a sea bounded by the tributary framework was now being challenged. Zheng's solution to the problem was not to abandon or disregard the tributary system and encourage a free market but to restore it with better surveillance and more effective governance. It is illustrative to integrate a Confucian-originated tributary worldview into the balance of power and order across the maritime world. Among this group of elites and political realists both within and outside the administration, Zheng's remarkable *Chouhai tubian* showcased his exceptionally advanced arguments against the *wokou* menace. His responses to address these disruptive raiders were not only comprehensive but also displayed an impressive level of theoretical sophistication. His

strategic insights and assessments showcased his identity as a pragmatic and daring visionary, serving as both an advisor and a catalyst for the emergence of subsequent maritime writings. As exemplified in the “Postscript to the Reprinted Edition of the *Chouhai Tubian*”,

Starting with Zheng Ruoceng, who exhibited diligence and filial piety, he lauded the military matters in Zhejiang and Fujian. He undertook the compilation of several works, including the *Chouhai tubian*, *Jiangnan Jinglue*, *Wanli Haifang*, and others, amounting to numerous volumes. Subsequently, under the patronage of Grand Minister Xiao Yan, Deng Zhong from Jinjiang curated the *Chouhai Zhongbian*. Minister Liu commissioned Fan Lai (?–1543) to compile the *Haifang leikao*, and Grand Marshal Wang assembled the *Haifang Zuanyao*. All these records echoed commendation for the comprehensive content within the *Chouhai tubian* assembled by the Zheng of Kunshan.<sup>60</sup>

Several generations of scholarship have outlined the drastic consequences brought on by the *wokou* crisis of the sixteenth century that had signalled the rather pronounced downturn of the Ming dynasty. We have learnt a great deal about those who fought and suppressed the *wokou* on the battlefield, such as Hu Zongxian and Qi Jiquang, but the connections between the Confucian conception among those coastal elites as well as the maritime consciousness within these people have attracted much less scholarly attention. Our conventional view of Ming China and its intellectuals is usually demarcated by two contrasting alternatives. One was constrained by the main line of Confucian orthodoxy that emphasised continental development, farming, and ritual learning, which, in turn, avoided as much as possible outgoing maritime activities and sea trade development. The second alternative, identified by adventurous seafaring activities and transregional shipping, admitted the need for and the desirability of the state to benefit from the ocean. In this chapter we can see that these alternatives should not always be seen as polar opposites. Although Zheng Ruoceng tended to identify himself as a staunch Confucian and had advocated not to relax the sea ban restriction, his maritime vision and consciousness did not frequently act in line with that orthodox stripe. He was a practical statesman and advocate who proactively responded to specific maritime problems. His Confucian identity did not forbid him from

60. Zheng Qihong, “Zhongke Chouhai tubian ba,” in Zheng Ruoceng; Li Zhizhong (ed.), *Chouhai tubian*, *juan 13 xia*, pp. 1012–1013.

formulating a rational blueprint to ‘pacify the maritime frontier’ (*jinghai*). Pacifying the sea meant several things – among them consolidating coastal fortifications and the relevant naval infrastructure – but what remained foremost in Zheng’s mind was to destroy the *wokou* and to distance the Japanese. As passionate as he was about addressing the *wokou* problem, throughout his career, spanning the second half of the sixteenth century, Zheng also spoke unabashedly about restoring the tributary system across maritime Asia and enriching the coastal population by placing the region under proper management.

The era troubled by the *wokou* in the mid-Ming, in effect, was a transformative epoch during which a band of Confucian elites at the local and provincial levels were shaped by the maritime world in order to rein in the problems that menaced the sea, and by extension, the communities attached to it. These self-conscious intellectuals, despite their cultural backgrounds having been moulded by Confucianism, began to examine the maritime frontier more critically and sensitively. Using Zheng and his social circle as an example, we noted the greater elite participation in maritime affairs, stimulated by the perceptible threats posed by piracy; the debate over the sea blockade policy, which was supposed to be an ancestral law and, thereby, indisputable; and, finally, the production and circulation of writings and sea charts that centred on the coastal region. The theme in Zheng’s writing, for instance, had intensified among intellectuals who also saw it as necessary to reinstate the coastal economy after a long period of disengagement between the central authority and the sea. They expressed their reflections in gazetteers and collected volumes, and even privately published their own policy essays. These local chronicles emphasised the importance of stabilising the coast and the maritime world thorough a series of practical attempts to resolve the problem. At the same time, these intellectuals also succeeded in leading a concerted, protracted, and fairly successful propaganda campaign to demonise the *wokou* raiders and, to a certain extent, the Japanese, who were responsible for years of coastal disturbances. This scholarly trend to engage with the maritime world, more or less driven by Zheng, also influenced later generations in the High Qing, not least the elements in Zheng’s thinking that resonated closely with the maritime consciousness of Chinese writers in the long eighteenth century. Most immediately obvious are the ideas, logic, and approaches he used when attempting to chart and visualise the coast, which we will further discuss in the upcoming chapter, “The Cartographers”.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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# The Cartographers

### Shen's Map and Beyond

In November 2022, the British Library hosted a five-month exhibition titled 'Chinese and British', showcasing the journeys of various individuals from China to England since the late seventeenth century. The objective of the exhibition was to celebrate the lasting impact of Chinese communities on British society for over 300 years, including those with East or Southeast Asian heritage. Among the exhibits were handwritten letters, photographs, paintings, diaries, and oral histories, with a hand-drawn map of northern China being a prominent highlight. This map was compiled by Michael Alphonsus Shen Fuzong (c.1658–1691), the first recorded Chinese traveller to visit the UK, in 1687, four years after Taiwan was annexed by the Qing navy.

While Shen was believed to be the first Chinese visitor to England, it is only recently that historians have begun to explore his fascinating story and his travels around Europe. During his journey, he even had the rare opportunity to present himself before Louis XIV at Versailles and Innocent XI in Rome.<sup>1</sup> Born and raised in Nanjing during the early years of the Qing empire, Shen differed from his contemporaries by not participating in the civil examination, thus not holding any official titles throughout his life. Nonetheless, he was well-educated, curious, and adventurous, making

1. Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide and Bertrand Rondot, "The Incomparable Versailles," in their edited volume *Visitors to Versailles: From Louis XIV to the French Revolution* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), p. 21.

his pioneering journey to the West an exceptional and significant event in Chinese, British, and global history.<sup>2</sup>

Shen's remarkable journey beyond China was made possible by Philippe Couplet (1623–1693), a Flemish Jesuit missionary in the Qing empire, known as Bai Yingli in China. Couplet brought two Chinese converts, including Shen Fuzong, back to Europe with him. They embarked on a voyage to Paris, Rome, and finally arrived in London in the spring of 1687. During their stay in London, Shen received an invitation from Thomas Hyde (1636–1703), an English orientalist, and the chief librarian of the Bodleian Library, to visit Oxford. Shen gladly accepted and played a vital role in cataloguing the Chinese books in the library due to his expertise in both Chinese and Latin.<sup>3</sup> He engaged in numerous discussions with Hyde about Chinese culture and history, leaving a profound impact on the latter's future research in sinology. During this time, Shen also generously bequeathed many of his drafts, papers, and writings to Oxford, including the hand-drawn map that was originally preserved in the Bodleian Library and later transferred to the British Library.<sup>4</sup>

Shen's map, despite its layout and style not adhering to proper cartographic standards, holds historical value as a sketch of major cities, mountains, and strategic checkpoints in the North China Plain above the Yellow River. While Shen Fuzong lacked experience as a cartographer, the map's significance lies in its creation by a Chinese individual in seventeenth-century England, making it a highlight of the 'Chinese and British' exhibition at the British Library. The map *per se*, however, is not the sole cartographic piece with ties to imperial China within the library's collection, as Chinese cartography has been part of the library since its inception, amassed through the efforts of European missionaries and collectors who ventured to China and Asia in the early modern era. These invaluable collections have drawn scholars from China and around the world, such as the renowned map scholar Li Xiaocong and others such as

2. David Emil Mungello, *The Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), p. 92; Eun Kyung Min, *Writing of English Literary Modernity, 1690–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 127–128.

3. Timothy Brook, *Mr. Selden's Map of China: The Spice Trade, a Lost Chart, and the South China Sea* (London: Profile Books, 2013), pp. 49–50.

4. Glenn Timmermans, "Michael Shen Fuzong's Journey to the West: A Chinese Christian Painted at the Court of James II," in Macau Ricci Institute (ed.), *Culture, Art, Religion: Wu Li (1632–1718) and His Inner Journey: International Symposium Organised by the Macau Ricci Institute* (Macau: Macau Ricci Institute, 2006), pp. 192–193.

Tom Harper, Peter Barber, Laura Hostetler, Jeff Kyong-McClain, Yongtao Du, and Yinong Cheng, who have greatly benefited from their respective collections for research purposes.<sup>5</sup>

While the aforementioned studies are undoubtedly significant and intellectually stimulating, the majority of them, except for a few conducted by Li Xiaocong, predominantly focus on land-based research utilising terrestrial maps from the British Library. What remains less known to readers is that the library serves as a major repository for a substantial collection of Qing-era ‘diagrams of coastal garrisons (*yingxun tu*)’, most of which have hardly received the attention they deserve. The majority of these maps, characterised by their military nature, found their way into the British Library through presentations by soldiers who fought in China during the nineteenth century or were bequeathed by their families.<sup>6</sup> Among them, one of the most substantial collections belonged to Hugh Gough (1779–1869), first Viscount Gough and then Commander-in-Chief of the British forces during the First Opium War. In 1951, his valuable collections were acquired from his descendant, Lucy Gough. Other items, according to the Head of Maps at the British Library, Peter Barber, ‘bear silent witness to the plundering by European forces that occurred in the course of the numerous Chinese wars and military interventions of the nineteenth century’.<sup>7</sup> Most of these Qing sea charts were beautifully finished in colours and nicely preserved. Delving into them opens up a trove of valuable insights into various critical aspects of the Qing projection of sovereign power into the sea, pre-dating the various Sino-Western military encounters that began in 1839. Within this chapter, the maps we encounter provide supporting

5. Li Xiaocong, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pre-1900 Chinese Maps seen in Europe* (Beijing: Guoji wenhua, 1996); Li Xiaocong and Zhong Chong, *A General Catalogue of Modern Chinese Urban Maps Drawn by Foreigners* (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2020); Tom Harper, *Atlas: A World of Maps from the British Library* (London: British Library, 2020); Peter Barber and Tom Harper, *Magnificent Maps: Power, Propaganda and Art* (London: British Library, 2010); Laura Hostetler, “Early Modern Mapping at the Qing Court: Survey Maps from the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong Reign Periods,” in Yongtao Du and Jeff Kyong-McClain (eds.), *Chinese History in Geographical Perspective* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 15–32; Yinong Cheng, *‘Nonscientific’ Traditional Maps of China: A Study of Traditional Chinese Mapmaking* (Singapore: Springer, 2022).

6. Li Xiaocong, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pre-1900 Chinese Maps seen in Europe*, pp. 64–67.

7. Peter Barber, “‘A Very Curious Map of China’: The Acquisition of Chinese Maps by the British Library and its Predecessors, 1724–2014,” in Xie Guoxing (ed.), *Reading Antique Cartography: Historical Chinese Maps in the British Library* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2015), p. 29.

evidence of the Qing dynasty's multifaceted approach in several key areas: 1) meticulous surveying of micro-ecologies and micro-geographies along the maritime frontier, 2) both conceptual and practical division of the sea space into inner and outer oceans, 3) strategic employment of cartography as a land-sea protection tactic, and 4) the establishment of strategic locations and efficient maritime routes to bolster its naval activities.

As suggested in the previous chapter, the practice of charting the coast in the Ming continued throughout the Qing, while the works conducted by Zheng Ruoceng, for example, remained an effective reference for cartographers in the Qing when compiling their projects. Contrary to the prevailing impression that coastal diagrams or sea charts were exclusive to the Ming era and absent in the subsequent dynasty, this chapter will reveal that the Manchu administration, during the long eighteenth century, also displayed considerable interest in surveying the sea water off the coast. Although the Manchu, in general, were more renowned in mobilising their calvary to sweep across the steppes and plains, the way the maritime frontier was charted in the Qing was comparatively more proactive, sophisticated, and encompassing than the methods of their predecessor. For instance, if we compared the Qing productions to the maps produced in the Ming, which are mostly appended to some literary writings, such as Zheng's *Chouhai tubian*, the sea charts compiled in the Qing were usually produced separately. In addition, they were also painted in a relatively more vivid and colourful way. In the final section of this chapter, I will address the issue of to what extent these Qing cartographic projects should be viewed not only from a political and naval perspective, but also from an aesthetic, iconographic point of view as remarkable and illustrative primary materials among other kinds of historical evidence.

The sea charts produced in the long eighteenth century exhibited a remarkable level of refinement and style, surpassing those of the Ming times. Nonetheless, a perceivable drawback was the absence of identifiable signatures or authorship, which presents a challenge in attributing these charts to specific cartographers. The official records give no answer. What is evident is that these sea charts were not the work of mere stay-at-home geographers but rather the result of skilled mapmakers with actual experience venturing into the sea. This is manifested through the incorporation of the latest and most up-to-date information in these projects, surpassing the mapping production of the Ming period by a certain margin. Despite the veil of anonymity surrounding these cartographers behind the scenes, their value should not be underestimated, as they provide valuable insights into

Qing maritime policies and strategic vision. These anonymous actors, with their detailed depictions of strategic locations, maritime routes, and coastal defence measures, provide a nuanced view of the empire's layered interaction with its coastal territories and the wider maritime dominion. They were the key players who mapped the physical geography of the coastal front in a way that responded to the agenda and desire of the Qing court. By studying the sophisticated details, context, and historical circumstances surrounding the production of these unidentified sea charts, we can obtain a richer and more vivid portrait of the mapmakers themselves. While the lack of explicit signatures might initially seem like a barrier to understanding their individual identities, a closer examination of their cartographic choices, stylistic elements, and the regions they depicted offers an illuminating glimpse into their backgrounds, motivations, and the very essence of their maritime consciousness and aspirations. Such insights unveil not only the cartographers' perspectives on the sea but also the profound impact of their works on shaping the maritime narrative during the Qing dynasty.

### Charting the Coast

The history of surveying and charting the coast of China was not exclusive to the Qing empire. Chinese cartographers had been carefully and systematically mapping the shoreline since at least the Tang and Song eras.<sup>8</sup> Most of the sea charts produced in earlier periods were considered geo-historical cartography.<sup>9</sup> While some charts were officially produced to display the respective dynasty's territorial limits, some were privately produced in order to provide a trove of essential information for officials, seafarers, and/or intellectuals, giving them a better sense of coastal conditions. As mentioned briefly, one of the differences that distinguished the sea charts produced during the Qing dynasty from those produced in earlier periods was that its coastal maps varied in form and tended to be more detailed. The illustrative evidence, particularly the *yingxun tu*, we are about to explore in this chapter provides substantial examples. It would be unwise, however, to suggest that the Qing dynasty 'invented' those *yingxun tu*. We can find similar

8. See Ao Wang, *Spatial Imaginaries in Mid-Tang China: Geography, Cartography, and Literature* (New York: Cambria Press, 2018).

9. Mei-ling Hsu, "Chinese Marine Cartography: Sea Charts of Pre-Modern China," *Imago Mundi*, vol. 40 (1988), p. 96.

charts, featuring coastal garrisons, dating back to the Ming and even Song dynasties.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, these Qing *yingxun tu* were distinct from the previous diagrams of coastal garrisons, which concentrated on the coastal and territorial contours. The cartographers of these sea charts pushed the landform to the periphery and invite us to contemplate the sea. Obviously, this is because the sea mattered, not the land sector. In other words, the maps we are about to explore are immensely sea-based, especially compared to those of earlier eras, which were largely land-based productions.

Not all of the *yingxun tu* discussed in this paper were precisely and literally named *yingxun tu* by the Qing government. There was no single standardised label used to categorise all of these coastal garrison diagrams at that time. Some of them were termed ‘diagram of harbours and checkpoints (*xunkou tu*)’, some ‘diagram of boundary lines (*jiezhi tu*)’, and some ‘diagram of inner and outer seas (*neiwaiyang yu tu*)’. However, as all of these diagrams carried a similar purpose of serving the navy and coastal officials in their efforts to better govern the sea space, I intend to group them together collectively for the present discussion. In fact, the term *yingxun tu* does not fully do justice to the nature of the diagrams discussed in this paper because *yingxun* in Chinese only means garrison or stronghold, which has weak and limited maritime connotations. However, as we shall see in the proceeding sections, these *yingxun tu* are not continental-garrison-oriented diagrams. Instead, their focuses effectively cover various aspects of coastal management and maritime militarisation. However, for the sake of consistency and to avoid confusion, I will simply apply the term *yingxun tu* in this article, unless otherwise indicated.

Another significant feature of these *yingxun tu* is that most of them were created within a particular provincial setting. Unlike other charts or coastal maps produced in the Ming and Qing dynasties such as the ‘Map of maritime border and situation’ (*Haijiang yangjie xingshi tu*) and the ‘Complete geographical map of the great Qing Dynasty’ (*DaQing wannian yitong dili quantu*), which broadly depict the entire coastline,<sup>11</sup> these *yingxun*

10. Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-Modern Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 172–173.

11. See Ralph E. Ehrenberg (ed.), *Reading Imperial Cartography: Ming-Qing Historical Maps in the Library of Congress* (Washington: Library of Congress, 2014), pp. 88–89; Ronald C. Po, “Mapping Maritime Power and Control: A Study of the Late Eighteenth Century *Qisheng yanhai tu* (A Coastal Map of the Seven Provinces),” *Late Imperial China*, vol. 37, no. 2 (December 2016), pp. 93–136.

*tu* clearly focus on specific swaths of water. Some cover a small portion of the sea off the coast of Zhejiang, or a certain maritime area surrounded by a set of islands off the Fujian coast. The details of each of these diagrams are specific to their location and purpose within a relatively ‘micro setting’. One can even recognise their specificity by studying the paratexts written on these *yingxun tu*. These paratexts are not lengthy narratives; in most cases, their messages are precisely conveyed in one or two sentences – and I will further elaborate this point in due course. Further, although they were not signed, I speculate that these pieces of paratextual information were very likely written by naval commanders, local coastal officials, or representatives of the navy, owing to the sensitivity of the information contained. As a result, a strong likelihood of collaboration between these naval personnel and the anonymous cartographers emerges. Together, they could have harnessed their respective expertise to create comprehensive and accurate sea charts. This hypothetical partnership presents an intriguing perspective on how the blending of maritime knowledge and cartographic skills may have played a pivotal role in shaping the empire’s understanding of its coastal territories and the broader maritime domain.

In the following sections, we will examine eight rare *yingxun tu*. The earliest is entitled the ‘Diagrams of the inner–outer seas of the naval base in Changshi (*Changshi shuishiyang neiwaiyang yu tu*)’ and was produced around 1730, during the Yongzheng era. The rest of the *yingxun tu* were mainly compiled between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One of the perceptible characteristics of these *yingxun tu* is that they each clearly display the geographical conditions of a particular terraqueous space. Each one includes both micro-ecologies and micro-geographies, by which I mean that the coast was sensibly studied and coupled with particular geographic information. For example, in the ‘Diagram of the coastal area of Pingyang naval base (*Pingyang Ying yan hai jie zhi tu*)’ (Figure 4.1), produced after 1739, the coastal condition of the Pingyang *xian* in Wenzhou is carefully depicted. From this *yingxun tu*, we can see that most of the strategic islands and mountains are clearly labelled, including Shitang, Dahu, and Xiaohu. Even more noticeable is that the mapmakers also highlight the connection between sea depth and the naval importance of each specific geographical region. For instance, in describing the sea off the island of Chiqi, it is stated that ‘the seawater off the island is deep and strategic. It has to be patrolled and garrisoned by a naval general as well as 10 soldiers’ (Figure 4.2). In a similar fashion, the sea off Jiangkou was also marked as ‘a strategic gateway

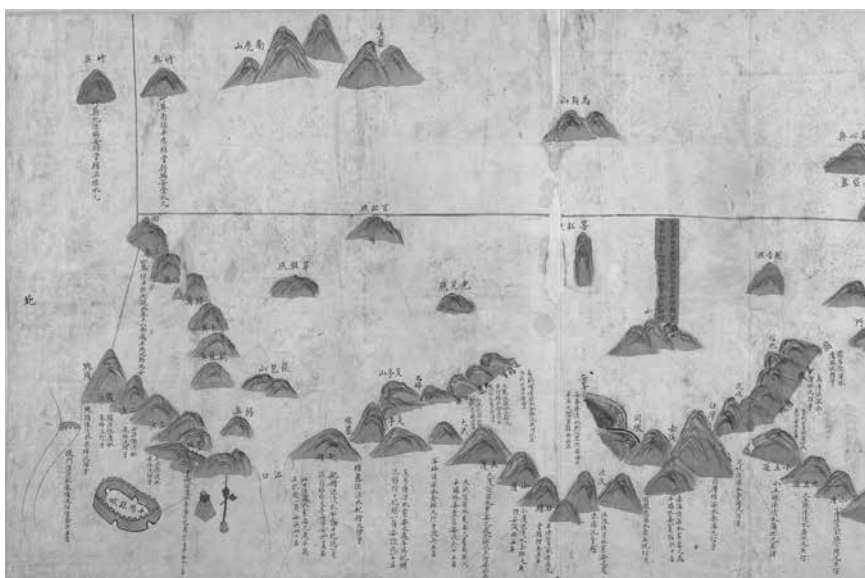


Figure 4.1: *Pingyang Ying yan hai jie zhi tu* (Diagram of the coastal area of Pingyang naval base) Source: British Museum, Identification number: Add. MS. 16358 (G)

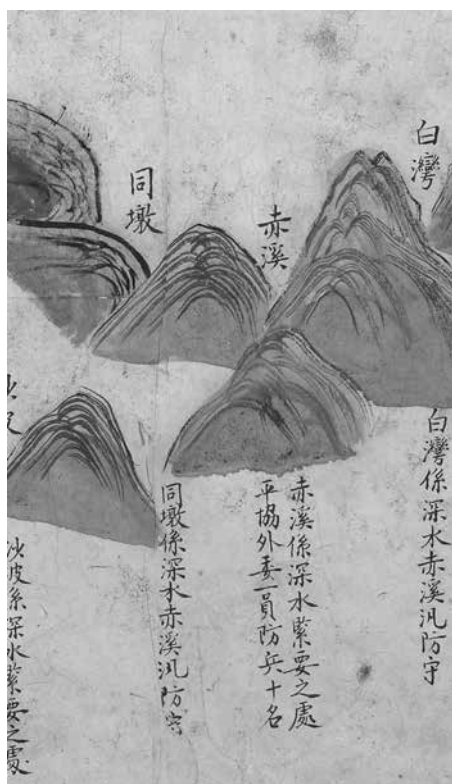


Figure 4.2: *Pingyang Ying yan hai jie zhi tu*, featuring Chiqi (the red river) Source: British Museum, Identification number: Add. MS. 16358 (G)

to Pingyang' and the region had to be 'patrolled by a higher-ranking naval commander (*qianzong*) as well as 40 soldiers'.

In another *yingxun tu*, entitled the 'Diagram of land and maritime checkpoints of Fenghua (*Fenghua xian shuilu yingxun jiezhi tu*)' (c.1821; Figure 4.3), the 'five mountains in the sea' (*haizhong shan*) or the five islands off the coast of Ninghai are also succinctly labelled and described. Additionally, even though the distances between the islands charted on both *yingxun tu* are not explicitly calculated, readers can probably gain a sense of how far those islands are located from each other by looking at these *yingxun tu*, as they were usually carefully drawn. Another example would be the 'Complete maritime diagram of the Taiping county of the Taizhou prefecture (*Taizhoufu Taipingxian*



Figure 4.3: *Fenghua xian shuilu yingxun jiezhi tu* (Diagram of land and maritime checkpoints of Fenghua) Source: British Library, Identification number: Maps 188.kk.1 (8)



Figure 4.4: *Taizhoufu Taipingxian haiyang quantu* (Complete maritime diagram of the Taiping county of the Taizhou prefecture) Source: British Library, Identification number: Add. MS. 16361 (A)

*haiyang quantu*), produced in around 1820 (Figure 4.4). The reason these *yingxun tu* were produced so neatly is indeed because they were purposely used by commanders, naval generals, and/or sailors. As such, they were not intended to be detailed and intricate maps showcasing the expanse of imperial power. Instead, they served as practical and functional guiding tools for officials to efficiently and purposefully administer the waters. In other words, these charts were designed with a specific focus on operational navigation, providing crucial assistance in the execution of maritime strategies and the management of coastal territories. By prioritising clarity and practicality over elaborate cartographic artistry, these *yingxun tu* served as vital instruments enabling the smooth coordination of naval operations and bolstering the empire's mastery over its blue frontier.

In some of the *yingxun tu*, we notice that there are red labels (*hongqian*) on the map. Further, important information is appended to these labels, allowing us to better analyse the coastal conditions. In one of the *yingxun tu* called ‘Diagram of sea and river checkpoints of the Jiangyin county (*Jiangyin xian yanjiang gangxuntu*)’ (produced in around 1840; Figure 4.5), there are a total of 12 red stickers. Similar to the textual evidence discussed in the previous paragraph, these stickers detail the geographical features of the coastline, coupled with some extra strategic reminders. Even though the focus of the *Jiangyin xian yanjiang gangxuntu* is not the coast but the river along the Jiangyin county, the information written on the stickers still embodies connections with marine governance. For example, on one it is written that ‘the cherry blossom harbour (Taohuagang) is 50 *li* away from the city. A shoal is found 4 *li* from the mouth of the harbour. No vessel can pass across the shoal. 30 *li* to the east of the harbour is the Yangtze River. The depth of the river there is 12 metres. From this particular point to the outer sea is 320 *li*’ (Figure 4.5).<sup>12</sup> From this piece of information, given that the distances between a harbour and a certain point in the river and the sea are precisely measured, we gain a sense that the river’s defence, particularly in the lower Yangtze River Delta, was closely associated with coastal security. In fact, most Jiangnan naval bases were located where the Yangtze River entered the ocean. Thus, the navy had a responsibility to safeguard both the river and the sea. Its mandate was to weave a sprawling dragnet that could efficiently detect and eliminate pirates.<sup>13</sup> By providing details of how far the sea is located from those harbours, such as the Taohuagang, this particular chart provided coastal and naval officials with a more comprehensive picture of the coastline and adjacent sea space so they could mobilise the navy in a timely and strategic manner.

Another feature that is worth mentioning is that this *yingxun tu* is divided by lines that create a grid. Further, the mapmaker makes it clear that each gradation equals 3 *li*, approximately 1.5 kilometres (Figure 4.6). To a substantial extent, this *yingxun tu* is inarguably more accurate than those produced without grids. Cordell Yee, a renowned cartographic historian, once observed that ‘scale mapping was not the primary concern of Chinese

12. *Li* has varied considerably over time, but it was usually about a third as long as the English mile and now has a standardised length of a half-kilometre, about 500 metres or 1,640 feet.

13. Yan Ruyu, *Yangfang jiyao* (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2011), *juan* 2, pp. 91–96.

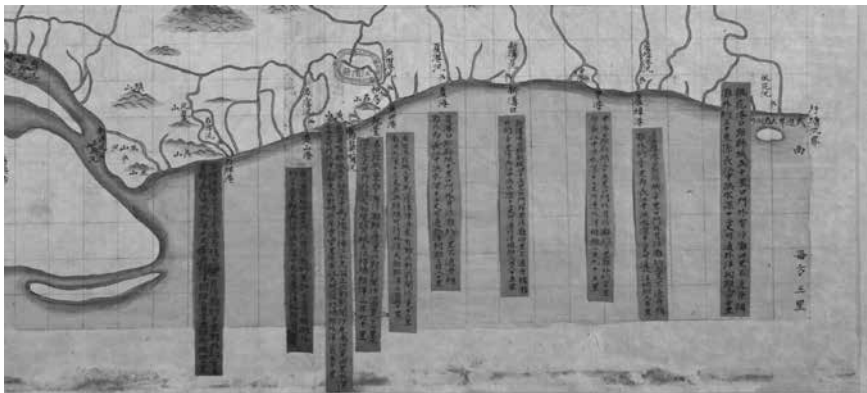


Figure 4.5: *Jiangyin xian yanjiang gangxuntu* (Diagram of sea and river checkpoints of the Jiangyin county) *Source:* British Library, Identification number: Add. MS. 16360 (J)

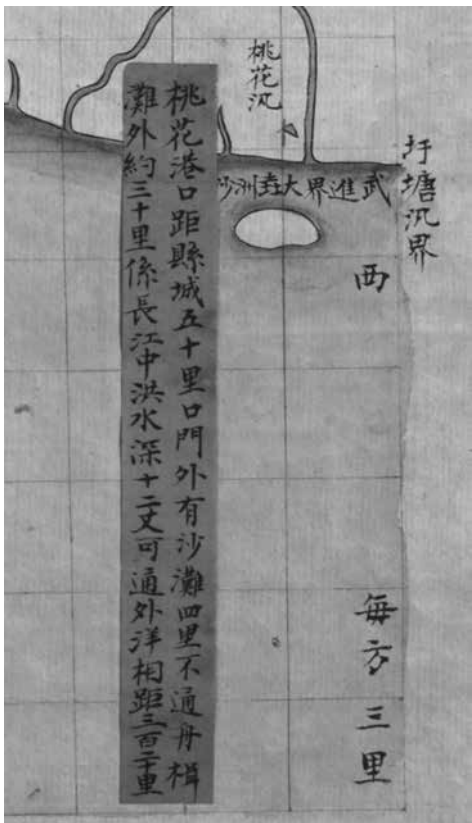


Figure 4.6: *Jiangyin xian yanjiang gangxuntu* (an extract) *Source:* British Library, Identification number: Add. MS. 16360 (J)

mapmakers, although they certainly understood its principles'.<sup>14</sup> He made this comment in order to account for why Chinese cartography seemed indifferent to technical accuracy. Given the reasonably high accuracy of some *yingxun tu*, such as this *Jiangyin xian yanjiang gangxuntu*, we may need to further consider to what extent Chinese mapmakers paid attention to accurate cartography.

### New Qing Maritime History

I have posited elsewhere the intriguing prospect or possibility of examining the school of new Qing history from a maritime perspective. It is perhaps essential to reiterate and further elaborate on this intention here, particularly concerning the *yingxun tu* under discussion. The idea of this new Qing maritime history is derived from the 'new Qing history prototype', which Mark Elliott, Peter Perdue, Joanna Waley-Cohen, Laura Hostetler, and many other respectable new Qing historians pioneered in the mid-1990s.<sup>15</sup> In his book *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*, Richard J. Smith observed that 'most China scholars in the West, and increasingly in China, accept the basic outlines of new Qing history',<sup>16</sup> and these outlines were summed up in an article co-authored by Mark Elliott and Ding Yizhuang in 2013. According to Ding and Elliott, new Qing History was greatly based on the following precepts: (1) the Manchu rulers knew very well how to manipulate their subjects in a deliberate fashion; (2) from the 1630s through to at least the eighteenth century, the rulers developed a sense of Manchu identity and applied Central Asian models of rule as much as they did Confucian ones; and (3) the Qing dynasty of the eighteenth century was, indeed, a shining empire in East and Inner Asia.<sup>17</sup> We should

14. Cordell Yee, "Traditional Chinese Cartography," in J. B. Harley and David Woodward (eds.), *Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 170.

15. Thomas S. Mullaney, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Identity in the Study of Modern China," in Michael Szonyi (ed.), *A Companion to Chinese History* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017), p. 293.

16. Richard J. Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), p. x.

17. Ding Yizhuang and Ou Lide (Mark Elliott), "Ershi yi zhiji ruhe shuxie zhongguo lishi: Xin Qing shi yanjiu de yingxiang yuhuiying," in *Lishi xue pinglun* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2013), pp. 116–146.

thus re-examine Qing history as one of the world empires from a global perspective. In my analysis of the so-called 'new Qing maritime history', I will respond to the third point specifically in order to contend that the Qing administration, as a shining power in the eighteenth century, was attentive to and deliberate in integrating its maritime frontier into its grand empire. Over such a long period of time, the Qing court gradually developed a maritime awareness and applied a series of frontier management models, not only to its land frontier in Inner Asia, but also to its sea borders to the East. After all, as an Asian giant with a coastline of almost 14,500 kilometres, the Qing could and should be studied from a maritime perspective; and as an early modern sea power, it was able to maintain its superiority across East Asia's seas for almost 100 years.

We must admit, however, that we should not overstate or over-amplify the approach of new Qing maritime history. Arguing that the Qing dynasty did not lose sight of its maritime frontier is not to discount its active military engagement with Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Asia. Essentially, the idea of proposing a new interpretation of Qing maritime history is to restore balance to the frontier history of the Qing dynasty throughout the eighteenth century, which has long been tilted toward its inland frontier. Needless to say, I do not attempt to advocate the idea of 'new Qing maritime history' merely with a single chapter or even a monograph. Recognising the ambitious nature of this endeavour, which demands considerable academic input and collective effort, one of the underlying objectives of this chapter is to garner ample scholarly attention for this topic and foster constructive academic discourse within the realms of Qing and maritime studies.

Appropriating the discourse centring on new Qing history and those *yingxun tu* as case studies, this section will consider the extent to which eighteenth-century China merits consideration as an early modern maritime power. I am in agreement with David C. Gompert, who has decoupled the often-assumed link between sea power and imperial expansion. He argued that 'sea power is the ability to exert power over what occurs at sea as well as power of the sea'.<sup>18</sup> The various historical and contemporary analyses of sea power should be directed toward the consideration of real processes that have to be studied on their own terms. In essence, the conception of

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18. David C. Gompert, *Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Cooperation, 2013), p. 6.

sea power included not only oceanic expansion but also the willingness and ability to manage maritime affairs in peacetime.

We need to study the Qing empire during the eighteenth century as part of, rather than isolated from, the early modern Asian sea region. In its use of various modes of visual representation, ranging from those renowned imperial maps such as the Kangxi Atlas to small-scaled *yingxun tu*, the Qing government constructed images of its shoreline and coastal waters in ways that can be best described as a power projecting its influence across the ocean. Focusing on the following *yingxun tu* (Figures 4.7 and 4.8), for instance, the maritime frontier was deliberately divided into a domestic sea space (inner sea) and a foreign sea space (*waihai*), which denotes the sea space beyond administrative governance and economic extraction. The rationale behind the division of the sea space lies in the multitude of security threats the Qing state encountered along its coastal regions, emanating from its own subjects in particular. Effectively countering these challenges necessitated the strategic deployment of war junks and soldiers to the affected areas. By dividing the sea space appropriately, the Qing government aimed to bolster its ability to safeguard its coastal territories and maintain stability in the face of internal pressures. In *The Blue Frontier: Maritime Vision and Power in the Qing Empire*, I provided an examination of the inner/outer framework of ocean spatialisation,<sup>19</sup> so there is no need to reprise my observations here. What I seek to achieve in this section is a further elaboration of the connections between sea power, provincial marine governance, and the *yingxun tu*. As a result, I will also tie my reflections into the wider academic context of new Qing history.

‘Sea power’ is a complicated term and concept because of the profound associations that have accompanied it since Alfred Mahan (1840–1914) published *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660–1783* in 1890. It is often associated with oceanic expansion, military invasion, marine exploitation, and a specific period of time, which in general corresponds to the age of imperialism, if not expansionism, engineered by Euro-American warships and muskets throughout the nineteenth century. More significantly, sea power in many parts of the world has tended to be coupled with these Europeanised conceptualisations. In her ‘Qing Connections to the Early Modern World’, Laura Hostetler contextualised the idea of colonialism as follows: ‘it has come to be equated with continuing victimization caused by

19. See Ronald C. Po, *The Blue Frontier: Maritime Vision and Power in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 44–88.



Figure 4.7: *Fenghua xian shuili yingxun jiezhi tu* (Diagram of land and maritime checkpoints of Fenghua) Source: British Library, Identification number: Maps 188.kk.1 (8)

an aggressive and imperialistic West against non-Western others during an era characterized by European and American ascendancy'.<sup>20</sup> To make sense of the connection between the Qing and the notion of sea power, I suggest we should adopt a similar consciousness. All of those associations linking to colonialism, in fact, also create substantial barriers to understanding the Qing empire as a sea power in the early modern era.

The reluctance to acknowledge eighteenth-century China as a sea power in comparison to Western seafaring empires can also be attributed to several reasons found in both Chinese and Western historiography. Firstly, for many Chinese scholars, considering the Qing empire as a sea power challenges long-standing assumptions about the nation's historical identity. Embracing this perspective may unsettle notions of the past of China, which have not been entirely reconciled. Additionally, such a recognition

20. Laura Hostetler, "Qing Connections to the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3 (July 2000), p. 627.

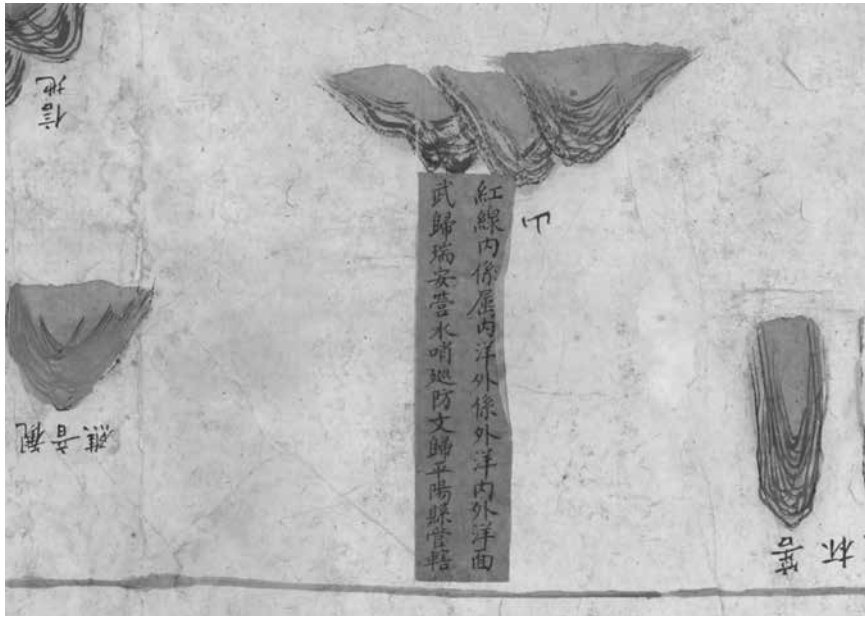


Figure 4.8: *Pingyang Ying yan hai jie zhi tu* (an extract)

Source: British Museum, Identification number: Add. MS. 16358 (G)

could potentially undermine the foundational narrative that has buttressed the power base of the Chinese government in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Largely because the PRC has often portrayed itself as a victim of imperialist aggression by seafaring powers since the First Opium War, acknowledging its own past as a sea power in the long eighteenth century, which is supposedly aggressive and intrusive, might deprive the modern nation of some of its self-orientation and national image. That's why the Chinese leaders in the present century have to be extremely careful when it comes to the rise of contemporary China as a land power or sea power. The term 'peacefully' is widely applied in state announcements and all sorts of propaganda. It is always rising peacefully (*heping jueqi*), either through the seascape, landscape, or space-scape.

Why did Chinese historians outside China and Western scholarship not extensively explore China's involvement in the maritime realm during the long eighteenth century? One apparent reason, from my perspective, is that, particularly in North America, the study of Chinese history from the 1950s to the 1960s remained largely confined within the paradigm propagated by

John King Fairbank. As pointed out by Xing Hang a few years ago, ‘current scholarship on maritime China in the States continues to be coloured by a classical binary framework initially articulated by the late John Fairbank’.<sup>21</sup> Relying on his sources, observations, the time frame (mainly nineteenth century), and geographic restraint (coastal areas of China) in question, Fairbank came to the belief that China only began to realise the importance of maritime governance after the British ventured into the East Asian Sea. Like Max Weber and Georg Hegel’s earlier prejudices, Fairbank portrayed the Qing dynasty as a fundamentally continental empire with little interest in the sea, let alone any form of adventurous marine navigation or expansion overseas.

With better access to Qing archives, ranging from imperial edicts to official memorials written in various languages, in China and Taiwan over the past few decades, Western scholars studying Chinese history have been able to follow a more China- or Manchu-centred approach that proactively rejects Fairbank’s assumptions. However, proponents of this approach have until now barely situated the Qing empire within the discussion of sea power. It is now time for a fresh look at the way a continental empire interacted with the maritime world in the early modern period, a look not coloured by the circumstances of all those nineteenth-century sea battles that occurred in Asian sea water. We require a new historiographical approach, if not paradigm, which is wide enough to view the Qing dynasty as a land power that did not overlook the importance of its maritime frontier with its own unique historical trajectories and dynamic, as well as its complexity and diversity. Like many other Asian and European powers in the early modern era, the Qing dynasty also developed its own attempt to rule over the waves. Only thus can we see how it consolidated itself as an empire, as advocated by new Qing historians, and even helped to shape trends in early modern world history. As demonstrated in these *yingxun tu*, it did not wait until Western gunboats arrived to exercise its power across the sea.

According to new Qing history, few would dispute that the Qing state was a shining power which flexed its military muscle across its inland frontier during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong eras. For instance, in his *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*, Peter Perdue

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21. Xing Hang, “The Evolution of Maritime Chinese Historiography in the United States: Toward a Transnational and Interdisciplinary Approach,” *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, vol. 14 (2020), p. 152.

consciously placed the Qing empire in the larger context of world history and as an equivalent to and rival of the other Asian empires, namely Muscovite Russia and the Mongolian Zunghars.<sup>22</sup> In a similar fashion, Laura Hostetler, Wensheng Wang, Jodi L. Weinstein, and Stevan Harrel also acknowledge the nature of new Qing history and its contribution to seeing the Qing as an expansive empire.<sup>23</sup> From the conquest of Inner Mongolia during the 1630s to the annexation of Taiwan in 1683, the Manchus had already established an expansionist state in the late seventeenth century, while the conquest of Tibet and Xinjiang in the eighteenth century apparently brought much frontier land under the regular administration of the Manchu power.

After conquering all these territories, the Qing emperors were aware of the increasing importance of consolidating their dominion in these newly acquired regions. They did so by setting up military outposts and visualising these new frontiers on maps and illustrative albums. However, these processes of consolidation of power should not be seen as merely operating on a land-based level. The Qing court also saw the maritime border as strategically significant, especially in fostering transregional sea trade after the Kangxi emperor established four customs offices in 1684. As the Kangxi emperor famously proclaimed,

Why did I open trade along the coast? The development of maritime trade will largely benefit the people of Fujian and Guangdong. As prosperity grows in these two provinces and commercial commodities circulate smoothly, other provinces and our empire as a whole will also reap the rewards.<sup>24</sup>

This vision highlighted the importance of facilitating maritime commerce for the overall prosperity of the Qing empire. Consequently, the creation

22. Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

23. Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Wensheng Wang, *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Jodi L. Weinstein, *Empire and Identity in Guizhou: Local Resistance to Qing Expansion* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014); Stevan Harrell, "Introduction: Civilizing Projects and the Reaction to Them," in his edited volume *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontier* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1994), p. 7.

24. *Kangxi yuzhi wenji* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuji, 1966), *juan* 14, 8a.

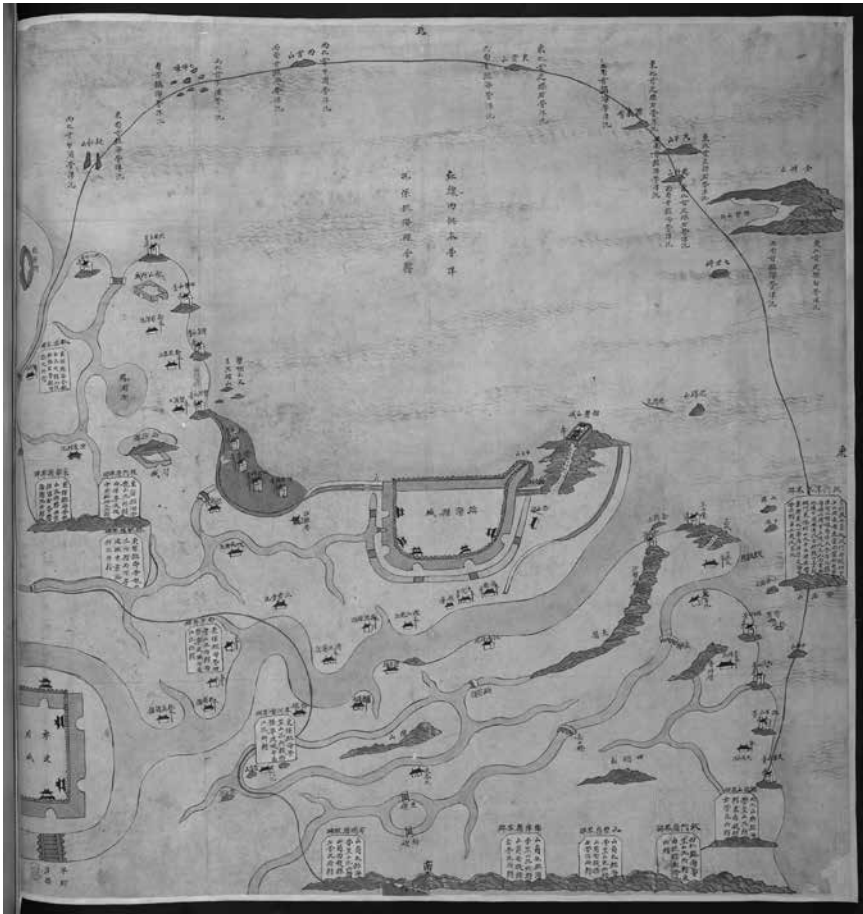


Figure 4.9: *Zhenhai shuishi yingxuntu* (Diagram of harbours and area patrolled by the Zhenhai navy) Source: British Library, Identification number: Add. MS. 16358 (I)

of accurate and detailed sea charts, as exemplified by the *yingxun tu*, became essential tools for achieving and maintaining control over the maritime domain. Therefore, these meticulously crafted charts served a dual purpose: not only did they assist in navigation, but they also provided invaluable, up-to-date information for governing and regulating maritime activities, contributing to the effective management and expansion of sea trade routes. They were precise records for safe and effective sea patrol, along with information on navigability, weather, and approach views to the



Figure 4.10: *Zhenhai shuishi yingxuntu* (an extract) Source: British Library, Identification number: Add. MS. 16358 (I)

seaports or passing views along the coastline, a useful feature lacking from Western-style sea charts of the time.

To sum up, the accent of these *yingxun tu* is on the presentation of maritime information, such as depths, coastline, tides, and the nature of the seabed for the mariner looking from the sea toward the land. It enabled the captain and soldiers on board to steer their warships in the direction they

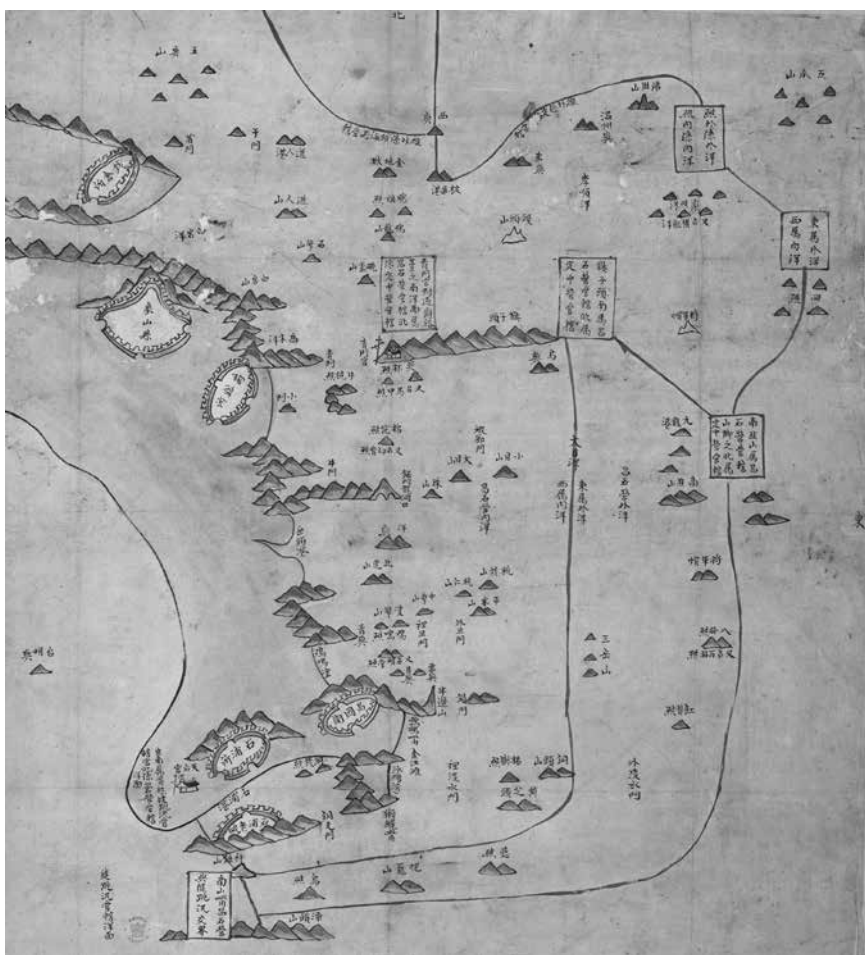


Figure 4.11: *Changshi shuishiying neiwaiyang yu tu* (Map of Inner and Outer Waters of the Changshishi Naval Garrison) Source: British Library, Identification number: Add. MS. 16359 (I)

needed to sail and to make adjustments to their course when their current positions had been checked. If we look at the *yingxun tu* more carefully, they also show how refined the technique of surveying had become by the turn of the eighteenth century. In the *Taizhoufu Taipingxian haiyang quantu* (Figure 4.4) and *Zhenhai shuishi yingxuntu* (Figures 4.9 and 4.10), for instance, the surveyors gave the main topographical features such as the hills, islands, shoals, and reefs that can be seen from seaward, and as we shall see, the detail

is finely worked. Even though no latitude or longitude is given, orientation can be obtained from the directions of the major naval bases and garrisons.

Another significant feature of these *yingxun tu* is that we should be able to have a better understanding of the exact limits of some of the inner and outer sea regions within a provincial setting. While there is a widespread impression that the Qing state did not attempt to draw any lines in the sea so as to facilitate and project its power, the following three *yingxun tu* convincingly suggest a counterargument that the provincial authority was quite eager to systematically divide the maritime frontier. If we look at the *Changshi shuishiyang neiwaiyang yu tu* (Figure 4.11), the (red) lines are clearly drawn across the seaboard. In addition to the evidence mentioned, the *Qingshilu* also records the creation of a detailed Oceanic Diagram (*Yangtu*) during the Qianlong period in Jiangsu province. This diagram precisely identified the boundaries of the *neiyang* and *waiyang*, as reported by Gao Jin, the governor general of Jiangsu, Anhui, and Jianxi (*Liangjiang zhongdu*), in 1765,

Mapping the *waiyang* poses challenges due to the difficulty in demarcating ocean boundaries. Presently, we have charted and recorded the limits of certain *waiyang* areas in quantifiable distances (*li*) within an oceanic diagram called *Yangtu*, which has been circulated among officials. However, in order to enhance its accuracy and precision, we need to revise and update the diagram. By producing a more detailed *Yangtu* for our navy, we will be able to effectively assign patrolling duties and ensure accurate surveillance of the maritime territories.<sup>25</sup>

Gao Jin's report to the Qianlong emperor provide a remarkable insight into the existence of an official oceanic diagram in Jiangsu, delineating the limits of the *neiyang* and *waiyang*. This crucial document was circulated within the region, demonstrating the administration's emphasis on representing and understanding the maritime territories. The awareness among officials, like Gao Jin, of the significance of such a diagram in facilitating meticulous sea patrol indicates their recognition of the importance of accurate information for effective governance and security measures. Regrettably, I have not been able to locate the *Yangtu* introduced by Gao Jin, and the above quotation implies that we can only assume its existence in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, if this official oceanic diagram, along with the previously mentioned *yingxun tu*, could be found and analysed collectively, it would

25. *Qinggaozhong shilu*, juan 750, collected in *Qingshilu*, vol. 18, pp. 259–260.

offer a more comprehensive and layered perspective on the inner–outer model.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, a more careful examination of those red lines on the *yingxun tu* shows that the Qing court did not overlook the administration of its offshore islands. Here, we also see that its attempt to define its jurisdiction over its sea space was quite different from that of the Ming government, as the latter did not really pay specific attention to its offshore islands.<sup>27</sup> From this *Changshi yingxun tu* (Figure 4.11), it is relatively clear that most of the islands were included within the Qing's maritime administrative perimeter. According to John E. Wills Jr., 'defensiveness' was the leitmotif of the Ming era on all frontiers, maritime and continental;<sup>28</sup> whereas the Qing empire, in conceptualising the naval zone across its maritime frontier by covering more islands off the coast, pushed across the sea in a relatively proactive and deliberate manner and thereby went beyond the Ming concepts of governing the sea. This particular example serves to demonstrate that while the Qing dynasty did take inspiration from certain precedents established by the Ming court in their approach to governing the sea border, they also developed their own unique maritime tactics. In essence, the Qing administration departed from the strict adherence to the 'Ming way' and tailored their strategies to suit the demands of their era. Amidst the intricate web of maritime management, it is essential to give due consideration to the significant connections between the Ming and Qing dynasties. These connections highlight the continuities and shared principles that informed their respective maritime policies. However, it is equally important to avoid both overestimating and underestimating the extent of relatedness between their maritime realities.

### A Dual Strategy

In retrospect, the Qing court employed a dual strategy to safeguard its coastline, comprising both naval patrols and a network of forts known as

26. I also introduced Gao Jin's *Yangtu* in *The Blue Frontier* (p. 65). I am hopeful that by revisiting and highlighting his memorial here once more, we might be able to successfully locate this valuable *Yangtu* for future research.

27. Wang Hongbin, *Qingdai qianqi haifang: sixiang yu zhidu* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2002), p. 71.

28. John E. Wills Jr., "Relations with Maritime Europeans," in Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 8, The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, part 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 333–375.

*paotai*. Unlike other dynastic states in the region, such as the Ottoman, Arabic, and Russian empires, the Qing navy derived considerable strength from these onshore defence mechanisms. From the late Ming era onwards, a well-coordinated system of fortifications took shape along the Chinese coast, particularly in the southeast, persisting until the late Qing period. These coastal fortifications held immense significance for both the Ming and Qing governments, forming an integral part of their maritime defence framework. Historically, scholars speculated that China predominantly relied on a 'passive defence' approach, centred on fortifying the shoreline. However, I propose that the Qing court recognised the limitations of this tactic and sought a more dynamic and comprehensive defence strategy. Beyond fortifications, the Qing court acknowledged the necessity of regular sea patrols to effectively protect its inner sea space. By amalgamating a standing navy with a robust system of fortifications, the Manchu administration forged a cohesive 'land-sea protection scheme (*hailu lüanfang*)' to counter the prevailing enemies over its maritime territories.

Remarkably, this approach indicates the Qing inclination to integrate the inner sea into their territorial domain, emphasising the inseparable connection between their terrestrial and maritime interests. While the navy served as the primary defence across the inner sea, the Qing court was well aware that coastal fortifications played an equally pivotal role, providing safe harbours and essential facilities for the refitting of vessels and crews. A more comprehensive understanding of these maritime strategies and their interconnectedness can be obtained through the *yingxun tu* drawn by those anonymous cartographers.

In the 'Diagram of harbours and checkpoints of the Hangzhou Bay (*Hangzhou Wan shuilu yingxuntu*)' (published c.1840; Figure 4.12) there are no red lines or curves demarcating the inner or outer seas. However, the locations of a series of coastal fortifications and some garrisons are clearly indicated along the shoreline. Meanwhile, all of the strategic islands across Hangzhou Bay are neatly depicted. Likewise, in the aforementioned *Zhenhai shuishi yingxuntu*, all fortifications are portrayed in detail. In this *yingxun tu*, the sea space within the confines of the red line is clearly labelled '*bunying yang*' (another form of expression indicating the inner sea), whereas it is noted that all of the garrisons were administrated by Zhenhai county. Moreover, in the right bottom corner of this *yingxun tu*, there is a paratext as follows (Figure 4.10): 'Starting from the Dagu Mountain to Jiaomen in the west, to Daping Mountain in the east, and to the south of the Seven Sisters Ocean, this is considered *bunying yang* (inner sea)... the

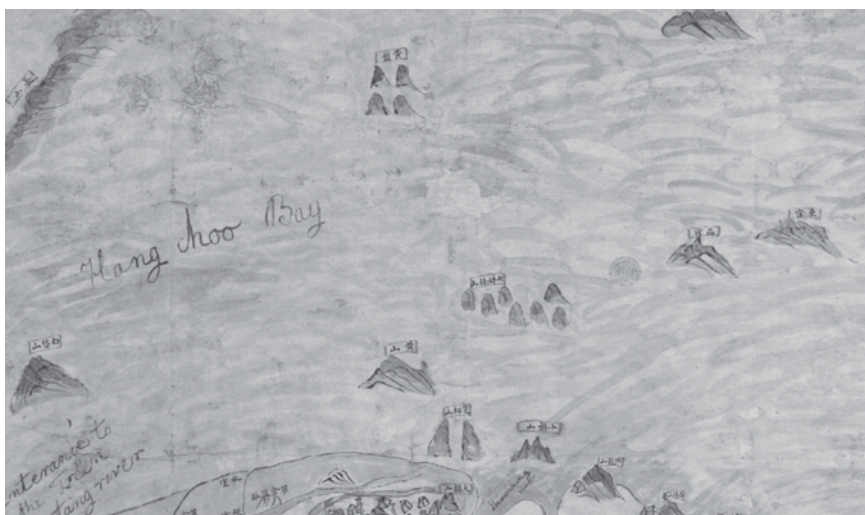


Figure 4.12: *Hangzhou Wan shuili yingxuntu* (Diagram of harbours and checkpoints of the Hangzhou Bay) Source: British Library, Identification number: Maps 188.kk.1 (5)

navy of Zhenghai county should stop patrolling beyond this line'. From these examples, it is clear that naval administration was always attached to coastal fortifications. It is also noticeable that the Qing court of the long eighteenth century was proactive enough to maintain a so-called land–sea protection tactic, at least cartographically.

After all, the cartographers of these *yingxun tu* have provided us with a unique perspective, inviting us to contemplate the Qing dynasty through an oceanic angle. They presented the Qing as a discerning, sensible sea power in the early modern era, actively engaging with its maritime frontier, establishing principles of coastal defence, and advancing innovative approaches to conceptualising and asserting territorial claims. Their sea charts offer valuable insights into the Qing strategic maritime prowess, reshaping our understanding of the dynasty's multifaceted relationship with the sea and its role as a significant player in the global maritime domain. In contrast to the charts produced in Western Europe, primarily employed for sea battles and overseas expansionist endeavours, the *yingxun tu* lacked a sense of urgency. Instead, they served as pragmatic tools for the Qing maritime governance and territorial management. While Western navigational charts were often driven by ambitions of conquest and territorial acquisition, the *yingxun tu* focused on the proactive approach of the Qing

court to securing its coastal borders and enhancing trade and navigation within its own territories.

The Western charts of the time, exemplified by the renowned portolan charts used by European sailors, were primarily navigational aids designed to facilitate navigation and exploration on far-flung voyages. They provided detailed depictions of coastal features, navigational markers, and hazards to assist mariners in their quests for new trade routes and territories. In this context, the urgency to expand their empires and gain a competitive edge in the global race fuelled Western cartography. On the other hand, the *yingxun tu* of the Qing dynasty were concerned with the intricacies of coastal defence, patrolling, and protecting maritime trade routes within their established territories. The Qing cartographers recognised the significance of maintaining a strong naval presence to safeguard their economic interests and coastal regions from potential threats. Thus, the *yingxun tu* were more 'protective' in nature, reflecting the Qing's focus on safeguarding their existing maritime domains rather than pursuing distant overseas conquests. In a way, such contrasting approaches of Western and Qing cartography offer valuable insights into how early modern powers leveraged cartography and their mapmakers as instrumental tools to advance their maritime interests and assert their dominance in the maritime arena.

Although the Qing dynasty did not actively seek to deploy its navy to distant seas, it would be implausible to assert that the Qing state remained oblivious to the potential threats posed by foreign powers from maritime domains. We have concrete evidence that the Kangxi court already kept an eye on issues related to naval defence. In an imperial edict dated in 1716, the Kangxi emperor noted that 'after hundreds of years, we are afraid that [the Qing] will suffer from injury from the overseas countries, for instance, from the European countries'.<sup>29</sup> Among those European powers, the emperor was particularly concerned about the Russians, the Dutch, and the Portuguese. While he believed that the Russians were 'thinking of constructing forts and ships which would allow them to come into the seas around Japan, Korea, and also China's maritime provinces', the Dutch, in his view, had 'acquired experienced soldiers, an unlimited number of strong vessels, and much money'. Commenting on the Portuguese, the emperor was equally worried that the

29. The imperial edict is translated by Lo-shu Fu – see his *A Documentary Chronicle of Sino-Western Relations (1644–1820)* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966), vol. 1, p.106. See also Jonathan D. Spence, *Emperor of China: Self-Portrait of K'ang-hsi* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 82.

Portuguese could easily become very powerful in the countries neighbouring China and Japan due to the geographical proximity of their bases in Luzon. At the same time, the Portuguese monarch was 'extremely wealthy and powerful, who expanded across the sea throughout the world'.<sup>30</sup> From these testimonies one should see in fact that Qing China was not an empire in the East isolated from the wider ocean, but an Asian player involved in the potential rivalry between empires across the maritime domain.

### Sandy Yellow, Cadet Blue, and Light Turquoise

By this point, we should have obtained an outline of the nature, functions, and some key characteristics of the *yingxun tu* produced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet, there remain two more features pertaining to these diagrams that are worthy of our attention. The first is the visual design and artistic value that these cartographic sources embodied. In terms of the actual sizes of these *yingxun tu*, they are not as long and wide as other imperial or official maps, such as the *quanlan tu* (an overview map of the empire), which were released during the High Qing period.<sup>31</sup> Most of the *yingxun tu* in this discussion are usually between 55 by 60 cm and 56 by 67 cm in scale. In addition, they were not painted on scrolls but on note papers, which further suggests that these *yingxun tu* indeed suited their purpose of principally serving coastal officials and naval commanders, whether they were on or off duty. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, even though most of these *yingxun tu* were relatively sketchily rendered hand-drawings, this does not necessarily mean that they were not accurate in locating strategic areas, including harbours, river mouths, sandbars, and islands, nor that they were poorly crafted. In fact, most of them were neatly and accurately presented, as shown in the aforementioned *Pingyang Ying yan hai jie zhi tu* (Figure

30. These records were extracted from Antoine Gauboil, *Correspondance de Peking, 1722–1759* (Geneva, Librairie Dorz, 1970), "Letter to P. Berthier in 1752," p. 710. The letter was originally published in French, while part of it was translated by Laura Hostetler in her article "Qing Connections to the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China," pp. 654–656.

31. Laura Hostetler, "Early Modern Mapping at the Qing Court: Survey Maps from the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong Reign Periods," in Yongtao Du and Jeff Kyong-McClain (eds.), *Chinese History in Geographical Perspective* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 17–18.

4.1), *Taizhoufu Taipingxian haiyang quantu* (Figure 4.4), and *Changshi shuishiyang neiwaiyang yu tu* (Figure 4.11).

If we take a closer look at the colour palettes of these *yingxun tu*, most were painted in sandy yellow, cadet blue, and light turquoise. Occasionally we also find red and brown on these charts. To a substantial extent, yellow, blue, and turquoise were the three main hues marine cartographers tended to use during the Ming and Qing eras. Since the boundaries between river, sea, islands, and land are coloured differently, their geographical features are easy to detect and differentiate. In most cases, officially supervised sea charts were more 'colourful' than privately produced ones. For instance, those sea charts that were attached to maritime writings authored by private writers in the eighteenth century were simply drawn in black and white, such as the *sihai quantu* appended to Chen Lunjiong's *The Record of Things Seen and Heard among the Maritime Kingdoms* (*Haiguo wenjian lu*). Compared to other private sea charts, these *yingxun tu* were artistically produced in terms of the variety of colours applied. Based on their colour palettes, it is highly likely that these sea charts were produced officially by experienced and talented cartographers.

Most of these *yingxun tu* have been well-preserved and are in outstanding condition, even after all these years. This indicates that the materials and paints used to compile these *yingxun tu* were of decent quality. The coastlines, islands, patrolling towers, and coastal fortifications are still sharply delineated and clearly and easily identified. Some *yingxun tu* that were produced in the nineteenth century even exquisitely feature the various outlooks and different sizes of the various Chinese junks of the time, for example, the 'Diagram of Chenghai, Chaoyang, Huilai, and the Nanao island (*Chaozhou fu Chenghai Chaoyang Huilai Nanaodao fangyutu*)' produced in around 1850 (see Figure 4.13) and the 'Complete diagram of the harbours and checkpoints in Fushan (*Fushan yingxun zongtu*)', released in around 1794 (Figure 4.14). It is plausible to speculate that the inclusion of depictions of junks in these sea charts served a practical purpose, aiding naval officers and soldiers in distinguishing the diverse array of trading vessels that plied the sea. However, beyond their utilitarian function, these little sailing craft exude a captivating artistic charm that cannot be overlooked. Those anonymous cartographers skilfully applied various colours, textures, and sophisticated lines to bring life to these vessels, evoking a sense of motion and vitality amidst the vast oceanic expanse. Each junk seems to possess a unique character, reflecting the regional distinctions and cultural nuances of the maritime communities they represent. Additionally, the presence of these charming sailing vessels provides us with a glimpse



Figure 4.13: *Chaozhou fu Chenghai Chaoyang Huilai Nanaodao fangyutu* (Diagram of Chenghai, Chaoyang, Huilai, and the Nanao island)

Source: National Library of Australia, Identification number: 230559800

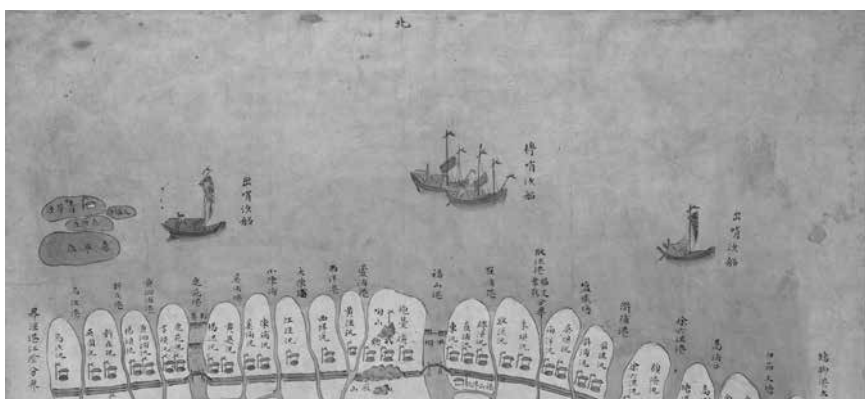


Figure 4.14: *Fushan yingxun zongtu* (Complete diagram of the harbours and checkpoints in Fushan)

Source: British Library, Identification number:

Add. MS. 16361 (U)

into the rich maritime culture and bustling trade activities that thrived along the coastal regions of the Qing dynasty. By capturing the essence of these maritime interactions, the *yingxun tu* transcends mere cartographic function, illuminating a narrative of the Qing engagement with the sea, where both pragmatic considerations and artistic expression converge to create a holistic and captivating depiction of its maritime frontier.

The second noteworthy characteristic of these *yingxun tu* lies in the exquisite beauty and readability of their paratexts. The accompanying text is precisely composed, adorned with elegant calligraphy, and thoughtfully organised, sometimes being placed within neat boxes or squares to enhance the overall visual appeal of the charts. These elements not only contribute to the aesthetic refinement of the diagrams but also facilitate easy comprehension and navigation for those who consulted them. If we agree with Jeremy W. Crampton that maps should not simply be studied as an operational tool but examined according to a 'tripartite classification system', considering maps as 'artefacts, images, and vehicles',<sup>32</sup> then I believe that the artistic and cultural merits of these richly painted *yingxun tu* also deserve our scholarly attention.

Despite the appealing materiality and aesthetic quality of these *yingxun tu*, it may well be the case that Qing maritime historians do not take the illustrative evidence of these sea charts seriously enough. By contrast, in my view, historians still prefer to deal with texts and numbers but neglect the deeper levels of experience that images probe or imply. Looking at what has been published in the field of Qing maritime history over the past few decades, we find that relatively few historians have focused on sea charts produced by the Qing artisans, compared to the numbers who work in repositories of written documents. In cases in which these charts or coastal maps are discussed in the text, such evidence is often used to illustrate conclusions that the author has already reached by other means, rather than giving fresh answers or asking new questions.

While we are generally unaware of the instrumental value of these sea charts and coastal diagrams, the 'pictorial turn' was already visible in the English-speaking world early in the 1980s. Historians such as John Blake, Peter Whitfield, and some of their contemporaries have long discovered the significance of nautical maps and sea charts as evidence for British maritime and European navigational history.<sup>33</sup> One might argue that as imperial China,

32. Jeremy Crampton, *The Political Mapping of Cyberspace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 185.

33. John Blake, *The Sea Chart: The Illustrated History of Nautical Maps and Navigational*

unlike a seafaring Europe, was less interested in marine exploration and navigation, the usage of sea charts was less applicable to complicate the maritime history of the Qing dynasty. This assumption seems a valid one, but it is also misleading. I would like to suggest contrariwise that well into the eighteenth century these *yingxun tu*, as demonstrated above, made an excellent illustration of Qing dynasty's sophisticated and deliberate naval policies applied across the maritime frontier. It would be difficult indeed to recognise the perimeter of an inner sea, for instance, without the evidence of some of those *yingxun tu*, while the sea patrolled between the coastline and offshore islands would be equally hard to identify without these coastal diagrams.

Nevertheless, while these *yingxun tu* hold valuable insights, some scepticism arises concerning their absolute reliability as historical sources. Some historians may question the wisdom of utilising charts compiled by (anonymous) cartographers, viewing them as too intuitive and speculative to be deemed entirely trustworthy. Moreover, they might not conform to the European standards of precise sea charting prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading to concerns over their accuracy as authentic maps. Indeed, it would be imprudent to claim that these *yingxun tu* are flawless and adhere perfectly to a 'scientific standard' upheld by Western cartographers. However, it is essential to consider the broader purpose of studying these diagrams. The goal is to decipher the deeper meaning embedded within these illustrations, rather than solely assessing their accuracy based on contemporary standards. Who commissioned the creation of these diagrams? Who were the intended viewers? Who were the talented mapmakers behind their production? And most importantly, what drove the creation of these remarkable visual representations? It is plausible to argue that these questions (all of them answered in this article, except the ones considering their authorship) will help historians to reconstruct sensibilities of the past through imagery. Even though the Qing dynasty has long been reckoned a land-based power, the seascape, as shown by those anonymous cartographers, could also be associated with a kind of maritime awareness derived from the Qing administration through a visual perspective. In other words, the *yingxun tu* discussed in this paper bring home to us what we might have known but did not take so seriously before. Whether the mapmakers were conveying information or giving aesthetic pleasure, they allowed us to conceptualise the maritime vision of the Qing court more vividly. Although written documents also offer valuable clues, the

images themselves are a necessary ingredient to display the power of visual representations as an important form of historical evidence. As the British historian Stephen Bann succinctly puts it, our position face-to-face with an image brings us 'face-to-face with history'.<sup>34</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Over the past few years, scholars in maritime and Qing history have begun to challenge the orthodox misapprehension that the Manchu authority displayed indifference towards the sea prior to the First Opium War. The war itself, as suggested in Chapter One, no longer presents a simple division between a China that was disengaged with the sea and one that was compelled to embrace it. Specifically, revisionist historians convincingly argued against interpreting the Qing naval narrative of the eighteenth century solely through the lens of the nineteenth century. The eighteenth-century Qing court was in actuality aware and assertive enough to sustain its maritime sovereignty across its inner sea space via various conduits. One of the attempts to ensure the safety of its maritime frontier was tied to an up-to-date, sufficient knowledge of the coast, the depths of the waters, and the strategic locations of islands, reefs, shoals, and other dangers to patrols. Such information, as this chapter has borne out, was furnished by some maritime diagrams entitled *yingxun tu* compiled by a group of anonymous cartographers. By focusing on this type of sea chart, I hope I have added an array of substantial elements to the emerging revisionist dialogue by visualising and considering the way the Qing court actualised its tactics across its sea border. More than just a set of military maps, strategic diagrams, or aesthetic displays, the *yingxun tu* discussed in this chapter serve as an effective tool demonstrating the significance of the 'Qing way' charting the coast, enforcing its land-sea protection tactics, and systematising the inner-outer administrative mechanism.

Although the *yingxun tu* under discussion may not possess the same level of meticulous and detailed cartographic intricacies as European seafarers might have anticipated, the Qing cartographers were acutely aware of the importance of maritime governance and administration. An examination of their content, nature, and function affords us the scope to identify a close

34. Stephen Bann, "Face-to-Face with History," *New Literary History*, XXIX (1998), pp. 235–246.

connection between provincial coastal management and strategic concerns. In a nutshell, through careful visual, textual, and paratextual readings of the *yingxun tu*, we can elaborate and deepen our understanding of the Qing's military engagement with its blue frontier throughout the long eighteenth century. Nonetheless, I should remind readers of the danger of over-using and interpreting one single type of historical material, such as these. We should not overlook the various official and private documents pertaining to its maritime affairs (*haiyang zhishi*), including imperial edicts, court memorials, government papers, gazetteers, naval documents, envoy records, customs reports, and some private writings. As we progress through the upcoming chapters, we will have the opportunity to encounter and explore some of these invaluable materials. Fundamentally, the purpose here is to suggest that these *yingxun tu*, along with all other types of primary source, serve as valuable evidence to refine our conventional and outdated perception of the relationship between the great Qing and the sea.

All in all, by imposing a set of deliberate patterns, well-defined boundaries, and strategically segmented areas off the coast of China, these anonymous cartographers demonstrated significant expertise and precision. Their sea charts not only served as navigational aids but also played a role in illuminating a distant maritime frontier – an imperial and supposedly perpetual space where the Qing approach to policing and administration found practical manifestation. They were the architects who crafted a spatial domain that extended from the land to the waters, solidifying the Qing state's practical jurisdiction and delineating the scope of what the central authority deemed to be within its borders in the Asian Sea. Within this defined space, interactions with outsiders were carefully regulated, while imperial authority was unequivocally asserted. Although their identities remain elusive, their productions continue to captivate scholars and enthusiasts alike, offering invaluable insights into the strategies and policies adopted by the Qing administration concerning maritime security and governance.

As we draw the curtains on our examination of these enigmatic mapmakers and their contributions to our understanding of Qing maritime endeavours, visions, and complexities, we set our sights on a pivotal figure in history who embodied the very essence of these maritime pursuits. In the upcoming chapter, we embark on the enthralling journey of the extraordinary Admiral Shi Lang, whose strategic brilliance and leadership forged a lasting legacy resonating not only throughout Qing history but also persisting to this very day.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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# The Legendary Admiral

In the year 1683, when the Ottomans besieged the city of Vienna with a force of 173,000 men, the Qing dynasty, armed with formidable fleets and advanced cannons, executed a devastating military offensive that led to the downfall of the Zheng maritime apparatus. The term ‘Zheng maritime apparatus’ denotes the extensive and influential network of seaborne activities established and controlled by the Zheng family during the late Ming and early Qing in the seventeenth century. Initially, the Zheng’s endeavours were centred in the southeastern coastal region of China, with a particular focus on Fujian province. Over time, they expanded their influence across the Taiwan Strait and into parts of the Fujianese diaspora in Southeast Asia. Their maritime dominance extended across a broad spectrum, comprising trade, naval expeditions, piracy, and territorial expansion. At the zenith of their power, the Zhengs commanded an impressive naval force, comprising both military vessels and merchant junks. Leveraging their maritime expertise strategically, they extended their influence well beyond coastal trading and piracy, successfully establishing a quasi-independent domain that held sway over Taiwan and certain coastal regions of Fujian.<sup>1</sup> Despite their significant achievements, they proved unable to withstand the might of the Qing navy, which eventually brought them to their knees.

Subsequently, unlike the Ottomans, who suffered defeat in the Battle of Vienna, the Manchu asserted their control over Taiwan, signifying an alternation in the island’s sovereignty. By integrating Taiwan, particularly the western part of it, into the empire, the Qing court not only reshaped the island’s governance but also set the stage for broader geopolitical realignment in East Asia. Taking a central role in this emblematic military

1. See Xing Hang’s fabulous study on the Zhengs: *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

campaign was Shi Lang, the commander-in-chief of the Qing navy and the central figure of focus in this chapter. Hailing from Fujian province, Shi Lang's presence at the forefront of these events is paramount in unravelling the intricate narrative that unfolds. Ironically, Shi had previously been an integral part of the Zheng camp, earning their trust and recognition as a valuable member of the Zheng family. Yet, by the mid-1600s, he had turned his back on his former allegiances and sided with the Manchu. In retrospect, Shi Lang's relationship with the Zheng family was both intriguing and complex, particularly concerning his interactions with Zheng Zhilong (1604–1661) and Zheng Chenggong (1624–1662; known to Westerners as Koxinga), the two influential leaders of the Zheng maritime apparatus.

Zheng Zhilong, the founding figure of the Zheng force, recognised Shi Lang's exceptional prowess in naval warfare early on and appointed him as captain of the navy's left vanguard in 1640. In the subsequent years, Shi Lang's capabilities earned him successive promotions within the Zheng ranks. However, the dynamics changed dramatically in 1646 when Zheng Zhilong began contemplating the possibility of defecting to the Manchu side. This startling decision by Zheng Zhilong significantly impacted Shi's career trajectory. Realising that some Ming generals who had aligned with the Qing were being rewarded substantially, Zheng Zhilong chose to withdraw his resistance against the Manchu forces. This left the Zhejiang passes unguarded and allowed the conquerors to capture Fuzhou.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this Manchu victory, Zheng Zhilong received significant rewards and recognition. However, not all of Zheng Zhilong's followers were convinced to serve the Qing and the Manchu, most notably his son, Zheng Chenggong, and his trusted right-hand man, Shi Lang.<sup>3</sup>

With Zheng Zhilong no longer opposing the Manchu, Zheng Chenggong became the legitimate successor of the maritime empire, and Shi Lang continued to be a reliable subordinate. However, whereas Shi Lang was once Koxinga's sworn brother, he failed to maintain a harmonious relationship with his new leader. Koxinga had always been jealous of the bond of trust

2. John E. Wills Jr., *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 224.

3. Tonio Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory over the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 124–136; John E. Wills Jr., "The Seventeenth-century Transformation: Taiwan under the Dutch and the Cheng Regime," in Murray A. Rubinstein (ed.), *Taiwan: A New History* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 84–106.

that existed between Shi Lang and his father.<sup>4</sup> Added to this were the many occasions during which Shi Lang offended Koxinga, both publicly and privately. The most intense conflict between the two men occurred after Koxinga's military loss at Xiamen. Shi Lang had accurately predicted Xiamen's vulnerability and, therefore, grew increasingly arrogant and often openly questioned Koxinga's military tactics.<sup>5</sup> In late 1651, no longer able to bear Shi Lang's arrogance and temperament, Koxinga imprisoned him on a boat, along with his father and younger brother. But two sympathetic followers helped Shi Lang escape to the Qing, where he surrendered to the Manchu. Meanwhile, back in Taiwan, Koxinga displayed no clemency towards Shi Lang's family. In a chilling act of vengeance, he ordered the execution of Shi's father, brother, son, and nephew, all in a single night. Shi Lang considered this bloody retaliation to be unforgiveable and made a resolute decision never to return to the Zheng camp. Instead, he committed himself to serving the Manchu authorities and seeking revenge for the tragic loss of his beloved family.<sup>6</sup>

During his initial decade of service, Shi Lang garnered substantial esteem from the Qing court due to his extensive naval expertise and his well-established network of commercial connections spanning East Asia. Swiftly ascending the ranks, he achieved the distinguished position of assistant brigadier general. In 1668, Shi presented an audacious strategy aimed at eradicating the Zhengs by orchestrating an invasion of Taiwan and the Pescadores.<sup>7</sup> However, the Qing court was ensnared in the tumultuous quagmire of the Three Feudatories Revolt (1673–1681), rendering any maritime campaign unfeasible. It was not until 1681 that Shi's visionary plan gained the long-awaited endorsement from the Kangxi emperor, tasking him with organising and training the navy. The obvious objective was to declare war on Taiwan.<sup>8</sup> In July 1683, Shi Lang led a fleet of 300 vessels, predominantly crewed by valiant Fujian soldiers, to a resounding triumph in the Pescadores, securing a decisive naval victory. In the ensuing

4. Sheng Bing, "Zheng Chenggong yu Shi Lang zhijian de enyuan," *Lishi yuekan*, vol. 38 (March 1991), pp. 86–89.

5. Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia*, p. 81.

6. Chen Jiexian, *Bu titou yu Liangguo lun* (Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 2001), p. 149; An Ran, *Shi Lang da jiangjun: Pingding Taiwan chuan qi* (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 2006), pp. 5–11.

7. Zhou Xueyu, *Shi Lang gong Tai di gong yu guo* (Taipei: Taiyuan chubanshe, 1990).

8. Lin Qian, "Kangxi tongyi Taiwan de zhanlue juece," *Qingshi yanjiu*, vol. 3 (August 2000), pp. 44–49.

October, his unwavering determination carried him to Taiwan, where he compelled Zheng Keshuang (1670–1707), the grandson of Koxinga and the final leader of the Zheng faction, to surrender.<sup>9</sup> For his success in this campaign, Shi Lang was bestowed the title of marquis (*jinghai hou*) – an honour that was passed down to his ancestors, in perpetuity (*shixi wangti*).<sup>10</sup>

This is a brief account of one of the Qing's most extraordinary admirals and statesmen. However, the aim of this chapter is not to unpack the eventful life of this notable figure – from his shifting loyalties to his bitter antagonism toward the Zheng camp. What follows does not even provide an outline of how Shi Lang defeated the Zheng fleet in the Taiwan Strait and the Pescadores – a textbook case of a significant achievement in the Great Qing, in both diplomacy and military effectiveness and prowess, as it meant conquering Taiwan. Nor does this chapter say much about the way Shi Lang administrated the island of Taiwan after it was annexed by the Qing. Scholars and historians of the rapidly growing field of maritime Asian studies have conducted extensive research on the life and times of Shi Lang; and they continue to uncover new information and make it available to Chinese and Anglophone audiences.<sup>11</sup> This chapter differs from these other promising works of scholarship. Here, we are about to explore the evolving legacy of Shi Lang through the production and (re)interpretation of history, in China and Taiwan, since the late seventeenth century.

Representations of Shi Lang, in China and Taiwan, as seen in private writings, commentaries, scholarly articles, books, comics, film, television, and other media, have wildly diverged, especially over the last decade. Commentaries on the Qing, produced in China, present Shi Lang as a

9. John R. Shepherd, "The Island Frontier of the Ch'ing, 1684–1780," in Murray A. Rubinstein (ed.), *Taiwan: A New History*, pp. 107–132; Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 849; Zhou Wanyao, *Haiyang yu zhimindi Taiwan lunji* (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2012), p. 182.

10. Shi Weiqing, *Shi Lang nianpu kaolue* (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1998); Ino Kanori, *Taiwan bunkashi* (Taihoku-shi: Nanten Shokyoku, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 187–191.

11. See, for instance, John E. Wills Jr., "Maritime China from Wang Chih to Shih Lang [Shi Lang]: Themes in Peripheral History," in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills Jr. (eds.), *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-century China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 228–234; Shi Weiqing, *Shi Lang zai Taiwan xunyede yanjiu* (Shanghai: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2015); Xue Zaiquan, *Shi Lang yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001); Zhang Xiaotian, *Jinhai da jiangjun* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2006).

promising admiral who helped consolidate and expand Qing rule. However, his legacy did not receive much attention during the Republican period and the first few decades of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It was not until the 1980s that Shi Lang became viewed as a maritime hero (*haishang yingxiong*) for his momentous victory over the Zheng force – a reputation that has endured to this very day. From the 1980s on, discussions of Shi have periodically emerged in PRC productions that use him and his story as a vehicle with which to disseminate a variety of political messages. In Taiwan, by contrast, Shi's legacy remains a subject of ongoing contention. Notably, he has been depicted not as an exceptional general or a revered national hero, but rather as a figure who shifted allegiance to the Ming and subsequently assumed an autocratic role as governor of Taiwan. It was only in the 1990s that historians and the general public began to re-evaluate his significance. Accordingly, I will argue that these divergent discourses reflect the influence of, if not a subjugation to, the official agendas and political aspirations of scholars in the field, and that these have persisted throughout the twentieth century. For over 100 years, the story of Shi Lang has conformed to the official line of the Qing, the Nationalists and, later, the Communist authorities. In other words, the story itself has provided a kind of operational resource that respective governments have utilised as a means to (de)construct history in order to achieve their political goals. The varied and contrasting perspectives surrounding Shi Lang exemplify a common phenomenon: when one set of leaders adopts a specific historical narrative, their counterparts are compelled to reject it in order to steer clear of embracing the political and cultural connotations tied to the disputed viewpoint.

Nonetheless, these centralised, orchestrated, and government indoctrinations or narratives did not always maintain the upper hand. They were also tangled up in local and regional politics, particularly in the Minnan region, often referred to as the Minnan Golden Triangle, extending to the coastal areas of Southern Fujian. On many occasions, the reception of the official narratives was complicated and contingent upon the local conditions within Minnan, which did not precisely fit within the 'central direction' (*zhongyang luxian*) of the discourse. This chapter, therefore, will also focus on the state's relationship with this (dis)connected Minnan articulation that was profoundly shaped by the maritime domain. Within this context, we will examine three discernible trajectories in Minnan unique cultural evolution, spanning from the Qing dynasty to the contemporary era. We will also proceed by comparing the commentaries on the official narratives

of Shi Lang and the local interpretations of this historical figure and how they interact with each other.

As we delve into the Minnan region, we will uncover a multifaceted narrative landscape. Here, not only do intellectuals challenge the official narrative by scrutinising specific depictions of this historical figure, but ordinary citizens living by the sea also embark on their own significant interpretive journeys. These interpretations are anchored in their distinct cultural or localised vantage points, often standing in contrast to the state-endorsed portrayal. This dynamic interplay between diverse viewpoints and actions paints a layered tableau that traverses levels that are typically intertwined or confined within distinct realms of states, spaces, generations, and practices. In a nutshell, in this chapter, we will complicate the ways in which the legacy of Shi Lang functioned as it percolated throughout Chinese history. I am interested not only in delineating how the story has evolved as a legacy, but also in exploring the rich variety of ways in which an individual or a community has adapted the contents of Shi Lang's story to suit the demands of various historical situations. As Paul Cohen astutely posits in one of his classics, *Speaking to History: The Story of King Goujian in Twentieth-century China*, a historical narrative, when transposed into different historical landscapes, assumes varying connotations.<sup>12</sup> This exploration should then be able to open the door to a nuanced understanding of how Shi Lang's legacy underwent transformation in response to the changing currents of history, thereby offering valuable insights into the dynamic evolution of his historical impact.

### Historical Figures and Their Legacies

Psychologist Jerome Burner, renowned for his insightful study *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*, casts a thought-provoking light on the interplay between historical narratives and the tangible fabric of our existence. He eloquently articulates that '[w]e cling to narrative models of reality and use them to shape our everyday experiences. We say of people we know in real life that they are Micawbers or characters right out of a Thomas Wolfe novel'.<sup>13</sup> This assertion underlines the powerful role narratives play

12. Paul A. Cohen, *Speaking to History: The Story of King Goujian in Twentieth-century China* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 228–229.

13. Jerome Burner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

in constructing and representing our perceptions, actions, and identities, as they serve not only as records of the past but also as templates that mould our understanding of the present and our projections into the future.<sup>14</sup>

Burner's perspective resonates universally, transcending cultural boundaries. While his insights have been gleaned from a Western context, they hold equal pertinence in the Chinese historical and cultural setting. In fact, almost all cultures have shared stories, legends, myths, and celebrated historical figures. The pantheon of such figures varies in prominence – some assume a mantle of ubiquitous recognition, seamlessly threading through the collective consciousness of an entire culture, while others carve a niche within specific subsets of that culture. There also exist those luminaries who remain accessible primarily to the erudite or the privileged echelons of society. This parallel phenomenon reflects the intrinsic human propensity to ascribe meaning and coherence to our existence through stories. Indeed, tales of heroism, sagas of sacrifice, and chronicles of triumphs and tribulations have a transcendent appeal that traverses cultural boundaries. Whether it's the Greek epics that pervade Western thought or the revered figures that grace China's past, these narratives function as more than mere chronicles; they are the threads that help construct a shared identity and collective aspirations. They offer a common vocabulary through which a society imparts values, imparts wisdom, and establishes a shared understanding of its past, present, and aspirations for the future. From emperors to heroes, poets to revolutionaries, these figures personify ideals, and their stories become vehicles for perpetuating cultural values and shaping a sense of belonging.

Much akin to the Western milieu, China possesses its own storehouse of well-known historical figures and culturally shared stories. Nonetheless, as pinpointed by Paul Cohen, what distinguishes China from the West is the utmost importance for the 'Chinese to communicate through stories and historical figures what they want their fellow Chinese to feel and think'.<sup>15</sup> This propensity finds its roots in a historical proclivity, as the Chinese have, since antiquity, established a complementary rationale for the indispensability of conveying information through narratives and historical personages.

This proclivity is perhaps best exemplified through the prism of figures like Shi Lang who, in the Chinese perspective, epitomise specific meanings

University Press, 2002), pp. 34–35.

14. Ibid., p. 16.

15. Paul A. Cohen, *Speaking to History*, p. 234.

and roles within the collective contexts of Chinese history. This category extends to characters such as King Guojian (r. 496–465 BC), Guan Yu (160–219), Wen Tianxiang (1236–1283), Yue Fei (1103–1142), and Koxinga.<sup>16</sup> Beyond merely bridging past and present, these historical figures wield enduring legacies that serve as potent tools through which the central authority can assert distinct cultural significances, be it objectively or subjectively construed. In essence, the central authorities retain the prerogative to (re)interpret these historical figures, infusing them with contemporary relevance and charting trajectories for the future. In this dynamic, these legacies forge a form of symbolic communion that assumes a dual role: underpinning the objective existence of a culture and fostering an individual's subjective affiliation with that cultural context. To quote Mark Elvin, the shared stories centred around certain historical figures carve out the 'intellectual landscape of a human group' while concurrently shaping their 'conceptualized physical landscape'.<sup>17</sup> That being said, the functions historical figures perform would mainly be determined by the specific political and cultural milieu in which these figures are represented.

### Shi Lang in the Great Qing

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Qing officially viewed Shi Lang as a preeminent general, adroitly orchestrating the consolidation of Qing dominion over the vast expanse of South China. In a similar fashion, Shi was favourably assessed in unofficial accounts (*yeshi*), meticulously chronicled by local writers and erudite gentry scholars who imbued their works with the tenets of the revered Confucian tradition. In a harmonious cadence with the imperial stance, these myriad commentaries

16. For instance, Guan Yu was portrayed as a loyal national hero, and even defined as the God of War – see Kam Louie, "Sexuality, Masculinity and Politics in Chinese Culture: The Case of the 'Sanguo' Hero Guan Yu," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4 (October 1999), pp. 835–859; Prasenjit Duara, "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4 (November 1988), pp. 778–795. Yue Fei was widely seen as a patriot and national folk hero – see Gong Yanming, *Yue Fei pingzhuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1969); Wang Zengyu, *Jinzhong baoguo: Yue Fei xinzhuang* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2001). These canonisations both perpetuated and reflected their accumulating popularities among ordinary people.

17. Mark Elvin, *Changing Stories in the Chinese World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 5.

echoed the measured tones set forth by the Kangxi emperor. In fact, shortly after the conquest of Taiwan, the emperor admitted that Shi Lang was ‘a brilliant admiral who knew the islands (including Taiwan) very well’, anointing him as an incandescent luminary of naval strategy, his mastery of the islands, including the coveted Taiwan, unfurling like a brilliant constellation against the firmament of maritime conquest.<sup>18</sup> The emperor even disclosed the fact that he enjoyed discussing with Shi Lang ‘almost every strategy related to Taiwan’. He further noted, ‘because of his remarkable achievement (in pacifying Taiwan), I will grant Shi Lang wealth and glory ever after’.<sup>19</sup> Evidently, these discourses were adorned with the symphony of shared counsel, with the emperor himself confessing to the intellectual camaraderie that flourished between them – a camaraderie steeped in strategic deliberations that illuminated the maritime landscapes of Taiwan.

After Kangxi, the literati of Fujian, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang were the source of most of the unreserved praise for Shi Lang. For instance, in his *Minhai jiyao*, Xia Lin praised Shi’s military skill and courage, unyielding his courage and achievement as one of the guiding stars that illuminated the path of Qing ascendancy.<sup>20</sup> In harmonious chorus, voices like those of Zha Shenxing (1650–1727) and Chen Kangqi (1840–1890) joined the narrative by concurring that Shi Lang, as a mariner of profound impact, achieved great success in elevating Qing rule to another level and in bringing peace to the waters of the Fujian coast (the Minhai).<sup>21</sup> The prolific writer Ji Liuqi (1622–?) even dedicated an entire chapter within the pages of his *Mingji nanlüe* to Shi Lang. Aptly titled “The sea rebel captured and beheaded (*qinzhan haizei*)”, this chapter radiated effusive praise, a triumphant ode to Shi’s gallantry that had cast a luminous victory over the shadows of the Zhengs.<sup>22</sup> Here, Ji Liuqi’s words forged a bridge across time, uniting Shi’s valour with his conquest over the maritime rebels, his triumph resounding as a clarion call to generations yet unborn. These positive narratives converged over the course of the Qing: they lauded Shi as a significant contributor to Qing solidification and they noted that his accomplishment in conquering

18. Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’an guan (ed.), *Kangxi qiju zhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984) vol. 2, p. 1028.

19. Ibid.

20. Xia Lin, *Minhai jiyao* (Nantou: Taiwan sheng wenxian weiyuan hui, 1995), *juan shang*, 17a.

21. Zha Shenxing, *Deshulou zachao* (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling guji keyinshe, 1986), *juan* 9, 8a; Chen Kangqi, *Lanqian jiwen* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1970), *juan* 12, 11b.

22. Ji Liuqi, *Mingji nanlüe* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), ‘qinzhan haizei’.

the Zhengs surpassed his image as a defector who defied the Confucian concepts of loyalty and piety when he forsook his allegiance to the Zheng camp.

Despite these positive assessments of Shi Lang, it is worth noting that certain literati, like Xia Lin, also penned compassionate accounts of the Zheng family. Nevertheless, their depictions of the Zhengs were, to a great extent, shaped by the constraints imposed by the Qing cultural dominion, often referred to as a literary inquisition. This sweeping inquisition cast its net wide, encompassing a diverse array of subjects, genres, and literary forms, ranging from official governmental decrees to personal reflections. As a result, the Qing rigorously wielded this literary inquisition as a tool to bolster ideological conformity, casting the Zheng family into the role of rebels and marauders pitted against the supremacy of the Great Qing. The stern strictures of censorship left little room for literati to overtly express admiration or sympathy for the Zheng family. Instead, their sentiments found subtle refuge within nuanced narratives. For instance, when recounting the demise of Zheng Chenggong and the aftermath of his realm, Xia Lin lamented it as a 'misfortune',<sup>23</sup> while Xu Zi (1810–1862), another Qing historian, subtly conveyed his evaluation of Zheng's administrative approach as 'impartial and above board'.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, most of these scholarly appraisals were compiled from an outside-Taiwan perspective, originating from individuals who possessed neither direct experience of nor residence in Taiwan. In contrast, certain writers and officials, more intimately acquainted with the island or having possibly visited or dwelled there, harboured an alternative perspective on Shi Lang. To them, Shi Lang appeared as an ineffectual and overbearing statesman whose actions had engendered a series of challenges for the island's welfare. An illustrative case emerges in the pronouncements of Huang Shujing (1682–1758), the inaugural imperial high commissioner to Taiwan. Huang strongly censured the 'sea blockade policy' Shi Lang had implemented when he was the administrator of Taiwan. 'Due to his unfavourable ploy', as Huang decried it, 'the connections between Guangdong and Taiwan were severely damaged, thereby harming the economy of both sides and aggravating the problem of piracy along the Guangdong coast'.<sup>25</sup> In Yu Yonghe's (1645–?) *Bihai jiyao*, which is considered one of the most popular

23. Xia Lin, *Minhai jiyao*, p. 14.

24. Xu Zi, *Xiaotian jinian* (Taipei: Datong shuju, 2000), p. 964.

25. Huang Shujing, *Taihai shicha lu* (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2001), p. 82.

writings about Taiwan during the Qing, the author did not mention Shi Lang, not even in the chapter entitled “Anecdote of the unendorsed Zhengs (*Wei Zheng yishi*)”.<sup>26</sup> The rationale behind Yu Yonghe’s exclusion of Shi Lang from his treatise remains somewhat enigmatic. Yet, from these instances, it becomes evident that assessments of Shi Lang during the eighteenth century were far from uniformly favourable. At certain junctures, Shi’s reputation suffered, being depicted as a morally dubious opportunist and a disloyal official.<sup>27</sup> However, it is crucial to avoid presuming that these adverse appraisals emanated exclusively from a ‘local Taiwanese perspective’, as such a conclusion would overlook the fact that both Huang Shujing and Yu Yonghe were merely representatives of the Qing court, tasked with governing the island.

During the late nineteenth century, when both Japan and France posed threats to Taiwan,<sup>28</sup> the Qing court continued to uphold the official notion that Shi Lang’s military capabilities remained exemplary. This stance aimed not only to communicate to these nations but also to the broader Chinese populace that Taiwan was an indivisible part of the Qing empire. Employing historical figures and precedents to justify ongoing policies and agendas was a crucial governance strategy for the Qing. In moments of peril and complexity, authorities would spotlight specific figures, imbuing them with positive qualities to cultivate loyalty among officials and society at large. Consequently, in official memoirs, such as *Zhang wenxianggong zouyi*, and local gazetteers, such as *Guangxu Shuntian fuzhi*, there are accounts of the Qing using the image of Shi Lang as the commander of the conquest of Taiwan so as to justify its annexation of the island.<sup>29</sup> This notion was championed by several scholars as well, reflecting the Qing court’s perspective on Shi Lang’s legacy. Renowned writers such as

26. Yu Yonghe, *Pihai jiyou* (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang, 1959). This edition is an edited print version of *Pihai jiyou*. If we consult the original version (printed in 1700 [Kangxi 39 *nian*]), Yu Yonghe did not mention Shi Lang either.

27. Liu Liangbi, *Chongxiu Fujian Taiwan fuzhi* (Taipei: Taiwan sheng wenxianhui, 1977), pp. 40–41; Li Guangdi, *Rongcun yulu xuji* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2000), *juan* 9, “Shi Lang.” For further discussion, see Lin Dengshun, “Shi Lang Qiliu Taiwan yi’tansuo,” *Guoli Tainan shifan xueyuan xuebao*, vol. 38 (2004), pp. 43–59.

28. Japan encroached Taiwan in 1873 (the Mudan Incident), whereas the French did so in 1884 (the Sino-French War).

29. Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang wenxianggong zouyi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), “*dianzou* 1,” p. 1242; *Guangxu Shuntian fuzhi* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1965), *juan* 101, “*renwu zhi* 11,” p. 2638.

Xu Ke (1869–1928) and Zheng Guanying (1842–1922) emphasised Shi Lang's pivotal role in Taiwan's history and its incorporation into the Qing realm. Both writers concur that Shi Lang was an exceptional, legendary hero, demonstrating prowess in naval battles, and a linchpin figure who facilitated the 'Qing–Taiwan integration'.<sup>30</sup> Jin Wuxiang, as recorded in his *Suxiang Suibi*, took this sentiment even further, presenting,

In the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Kangxi (1683), the emperor bestowed a poem on Shi Lang, parsing his remarkable victory in conquering Taiwan and extinguishing the rebels.... In the preface of his poem, the emperor explained his reason for not giving up Taiwan. It is mainly because he was so worried about the deteriorating coastal economy and he could hardly bear to see his citizens, who used to live along the coast, suffer from the worsening situation. He, thus, appointed Shi Lang to lead the navy and pacify Taiwan without further delay. Thanks to Shi Lang and his faithful soldiers, the Zheng soon surrendered to the Qing. The emperor indicated, in the preface, that he still remembered that he received the report of victory during the mid-autumn festival. Convinced that his empire would have fewer hindrances after the Taiwan issue was settled, he cheered. He bestowed Shi Lang with the garment he was wearing on the day the news of victory arrived. In addition, the emperor also wrote Shi a poem expressing his highest appreciation.<sup>31</sup>

A comprehensive examination of Jin Wuxiang's narrative rendition of the 'Taiwan story' would be exhaustive, but delving into the connection between the emperor and Shi Lang holds particular significance. In certain aspects, Jin's portrayal of Shi Lang is even more elevated than the previously discussed positive appraisals. Rather than extensively highlighting Shi's military acumen, Jin turns his attention to the aftermath of the conquest, focusing on the exceptional treatment Shi Lang received from the emperor. Within the context of dynastic eras, being graced with a poem from an emperor carried profound honour, while being adorned with an emperor's garment was the pinnacle of privilege. These details further reinforce the impression that, particularly in the eyes of the Kangxi emperor, Shi Lang had played an indispensable role in the Taiwan conquest. Jin's account also

30. Xu Ke, *Qingbei leichao* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 11a; Zheng Guanying, *Shengshi weiyuan* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2014), 25a.

31. Jin Wuxiang, *Suxiang suibi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 21a.

unveils a notion that the imperial consensus of the early Kangxi era cast a lasting influence, continuing to resonate within certain late-Qing narratives centred around Shi Lang.

The Treaty of Shimonosaki, in 1895, ceded Taiwan to the Japanese. Prior to the arrival of the Japanese army, Tang Jingsong (1841–1903), the governor of Taiwan province, embarked on an endeavour to establish a Republic of Formosa (*Taiwan minzhuguo*). However, this fledgling movement was promptly quashed by the Japanese, causing it to collapse within a mere five months. During this brief period of reform, Shi Lang was nowhere to be found. Neither Tang Jingsong nor his supporters attributed significant importance to Shi's legacy. Instead, they celebrated the legacy of Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga), who had successfully defeated foreign invaders (the Dutch) in the seventeenth century and had used Taiwan as a base from which to resist a Manchu incursion. In a temple in Tainan, which was erected in commemoration of Zheng Chenggong, Tang Jingsong even dedicated a couplet to this 'national hero', which is emblazoned in the temple's entrance, as follows:

From scholar to king, (Zheng Chenggong) is an exceptional model of all intellectuals in the world (*you xiucai feng wang, wei tianxia dushuren biekai shengmian*).

Expelling foreigners from the country, (he) revitalizes and rejuvenates all aspirants in China (*qu yizu chujing, yu Zhongguo youzhizhe zaigu xiongfeng*).

In stark contrast, following the Qing relinquishment of Taiwan to Japan, Shi Lang was omitted from the list of celebrated figures. When Zheng Chenggong was being worshipped as a remarkable hero, Shi failed to garner any positive appraisal largely due to the perception of his defection from the Zheng to the Manchu. During the period of Japanese occupation (1895–1945), his legacy languished in near obscurity. Remarkably, the Japanese conspicuously omitted any mention of Shi Lang from their publications and newspapers, such as the *Taiwan jiho* and *Taiwan nichinichi shipo*, suggesting an intentional effort to erase the Qing–Taiwan connection, given its association with colonial control.<sup>32</sup> This noticeable absence was

32. See Yuko Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 181–182.

compounded by Shi Lang's role as a symbol of Qing unity between Taiwan and the mainland, leading to his erasure from Taiwanese narratives as well. Nevertheless, despite the official nihilistic stance toward Shi Lang, traces of his legacy managed to persist in the historical accounts penned by both Chinese and Taiwanese scholars in colonial-era Taiwan – as we will discuss in further detail in subsequent sections.

### Shi Lang in the Republican and Early Communist Era

In 1912, the Qing dynasty came to an end and was replaced by Republican China. In the aftermath of the Qing, however, China was marred by a series of crises, unfolding like a relentless chain reaction. The tumultuous period saw the transition from Yuan Shikai's (1859–1916) monarchy to the fervour of the May Fourth Movement, accompanied by the shadow of warlordism and the subsequent eruption of the Communist–Nationalist civil war. The early thirties witnessed a convoluted interplay of power, and the nation grappled with the agonies of the Second Sino-Japanese War, further followed by the strife of a second domestic conflict from 1937 to 1949. Although there were progressive developments, the Republican era was characterised by a pervasive frustration of aspirations, countered by the surging tide of nationalism. During this epoch, a prevailing sentiment emerged – an urge to dismantle the vestiges of the Qing dynasty that came to be seen as a symbol of the country's backwardness, enfeeblement, and passiveness.

As with other revered Qing-era luminaries like Zheng Guofan (1811–1872), Zuo Zongtong (1812–1885), and Li Hongzhang (1823–1907), Shi Lang did not receive the same attention he had been accorded in previous centuries.<sup>33</sup> Instead, the collective gaze returned to Zheng Chenggong, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, a time of intensifying Japanese aggression. Zheng Chenggong's renown was revived primarily for his triumph over the Dutch and liberation of Taiwan in the seventeenth century, offering a potent example of Chinese defiance and ousting of

33. In the Republican era, Shi Lang fared better than some other Qing figures who were harshly criticised as emblems of national humiliation. Zheng Guofan, Zuo Zongtong, and Li Hongzhang were three significant examples. See Ronald C. Po, "Triumvirate in Late Imperial China: A Discussion on the Abbreviation 'Zeng-Zuo-Li,'" *Si yu yan*, vol. 48, no. 3 (September, 2010), pp. 1–36.

foreign dominion.<sup>34</sup> The Republican era also witnessed the revival of admiration for other historical figures such as Qi Jiguang (1528–1588), renowned for repelling the *wokou* pirates, Shi Kefa (1601–1645), who valiantly defended the Ming against the Manchus, and Yue Fei, a resolute, heroic symbol of resistance against foreign incursions during the Southern Song era.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, while Shi Lang had played a crucial role in aiding the Zheng against the Manchu before serving the Kangxi emperor, he did not find a place within this revived constellation. This omission could likely be attributed to the overzealous adulation he received during the Qing. In essence, during the Republican period, Shi was seen as an unwelcome Qing figure and was not treated favourably. In the *Draft History of the Qing* (*Qing shi gao*), Zhao Erxun (1844–1927) portrayed Shi Lang as a ‘leading figure’ who had pacified Taiwan, yet he only briefly mentioned Shi’s achievements.<sup>36</sup> However, as Zhao was a Qing loyalist, it is possible that he might have purposely downplayed Shi in his narrative, whereas, due to his scholarship, his assessments of Shi Lang and the Qing–Taiwan unification should have been extensively and objectively documented. Additionally, in the *General History of Taiwan* (*Taiwan tongshi*), Lian Heng (1878–1936) even depicted Shi Lang as a defector who had made a serious mistake:

Formerly, he had been a subordinate of the Zheng kingdom; he defected to the Qing because he had offended the Zheng ruler. It is infuriating to think that he intended to overthrow the only pro-Ming resistance at that moment. I went to great pains to understand how he had put his personal feelings against the Zheng above larger national interests.<sup>37</sup>

It is noteworthy that Lian Heng produced his *Taiwan tongshi* under a distinct and specific political climate. Consequently, his rationale and

34. See, for example, a five-part account of Zheng Chenggong’s heroic achievements in the Beijing newspaper *Shibao* (The Truth Post), dated 17–22 March 1934.

35. See Ray Huang, *1587, a Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 156–188; Huang Ko-wu, “Remembering Shi Kefa: Changing Images of a Hero in Late Imperial and Early Republican China,” a paper presented at the New England Regional Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (25 October 2003); Sun Jiang and Huang Donglan, “Yue Fei xushu: Gonggong jiyi yu guozu rentong,” *Ershiyi shiji*, vol. 86 (December 2004), pp. 88–100.

36. Zhao Erxun et al., *Qing shi gao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), *juan* 260, “liezhuan” 47.

37. Lian Heng, *Taiwan tongshi* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1991), *juan* 30, “liezhuan” 2.

mindset diverged substantially from those of scholars who had lived and written during the Qing dynasty (as previously introduced) or within the Republican China era (like Zhao Erxun). Lian Heng was 17 when the Qing was defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). The resonance of the nation's humiliation in that defeat seemingly coloured Lian's perception of the Qing as a frail and dwindling empire, one he did not hold in deep regard or attachment. Subsequently, during the colonial period, he found himself enlisted as an editor for the official *Tainan News Daily*. This journalistic role immersed him in the currents of nationalism, exposing him to the sentiments of the Taiwanese populace who harboured profound connections to their native heritage, language, and culture. In this context, his *Taiwan tongshi* assumed the mantle of a resounding manifesto, strongly emphasising the imperative of forging a cohesive and distinct national Taiwanese identity. As Shi Lang represented not only a Qing subject, but also a defector from a Taiwan-based Zheng empire, it is understandable that he was abased.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, Shi's legacy faced a somewhat cursory treatment within the PRC. An exception to this trend was witnessed in Fujian, where the academic community exhibited a keener interest, given that Shi Lang was born and raised in this region. Within this province's academic circles, particularly in university journals, research on Shi Lang gained prominence, centring on facets of the admiral's social background and military prowess. This type of narrative endured well into the 1990s. On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, however, a strong wave of negative assessments impugned Shi Lang's reputation, thereby mirroring the contestation between the two Chinas. Within Taiwan, the exiled Kuomintang government seized upon Shi Lang as a convenient target to bear the brunt of blame, depicting him as a defector who had forsaken the cause of the Zhengs and their pro-Ming resistance against the Manchu dynasty in favour of serving the Qing monarch. In a sharp juxtaposition, the revolutionary forces elevated Zheng Chenggong from a symbol of loyalty to a vanquished dynasty to an embodiment of national self-determination.<sup>38</sup> According to the Nationalists, like the Communists, the Qing and the Manchus had inflicted grievous harm upon authentic Chinese culture.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the primary task of the Kuomintang government was to eradicate

38. Ralph C. Croizier, *Koxinga and Chinese Nationalism: History, Myth, and the Hero* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 50–52.

39. Jiang Renjie, *Jiegou Zheng Chenggong* (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2006), pp. 118–123.

Qing influence. As Shi Lang was seen as a symbolic embodiment of the Qing and the mainland, he became the subject of criticism and his achievements were downplayed. On most occasions, he was tarnished with derogatory appellations such as *hangjian*, *zougou*, *minzu zuiren*, and/or *erchen*, all of which carried connotations of betrayal and treachery. These terms pointedly echoed discomfiting associations with the foreign entity of the Qing dynasty and the emerging People's Republic of China.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, in this political atmosphere, the Zhengs were cast as the architects of an independent and resolute maritime dominion, their legacy painted in contrasting strokes of resilience and defiance.

### Shi Lang after the Cultural Revolution

During the devastating Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), as was the case for most historical topics, research on Shi Lang came to a halt. Amid a radical movement to break from the past, libraries, museums, and archives became targets of frenzied raids, resulting in the destruction of numerous invaluable artifacts, texts, and documents. This cataclysmic episode marked a period of intellectual darkness, where the illumination of history was tragically dimmed. It was only in the relaxed political climate of the 1990s that academic interest in Shi Lang was revived. In the subsequent two decades, dating from the 1990s, academic appraisals of Shi Lang's legacy have closely adhered to the official narrative that crystallised amidst the most recent phase of resurgent tensions across the Taiwan Strait. This phase of 'renewed tension' materialised in the waning days of the Cold War, when seismic shifts in the balance of power profoundly restructured cross-strait relations (known as *liang'an guanxi*). As these geopolitical currents surged and altered trajectories, so too did the interpretation of Shi Lang's historical significance, becoming intertwined with the evolving dynamics of cross-strait interactions.

Following the ruling principle of his predecessor Chiang Ching-kuo (1910–1988), Lee Teng-hui shelved his plan to seek independence from the mainland and, instead, moved toward formulating a distinct and novel Taiwanese identity that would stand apart from the mainland's

40. Zhou Xueyu, *Shi Lang gong Tai di gong yu guo*, p. 24; Ge, Peng, "Minzu dajie, Qianqiu gongzui: Tan Pan Mingxiang Qing de Shi Lang," *Lishi yuekan*, vol. 38 (March 1991), pp. 78–85.

influence and narrative.<sup>41</sup> This strategic shift gained momentum in the year 2000, as Chen Shuibian assumed the presidency after Lee. Under Chen's leadership, the quest for a unique Taiwanese identity continued to gain traction, manifesting in increasingly audacious measures aimed at reinforcing Taiwan's global standing and unfastening the island's cultural and historical bonds from the mainland's embrace.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, amidst this divergence in cross-strait trajectories, the PRC government embarked on an ambitious trajectory of its own. Driven by aspirations to ascend to twenty-first-century superpower status, the Chinese Communist Party assumed a determined posture to claim its position at the zenith of the international order.<sup>43</sup> In this resolute pursuit, the restoration of China's erstwhile territories, including Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, emerged as non-negotiable prerequisites for the resurgence of China's historical grandeur and the charting of a new trajectory for its future.<sup>44</sup>

In political, economic, and cultural respects, the PRC has strategically employed instrumentalism to fortify its territorial claims over Taiwan. As a result, most of the historiography of the mainland during this era was aligned with this specific political agenda: 'Taiwan is an indivisible

41. Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *Lee Teng-hui and Taiwan's Quest for Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 137–162; Hao Zhidong, *Whither Taiwan and Mainland China: National Identity, the State and Intellectuals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), pp. 54–59; Hsu Chien-Jung, *The Construction of National Identity in Taiwan's Media, 1896–2012* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 153.

42. Bo Tedards, "Trajectories of Democratization," in David Blundell (ed.), *Taiwan since Martial Law: Society, Culture, Politics, and Economy* (Berkeley and Taipei: University of California Press & National Taiwan University Press, 2012), pp. xlix–lxxvi; Miao I-wen, "Cultural Tendency on Taiwan: A Politicised Product of Global-Regional-Local Nexus," in Christina Neder and Ines-Susanne Schilling (eds.), *Transformation! Innovation? Perspectives on Taiwan Culture* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), pp. 215–235.

43. Robert Suttler, *Foreign Relations of the PRC: The Legacies and Constraints of China's International Politics since 1949* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), pp. 149–180; Ronald C. Keith, *China as a Rising World Power and Its Response to Globalization* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2005); Christopher Ford, *The Mind of Empire: China's History and Modern Foreign Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), pp. 7–9.

44. Zhao Shisheng, "Strategic Dilemma of Beijing's Taiwan Policy: Chinese Nationalism and the Making of the Anti-Secession Law," in Peter C. Y. Chow (ed.), *The 'One China' Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), p. 201; Taryn Shepperd, *Sino-US Relations and the Role of Emotion in State Action: Understanding Post-Cold War Crisis Interactions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 72–73.

component of China, rightfully under the governance of the PRC'.<sup>45</sup> This narrative once again invoked Shi Lang's historical significance, particularly his pivotal role in the annexation of Taiwan, as a potent instrument for legitimising the mainland's authority over the island. As the widely recognised historian Fu Yiling (1911–1988) proclaimed, 'Like Zheng Chenggong, Shi Lang brought Taiwan back to the mainland out of a sense of nationalism (*minzu dayi*). It was done with the best of intentions and was by no means a personal vendetta'.<sup>46</sup> Fu Yiling praised Shi Lang as a patriot who helped foster China–Taiwan integration. Fu even stated that Shi's accomplishment was not the result of a personal vendetta, but rather he saw it as a national achievement and, thereby, circumvented the issue of whether Shi had defected from the Zheng forces. In fact, scholars in the PRC predominantly refrained from scrutinising Shi Lang's allegiance to the Zhengs, even as they drew upon traditional Confucian principles to evaluate his actions. Rather than embracing Confucian moral obligations as the core of late imperial China's cultural framework, they often dismissed these principles as having only limited relevance to the practical lives of the general populace.<sup>47</sup> Their analyses, instead, concentrated on Shi Lang's remarkable military achievements and his adeptness in convincing the Kangxi emperor to integrate Taiwan into the Qing empire subsequent to their triumphant campaign, even in the face of the Qing court's initial intent to relinquish control over the island.<sup>48</sup> Lin Qian and Wang Zhengyao, for instance, advanced the perspective that both Shi Lang and the Kangxi emperor held decisive positions in the unification of the two shores of the Taiwan Strait.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, as previously highlighted, the utilisation of Shi Lang

45. Colin Mackerras, *The New Cambridge Handbook of Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 185.

46. Fu Yiling, "Zheng Chenggong yanjiu de ruogan wenti," *Fujian luntan*, vol. 3 (April 1982), p. 5.

47. Chen Wutong, "Lun Shi Lang tongyi Taiwan de lishi goingji," *Zhongguo bianjiang shide yanjiu*, vol. 3 (March 1996), pp. 17–24; Wang Sizhi and Lü Yuancong, "Shi Lang yu Qing chu tongyi Taiwan," *Qingshi yanjiu*, vol. 1 (January 1997), pp. 59–69.

48. See, for example, Tang Mingzhu, "Shi Lang yu Qingchu Taiwan de tongyi," *Yunnan jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao*, vol. 10, no. 4 (August 1994), pp. 55–60; Yang Qinhu, "Ping Shi Lang zai weihu zuguo tongyi zhong de lishi zuoyong," *Shehui kexue*, vol. 11 (April 1996), pp. 68–72.

49. Lin Qian, "Kangxi tongyi Taiwan de zhanlue juece," pp. 44–49; Wang Zhengyao, "Jianlun Shi Lang zai fazhan liang'an guanxi fangmian de zhongyao gongxian," *Zhonghua wenshi wang* (online journal, accessed on 1 December 2004).

as a means to legitimise state authority over Taiwan and enhance the bonds between the two regions was not an entirely novel phenomenon unique to the era of the People's Republic of China. Even during the late-Qing administrations, Shi Lang was acknowledged for his instrumental role in fortifying the course of political consolidation.

Whether by design or happenstance, the resurgence of scholarly interest in Shi Lang has opened up a broader debate, among mainland academic circles, over who deserves more credit for bringing Taiwan back to the motherland: Shi Lang or Zheng Chenggong. This deliberation was likely instigated by the 'Shi clan', hailing from the Minnan region and the Quanzhou area of Fujian, who appear to have initiated this discourse as early as 2003.<sup>50</sup> Shi Weiqing, the author of the *Biography of General Shi Lang* (*Shi Lang jiangjun zhuan*), asserted that his forbear was by no means a defector, but an extraordinary general in modern Chinese history:

We admire Shi Lang because, first of all, he was so brave in sailing across the dangerous ocean at the very advanced age of 63. Even though he might have wanted to avenge the death of his family, he was courageous and fearless. Moreover, he was bold enough to voice the disputes that his colleagues dared not speak out about and achieved a task that others had hesitated to complete. He is, thus, incomparably above and beyond all of his contemporaries.<sup>51</sup>

In a similar fashion, Wuhan University History Professor Wu Boya echoed a comparable sentiment, expressing her deep admiration for Shi Lang's remarkable achievement in securing the Qing victory:

The fact that Shi Lang strongly proposed to keep Taiwan and was determined to defend the island [was] striking. His determination contributed substantially to Chinese unification, thereby checking any potential foreign invasions. His name and spirit will probably remain immortal.<sup>52</sup>

50. In fact, in one of his articles, published in 1997, Wang Hongzhi compares Zheng Chenggong with Shi Lang, but the article generated little impact on academia. See his "Zheng Chenggong, Shi Lang tongyi Taiwan geyou qigong," *Yanhuang chunqiu*, vol. 6 (June 1997), pp. 66–68.

51. Shi Weiqing, *Shi Lang nianpu kaolue*, p. 3.

52. Wu Boya, "Shi Lang dui Qingchao tongyi Taiwan de gongxian," *Zhonghua wenshi wang* (online journal, accessed on 29 March 2005).

These resoundingly positive assessments reverberated widely within mainland academic circles, disseminating an enthusiastic discourse that gained momentum over the subsequent years. Numerous scholars joined in this chorus, penning articles and contributing chapters to publications that extolled the remarkable feats of Shi Lang. Illustratively, both the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the National Qing History Editorial Committee took the initiative to organise a sequence of national conferences and workshops, deliberately cultivating an academic environment that fostered research focused on Shi Lang's legacy. These august institutions further lent their support to the publication of comprehensive volumes, which emerged as post-conference compilations aimed at inspiring scholars to transcend the conventional 'Han-centred point of view' and, instead, advocate for a nuanced evaluation of Shi Lang's significance within the framework of a 'united but multi-ethnic nation', which embraced the diversity of its 55 ethnic groups, ranging from the Mongols and Uyghurs to Tibetans and Manchus.<sup>53</sup>

Speaking of which, despite the PRC's proclamation in the 1950s, following the 'ethnic classification project' of 1954, that the new China was a 'united nation' encompassing diverse ethnic communities, there remained an uneven treatment of the Manchu legacy and the Qing dynasty. Within Communist ideology, the Qing era was often perceived as a period of national humiliation, haunted by the shadows of the 'century of humiliation' marked by foreign aggression, economic distress, and social upheaval. This preoccupation with historical grievances frequently overshadowed discussions on the Qing dynasty, leaving the legacy of both the Manchu people and the Qing court unfairly marginalised. Curiously, within this context, Shi Lang – a notable figure of Manchu background – emerged as an exception. The Communists found reason to applaud Admiral Shi Lang for his decisive role in effecting 'China–Taiwan integration'. In other words, while other facets of the Qing dynasty were subjected to critical scrutiny, Shi Lang's achievement was presented as a significant accomplishment that aligned with the Communist narrative of national unity and territorial integrity.

After the National Academy of Social Sciences adjusted to the new line (*xin luxian*), in terms of re-examining Qing history, according to the above 'united but multi-ethnic model', the Communist Party began to break

53. See, for example, Shi Weiqing (ed.), *Shi Lang yu Taiwan* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2004); Xu Zaiquan (ed.), *Quanzhou wenshi yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004).

through the ‘humiliation ideology’ and acknowledge the Qing’s greatness. The PRC decided to reassert its assessment of the Qing empire and inherit its imperial geo-body intact largely because the ‘New China (*xin Zhongguo*)’ had to justify its control over a series of frontier regions, namely Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet. Central to this enterprise was the reclamation of Shi Lang as an emblematic, legendary Qing figure, whose contributions resonated with both ‘China–Taiwan integration’ and the delineation of the Qing empire’s borders. This acknowledgement served not only to honour Shi’s role but also to solidify the enduring connection bridging the legacy of the Qing dynasty and the contemporary essence of the PRC.

Apparently, it is obvious that the central government has attempted to celebrate an all-inclusive, multi-ethnic nationalism by promoting the importance of Shi Lang. As a result, the admiral was ‘doubly credited’ and, in turn, his legacy led to the so-called Shi Lang fever (*Shi Lang re*) that spread throughout social media and academia. For instance, in 2003, the State Administration of Radio and Television sponsored a 37-episode drama on Shi Lang. The entire production process extended over almost three years. On 23 March 2006, the premiere screening was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing and attracted a sizeable number of central and local officials. Four days later, the drama, *The Great General Shi Lang* (*Shi Lang da Jiangjun*), was publicly aired, during primetime, on China Central Television (CCTV).<sup>54</sup>

Shi Lang fever quickly gained the central government’s support. In late 2006, the Chinese Communist Party pronounced a historically deterministic standardised narrative that depicted the history of Taiwan’s incorporation into the Qing state. In this account, Shi Lang is officially praised for returning Taiwan to mainland control.<sup>55</sup> Understandably, his contribution was effectively and markedly elevated. In commemorating the 337<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Qing conquest of Taiwan, the Social Science Academy in Xiamen founded a research association entitled *Shi Lang*

54. *Shilang da jiangjun* official CCTV website: <http://tv.cntv.cn/videoset/C10779> (accessed on 6 March 2019).

55. ‘According to China National Radio, the TV drama that features Shi Lang describes how the patriotic general successfully completed the unification of the country and artistically presented the heroic deeds of General Shi Lang in pacifying Taiwan and realizing national unification’ – quoted in “The Great General Shi Lang” on the website “East-South-West-North” ([http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20060403\\_2.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20060403_2.htm), accessed on 30 April 2019).

*yanjiuhui*.<sup>56</sup> This association publishes a journal that contains new research findings and analyses, commentaries, and books related to Shi Lang and the Kangxi emperor. In collaboration with members of the 'Shi clan' in Quanzhou, the association even constructed a giant statue depicting Shi Lang facing seaward from his native coastal village in Jinjiang and holding a sword that is pointing toward the ground. Building on the Communist framework, the popular boom in the topic of Shi Lang is notable and its underlying message is readily obvious. As Su Shuangbi, the editor of the Communist Party's journal, *Seeking the Truth (Qiushi)*, has alluded,

Shi Lang maintained a principled insistence that Taiwan always belonged to China and refused to tolerate any foreign interference in its affairs.... Due to his determination to preserve the country's territorial integrity, Shi Lang deserves the exalted title of national hero.<sup>57</sup>

The editor ventured further by offering a prophetic insight into Taiwan's future, drawing a historical parallel that highlighted an inevitable course: 'the island's fate is akin to the Ming Dynasty's inability to withstand the ascendancy of the Qing Dynasty in the seventeenth century'.<sup>58</sup> This foresight resonated with the strategic imperative for reunification, mirroring the Qing's need for a formidable navy to traverse the strait. Notably, this rationale finds resonance in the naming of one of the People's Republic of China's aircraft carriers, symbolising its commitment to a unified destiny. Emblematic of this intent, the carrier was proposed to be christened *Shi Lang*, epitomising the continuity of historical legacy driving contemporary endeavours.<sup>59</sup>

56. Official website of Shi Lang *yanjiuhui*: <http://www.xmsk.cn/a/shetuangongzuo/shetuanhuodong/2014/0522/5457.html> (accessed on 6 March 2019).

57. Su Shuangbi, "Zaitan lishi renwu pingjia de jige wenti [Commenting Again on Some Problems in Assessing Historical Figures]," in Shi Weiqing, *Shi Lang yu Taiwan*, p. 8. This paragraph is translated by Xing Hang.

58. Ibid.

59. In my view, naming the carrier *Shi Lang* is not feasible simply because the tradition in China is to name almost all aircraft carriers after provinces or specific places.

### The Counter Narrative in the PRC

Since 2003, the PRC government has assumed a proactive role in promoting a positive, celebrated image of Shi Lang and in popularising this image as its official line. Nonetheless, intellectual circles and online social networks in China do not always concur with the government's aspirations for its reappraisal of this striking historical figure. Backlashes to Shi Lang fever have occurred at both academic and popular levels. Within academia, some scholars, who were assessing whether Shi Lang was the 'architect of unification between the Qing and Taiwan', skilfully countered that the admiral also made statements about Taiwan being a remote frontier that lay 'beyond the orbit' and outside the Qing. For instance, Deng Kongzhao, the director of the Taiwan Research Institute at Xiamen University, suggested a measured and comprehensive evaluation of Shi Lang's legacy before hastily anointing him as an undisputed 'national hero'. He astutely pointed out that, even after the naval victory of 1683, Shi Lang attempted to sell the island of Taiwan to the Dutch.<sup>60</sup> 'After all', Deng continued, 'the Qing Empire was a land-bounded empire with a continental mindset, and the official court was unable to fully comprehend the geopolitical value of its maritime frontier and the island of Taiwan'.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, voices like Zhu Shuangyi and Zheng Congming in China advocated for a balanced perspective. They called upon readers not to overly fixate on Shi Lang, while simultaneously emphasising the role played by the Zheng family in facilitating Taiwan's return to the embrace of China.<sup>62</sup> These scholars underline the importance of maintaining a well-rounded view and avoiding undue neglect of other integral factors within this historical narrative. In essence, their collective stance reflects the notion that the fervour surrounding Shi Lang's legacy should find equilibrium, marking a transition from its fanatical peak to a more tempered assessment.

60. In fact, even though Shi Lang argued for not abandoning Taiwan, he also approached the Dutch and the English with the idea of selling the island to them in exchange for commercial advantages. See Cheng Wei-chung, "Shi Lang Taiwan guihuan Helan miyi," *Taiwan wenxian*, vol. 61, no. 3 (September 2010), pp. 35–74.

61. Deng Kongzhao, *Zheng Chenggong yu Ming-Zheng Taiwan shi yanjiu* (Beijing: Taihai chubanshe, 2000), pp. 226–235.

62. Zhu Shuangyi, "'Zheng Jing shi Taidu fenzi' shuo zhiyi," *Xiamen daxue xuebao zhhexue shehui kexueban*, vol. 167, no. 1 (2005), p. 70; Wu Youxiong and Xu Zaiquan, "Ruhe zhengque pingjia Shi Lang," in Wu Youxiong, and Xu Zaiquan (eds.), *Shi Lang yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001), pp. 167–172.

The phenomenon known as Shi Lang fever also stirred widespread discontent among the general populace. After the release of *The Great General Shi Lang* on CCTV, producer Chen Ming was attacked in a barrage of criticisms that were posted on several internet forums. He was labelled as disloyal, unrighteous, and a 'fake Confucian'. The forums harshly criticised Chen for having abandoned his objective judgement by wilfully and unreservedly promoting Shi Lang in an attempt to feed the Communist Party's political hunger. Added to this, the descendants of Zheng's family, who still reside in the Minnan region of Fujian, could not be satisfied with Shi Lang fever. As pointed out by Xing Hang, after conducting his field trip in Southern Fujian, the pro-Shi Lang narrative 'added fuel to the ongoing enmity between the Zhengs and the Shis, [which was] already strained to the point that members of the two clans still refuse to inter-marry.... As Zheng Guangnan [a descendant of the Zhengs] writes to me, he sticks up his nose at the very idea that an opportunist and turncoat like Shi Lang could match the moral fibre and patriotic spirit of his illustrious ancestors'.<sup>63</sup>

Undoubtedly, these dissenting voices introduce a noteworthy challenge to the pursuit of a cohesive and unifying narrative that seeks to establish conformity and stability. What emerges is a fascinating dynamic within the cultural realm of Southern Fujian (Minnan) that stands in noticeable contrast to Beijing's hegemonic initiatives. As previously highlighted, this phenomenon presents an intriguing avenue for deeper exploration and understanding. Within this context, the divergence of perspectives from the cultural landscape of Southern Fujian carries considerable implications. It directs us to the meaningful interplay between local narratives and the larger national discourse marshalled by the Beijing officials.

The formation of a distinct Minnanese regional narrative on Shi Lang found itself distinctly at odds with Beijing's pronouncements on the topic of Shi Lang and his role in Chinese history, particularly as it relates to Taiwan. The Minnan region is often referred to as the southern part of coastal Fujian province. When William Skinner mapped out the four principal geographically defined economic systems of the southeast Chinese coast, the Minnan region was labelled as the 'Zhang-Quan' economic zone.<sup>64</sup> The geography of the Minnan region, similar to the rest of Fujian province, is largely

63. Xing Hang, "The Contradictions of Legacy: Reimagining the Zheng Family in the People's Republic of China," *Late Imperial China*, vol. 34, no. 2 (December 2013), p. 13.

64. William Skinner, "Presidential Address: The Structure of Chinese History," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (February 1985), p. 277.

made up of mountains and isolated valleys that preserve a great diversity of local subcultures that range in indigenous dialects, theatrical traditions, architecture, food, and musical traditions.<sup>65</sup> Since the Tang dynasty, if not earlier, the Minnan culture has remained special and distinct among the surrounding provinces. However, not all governing regimes appreciate the beauty of such a unique pattern of development. For example, in Mao's era, the Minnan region was considered to represent one of 'separatism', or an attempt to split from the country and its feudal remnants.<sup>66</sup> Despite the tension between the central government in Beijing and the Minnan region, it is challenging to entirely suppress or mould a regional culture, especially when the region's spatial and temporal aspects as they relate to its culture have been deeply entrenched over several centuries. These differing spatial and temporal factors may have contributed to the inconsistent evaluation of Shi Lang within the PRC, but these factors are not the only explanation. The negative assessments of Shi Lang, founded in Minnan, are also intertwined with the legacy of Zheng Chenggong. Unlike Shi Lang, Zheng Chenggong was not born and raised in Minnan, but rather in Nagasaki, Japan, and only moved to Southern Fujian (Quanzhou) when he was eight years old. Yet, the connection between Zheng Chenggong and Minnan is no less profound than that between Shi Lang and the region. During the 1650s, Zheng's headquarters were located in Xiamen – a key port city in Minnan. From there, he intended, first, to resist the Qing empire, and then to mobilise his troops to recapture Taiwan.

When the Republicans proclaimed Zheng Chenggong a national hero in the struggle for a stronger China, Minnan elevated his stature to one of glory and valour. As a consequence, Minnan academia has long been focused on the history and achievements of Zheng. For example, in the Republican period, Fu Yiling founded the Association of Zheng Chenggong (*Zheng Chenggong yanjiu xuehui*) in order to popularise a positive image of him. Evidence obtained from this association's work helps our understanding of Fu Yiling's sentiments toward Zheng and why he devalued the importance of Shi Lang, as demonstrated earlier. Later, in the 1970s, Xiamen University established a research unit on Zheng, naming it 'Xiamen daxue Zheng Chenggong lishi diaocha yanjiuzu'. Some may wonder why Fu Yiling, and

65. Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 21.

66. See André Laliberté and Marc Lanteigne, *The Chinese Party-State in the 21st Century: Adaptation and the Reinvention of Legitimacy* (London: Routledge, 2008).

a majority of the Minnanese community, could not celebrate the legacies of both Shi Lang and Zheng Chenggong, especially during a time at which the PRC government acknowledged both historical figures.<sup>67</sup> Naturally, it is possible for a single province to have several national heroes. However, some local communities in Minnan find it inexpedient to acknowledge both historical subjects. This is especially so in communities where native Zheng family members still enjoy great respect and prestige, particularly in light of the fact that Shi Lang betrayed Zheng Chenggong. Hence, every time the Beijing authority promotes the importance of Shi Lang, the response of the pro-Zheng Chenggong community is a consciousness that runs counter to the state's attitude. Among the counter narratives that exist in Minnan, one can discern how the formation of a passionate regional circle could generate a challenge to a more centralised, official narrative that aims to achieve a particular sentiment or understanding on a wider national level.

### The Counter Narrative in Taiwan

Not surprisingly, the counter narrative was strongest on the opposite side of the Taiwan Strait, where Shi Lang has not received respect since the Kuomintang era. Taiwanese scholar Cai Xianghui's commentary in 2002 encapsulates this viewpoint succinctly: 'Shi Lang pretended to foster Qing-Taiwan integration in the late seventeenth century; in fact he selfishly took every opportunity to maximize his profits in Taiwan by expropriating farmland and villages'.<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, Lu Jianrong further castigated Shi Lang, accusing him of encroaching upon the properties of native Taiwanese. Additionally, Lu questioned Shi Lang's fidelity and loyalty, asserting that 'a person may rightfully regard himself highly if he remains faithful and loyal to his master or monarch. In contrast, Shi Lang's betrayal of the Zheng kingdom marked him as a renegade, casting a shadow on his reputation and diminishing his stature over the centuries. Ultimately, a figure characterized by deceit is unlikely to garner admiration'.<sup>69</sup>

67. To the PRC, Zheng is an anti-imperialist hero whose defeat of the Dutch has been the subject of a few television dramas and films.

68. Cai Xianghui, "Shi Lang yu Taiwan shanhou," in Tainan xian Jiangjin xianggongsuo (ed.), *Jiangjunxiangxiangmingsuyuanji Shi Langxueshu yantaohui lunwenji* (Tainan: Jiangjun xianggongsuo, 2002), p. 67.

69. Lu Jianrong, *Ruqin Taiwan: Fenghuo jiaguo sibainian* (Taipei: Maitian chubanshe, 1999).

In Taiwan, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the tide of criticism directed at Shi Lang gained momentum. Prominent figures like Yang Qinhua and Xu Xiaowang, among others, levelled accusations against Shi Lang, alleging that he had deceitfully pledged loyalty to the Zhengs while secretly betraying the Ming court and exploiting the Taiwanese populace for personal gain. This critical stance echoed the counter narratives prevalent in the Minnan region, mirroring the laudatory treatment bestowed upon Zheng Chenggong, whose resistance against the Qing was hailed as virtuous and imbued with patriotism. However, it is important to note that not all intellectuals in Taiwan have unequivocally attacked Shi Lang. Wang Rongzu, a distinguished Taiwanese historian who taught for many years in the United States, was probably the first scholar to reassess Shi Lang in a positive light. In his “Security and Warfare on the China Coast”, published in 1983, Wang had this to say about Shi Lang:

(Shi Lang) proved himself not only a brilliant commander but also a perceptive strategist and able administrator. He was truly indispensable for the Taiwan campaign, no matter how we minimize the importance of an individual in the larger historical event... he was a persistent advocate of the Taiwan campaign. His knowledge and confidence in the matter were essential for the campaign to materialize. His strong interest in it was not simply to seek personal revenge, even though Cheng Ch'eng-kung (Zheng Chenggong) had brutally executed his father and brother for his defection to the Manchu authorities. He had a stellar understanding of the strategic importance of Taiwan to the security of the mainland coast, largely due to his familiarity with the island.<sup>70</sup>

In the early 1990s, Taiwanese historian Zhou Xueyu echoed the call for a more balanced and unbiased evaluation of Admiral Shi. In a manner akin to Wang's approach, Zhou contended that while Shi had indeed shifted allegiance from the Zhengs to the Qing, his actions can be contextualised within a broader strategic vision that aimed at maintaining Taiwan under Qing control, setting him apart from his contemporaries.<sup>71</sup> This perspective enables these Taiwanese scholars to appreciate Shi Lang as not only a

70. Wong Young-tsu, “Security and Warfare on the China Coast,” *Monumenta Serica*, vol. 35 (1981–1983), pp. 113, 168–169.

71. See Zhou Xueyu, *Shi Lang gong Tai di gong yu guo*.

proficient military leader but also a figure shaped by the maritime world, thus providing a more impartial and nuanced historical interpretation of his role and actions.

This counter narrative is also included in reappraisals of Shi Lang at the local level. A case in point is the active engagement of the members of Shi's clan in Taizhong (*Taizhong Shixing zongqinhui*), who persistently uphold his heritage on their association's website and promotional materials. Within their domain, this association curates a Shi Lang memorial hall in Taizhong, housing a rich collection of original materials pertaining to his life and endeavours. They further honour their forebear through workshops and commemorative gatherings, underscoring a steadfast commitment to revisiting and preserving a more complex narrative of Shi Lang's historical role.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Shi Zhongxiang, an active member of the clan association in Tainan, took the initiative to sponsor the creation of the General Shi Lang Memorial Museum (*Shi Lang Jiangjun jinian guan*), an institution situated within the precincts of the designated 'General District' (*jiangjun qu*).<sup>73</sup> Adorned with exquisite elegance and thoughtful design, this museum serves as a dignified testament to Shi Lang's legacy, portraying him as the catalyst behind the Qing–Taiwan integration and the subsequent development of the island. Remarkably, it refrains from tarnishing his reputation by branding him a traitor. This establishment reveals an intriguing interplay between the Shi clans on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Despite the political partition, the familial bonds of the Shi Lang legacy persist as an unbroken thread that transcends the political chasm.

In 2014, Zhang Tianjian, a committee member of the *Fudeye miao* (Temple of the Lord of the Soil and the Ground), proposed the construction of a shrine, in Tainan, dedicated to Shi Lang, aptly named the *Shi Lang miao*. In a press interview, Zhang articulated his belief that Shi Lang should be venerated for his instrumental 'Taiwan proposal' (*Gongchen Taiwan qiliu shu*) to safeguard and preserve this island. He emphasised that 'without this proposal, the Kangxi Emperor might have forsaken Taiwan, thereby neglecting this invaluable territorial gem'.<sup>74</sup> Contrary to the conventional

72. Taizhong Shixing zongqinhui official website: <http://www.tcshih.org/> (accessed on 30 April 2019).

73. Online description of the General Shi Lang Memorial Museum: [http://datataiwan.com/tourism.php?id=C1\\_315081600H\\_000146](http://datataiwan.com/tourism.php?id=C1_315081600H_000146) (accessed on 6 March 2019).

74. Online version of the interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaFwIimpqOLY> (accessed on 6 March 2019).

perception of Shi as an unfaithful officer and disloyal figure, Zhang pointedly highlighted that the admiral's commitment to Taiwan endured. It is perhaps even more noteworthy that the proposed site of the Shi Lang temple is just 200 feet away from the Zheng Chenggong temple (*Yanping junwang ci*). Zhang Tianjian has not explicitly expounded on the proximity of the Shi Lang shrine to the Koxinga joss house, but this decision might symbolise how the re-evaluation of Shi Lang's legacy has reignited interest in the historical significance of both eminent and memorable Qing figures. In a sense, Zhang emerges as a representative of a collective that not only acknowledges Shi Lang's achievement in upholding Taiwan's connection to China, but is also driven to explore his influence in shaping the island's local and indigenous identity. According to Zhang Tianjian, Shi Lang was not only an admiral who represented the Qing in the annexation of Taiwan, but he was also a heroic figure who recognised the importance of Taiwan. Shi Lang's 'Taiwan Proposal', followed by his policies on ruling the island, imbued him with a Taiwanese identity. In a nutshell, Shi's renewed status should not be seen as the result of the officially sponsored narrative coming out of Beijing or the PRC; instead, it is based on a local (Taiwanese) identity that is the consequence of the emergence of an alternative community, a clear and more localised domain of culture, and a symbolic framework of identification that recognises Shi Lang's contributions from a disparate point of view.

### Concluding Remarks

For more than two centuries, the legacy of Shi Lang, a prominent naval admiral whose life and achievements were shaped by the maritime world, has captured the attention of some of China's most eminent officials and literary luminaries. Compared to many other historical figures, Shi Lang remains essential to our understanding of the troubled past and murky future of the East Asian region's cross-strait tensions and geopolitics. While Shi Lang's image has held varying significance for different individuals, it is worth noting that his historical significance within a specific community has managed to resonate with other communities to some extent. Consequently, as we examine the diverse interpretations of Shi Lang's narrative, we can discern a pattern of historical narratives characterised by an ongoing, dynamic interplay and mutual reinforcement.<sup>75</sup>

75. In assessing the legacy of Zheng Chenggong, Xing Hang first introduced the

The story of Shi Lang has evolved and adapted across different historical periods – from the Qing dynasty to Republican China, and from the contemporary China (PRC) to Taiwan (ROC). Each interpretation has been tailored to align with the prevailing societal currents of its time. For instance, during the early years of the Communist era, Shi Lang was viewed with suspicion as a symbol of the Qing dynasty's perceived backwardness. However, as the PRC embarked on a mission to reclaim lost territories, Shi Lang underwent a transformation, becoming a revered national and maritime hero credited with unifying Taiwan and the mainland. Similarly, the Kuomintang government, prior to retreating to Taiwan, used Shi Lang as a metaphor to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the PRC's territorial claims and to serve as a reminder of his betrayal of the Zheng empire, representing the legitimate authority of Ming China. This shifting portrayal exemplifies how historical interpretation has been shaped to align with the political and ideological landscapes of each era.

All of this suggests that Shi Lang's legacy has been harnessed as a tool for nationalist narratives. Unlike many other renowned historical figures, the story of Shi Lang carries a profound political resonance, casting a spotlight on the complications and complexities within the cross-strait relationship. Nonetheless, his legacy is much more than this. Shi was a complex, eventful, and controversial figure. His legacy encompasses a range of meanings that scholars and the general public have cultivated in order to serve the particular circumstances at hand. Evidently, Shi Lang stands as one of China's most complicated historical figures, fuelling an ongoing process of reinterpretation that extends beyond the shaping of national narratives driven by specific political or nationalist agendas. This legacy is shared by countless individuals who contribute to the broader realm of cultural production through their diverse perspectives on Shi Lang's significance.

While state-sponsored perspectives have significantly influenced both academic and public discussions about Shi Lang at most stages of the process, it is important to note that the central authorities have not always maintained the upper hand. As highlighted at the outset of this chapter, there have been instances where opposing voices – ranging from scholarly academics to influential internet bloggers – have openly challenged these perspectives. Undoubtedly, the diversity of opinions has particularly

conception of 'a continually shifting and mutually reinforcing process' in his article titled "The Contradictions of Legacy".

flourished over recent decades, riding the wave of a more open social and political landscape. However, there is no way of knowing how Shi Lang will be treated in the future in response to political circumstances, as these can rapidly change at any time. It is possible that, as long as the PRC government remains bent on transforming the political and economic landscape of the Taiwan Strait, Shi's legacy will continue to be discussed in terms of his influence in the region. Only when the territorial disputes between China and Taiwan are ultimately resolved will the Shi Lang question become less significant in the nationalist narrative of party leaders and government administrators. What is certain is that Shi Lang, a historical figure with strong ties to the maritime world, southern China, and Taiwan, compellingly illustrates that the history of early modern China was intertwined with the blue domain. This maritime connection continues to be inextricable even for present-day power holders, underscoring its profound and enduring influence over time.

## CHAPTER SIX

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# The Master of the Sea

While Shi Lang was under a spotlight for over two centuries, it is surprising to see that Lan Dingyuan remained rather obscure and unsung over the *longue durée*. If we were to select the most prolific and attentive scholar-official to have written about coastal defence and naval management in the eighteenth century, Lan Dingyuan would probably be one among few other top candidates. As gender and maritime historian Li Guotong put it, Lan was ‘a walking encyclopaedia of the southeast coast, particularly eastern Guangdong and Fujian’.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding his prominence in maritime history, we are still waiting for a comprehensive English-language biography about him. Although only one chapter in this book is devoted to this prominent historical figure, I hope that I can at least introduce our Western readers to the life and times of this exceptional intellectual, who wrote and published extensively during the Yongzheng era. His writings ranged from private essays to official memorials and played a pivotal role in influencing how the Qing’s maritime policy unfolded during the eighteenth century. His thoughts and ideas directed scholar-officials and the emperor’s attention to the maritime world while at the same time sparking a profound revision to the Qing’s approach toward coastal control and the governance of Taiwan.

We are always under the impression that the Yongzheng era, which is considered the middle phase of the High Qing period, was calm, peaceful, and without any significant complications.<sup>2</sup> However, in actuality, even during the final few decades of the Kangxi regime, the Qing empire had already been foundering under the weight of nepotism, bureaucratic

1. Li Guotong, *Migrating Fujianese: Ethnic, Family, and Gender Identities in an Early Modern Maritime World* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 10–11.

2. C. Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China’s Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 45.

corruption, and the breakdown of local order.<sup>3</sup> These could be seen in a series of natural disasters, rural misery, poverty, and even instances of local turbulence that pervaded some remote villages. Although some writers of the time ignored such disturbances and heralded the empire's prosperity for the sake of cherishing it and fanaticising an image of proper order and control, the conditions of the time created a general crisis of confidence that stimulated a group of intellectuals to examine the situation more carefully in order to safeguard the empire from perceptible and potential crises. This review of the times was accompanied by a vigorous and pragmatic approach to a set of constructive reforms led by the Yongzheng emperor in the hope of revitalising the country by modifying a series of deficient and ineffective administrative practices.

The Yongzheng reform covered a wide array of sectors and situations, ranging from taxation to combats against large-scale nepotism and corruption.<sup>4</sup> It also included the search for practical strategies to stabilise the northwestern frontier bordering the Dzungar.<sup>5</sup> While previous scholarship focused on the emperor's approach to these alarming matters, it is worth noting that Yongzheng also paid considerable attention to the maritime frontier to the east, which, in his view, might have exposed the empire to severe dangers if this frontier were neglected or overlooked.<sup>6</sup> In other words, his agenda of governance in the first half of the eighteenth century not only focused on the problems that were visible on land but also included both perceptible and conceivable challenges that might have come from the sea. According to governmental documents exchanged between the emperor and his officials at the time, the problem of piracy, the stabilisation of Taiwan, and potential dangers coming from the Japanese and overseas Chinese traders in Southeast Asia were key issues facing the country's maritime frontier. In essence, Lan Dingyuan was caught up in

3. Qizhi Zhang, "The Golden Ages of the Han, Tang, and Qing Dynasties: A Comparative Analysis," in his *An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2015), p. 66.

4. Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 908–909.

5. Ulrich Theobald, *War Finance and Logistics in Late Imperial China: A Study of the Second Jinchuan Campaign (1771–1776)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 142; Franck Bille, *China and Russia: Four Centuries of Conflict and Concord* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), p. 71.

6. Ronald C. Po, *The Blue Frontier: Maritime Vision and Power in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 20.

these central issues pertaining to coastal governance in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In many respects, his life and times expressed the foment, tensions, and creativity of this period. His writings not only reflected his practical attempts to maintain peace along the coastal area, they also provided a refreshing and up-to-date evaluation of the empire's maritime frontier, comparing to the reviews of authors of the Ming or early Qing, such as Zheng Ruoceng, whose work we discussed in the previous chapter. As a pragmatist and visionary, Lan's work epitomised the integrity and pragmatism of those devoted to securing China's maritime frontier in the long term and even during the period that is (mis)characterised as having been peaceful and calm.

Similar to Zheng Ruoceng's connections with his hometown, Lan's interactions with the local communities in Fujian, including scholars, officials, traders, and even the commoners, since his early years, shaped his approach to rational coastal management. First, they made him sensitive to problems of the coast and engaged him in a searching reappraisal of many aspects of the country's maritime administration, especially after Taiwan was integrated into the empire in 1683. In other words, Lan was already familiar with and had helped shape an indigenous approach to reform before he was formally bestowed an official title at the age of 43. Moreover, he was well versed in the conditions of coastal defence and the insufficiency of the Qing's political-military control of its coastal area. With the outbreak of the Zhu Yigui rebellion in Taiwan, in 1721, Lan's critical examination of the situation focused on this unrest. After helping suppress the riot in Taiwan, he was well prepared to formulate a revision of Qing maritime policy. Finally, Lan's experience with the locals caused him to relate a set of social, regional problems to fundamental issues associated with the substantial, long-run maintenance of the coast. In Lan's assessment, improper coastal management and social immorality were closely intertwined. In the views of some who were as far-sighted as Lan Dingyuan, such an evaluation was, in fact, a recognition that the sea and the land could hardly be separated when it came to comprehensive tactics for administering marine matters.

### The Early Years

Located in the most southern part of Fujian province, Zhangpu was a medium-sized city under administrative control of Zhangzhou prefecture. It was bordered by Longhai City to the north, Pinghe and Yunxiao counties

to the west, and the Taiwan Strait to the east and south. In many ways, Zhangpu was just another coastal city in southern China, where most of its compounds were enclosed within a high, thick city wall. The alleys and pathways therein were dirty, narrow, and badly paved with muddy stones. In size, it was smaller than most major cities, such as Fuzhou and Canton; and its affluence and development were not comparable. However, Zhangpu was not without its charms. Its harbour counted among the major hubs where merchants stopped to trade with the locals and businessmen arriving from other provinces. As noted in the *Zhangpu Gazetteer*, these interactions brought fortune to the little town and ‘the citizens there could easily get rich without doing too much hard work (*weiyizhe bulao er minfu*)’.<sup>7</sup> Culturally, Zhangpu was not a desert. The city had produced a sizeable number of scholars and artists in literature, philosophy, and landscape paintings.<sup>8</sup> It was here, on the west side of the city (Xixiang), that Lan Dingyuan was born into an eminent gentry family on 27 August 1680.

The family history of the Lan clan can be traced back to the ancient time when the Huang emperor, a legendary Chinese sovereign, was thought to have ruled China proper roughly between 2687 BC and 2597 BC. The clan then moved to various parts of northern China. It was not until the Sung Dynasty and the Mongol invasion that most of the Lans retreated to the south.<sup>9</sup> Although this family was not counted among the empire’s highly prestigious lineages, it had produced a few degree- and office-holders since the Song times, such as Lan Chun, Lan Wei, and Lan Rui.<sup>10</sup> During the Ming–Qing transition, a branch of the clan relocated to Fujian and settled in Zhangpu. Lan Dingyuan belonged to this branch’s generation.

Over time, the Lans successfully established themselves as part of the local elite in Fujian. Dingyuan’s grandfather, Lan Jishan, and his father, Lan Bin (1658–1689), were both renowned scholars in the region, although neither of them successfully passed the civil service examinations. The Lans who had settled in the region were also very family-oriented. Although there were ample opportunities for trade and shipping, the Lans were more

7. Zhuo Zun, “Qingjuan jingzong zhiqian ji,” in *Zhangpu xianzhi* (Kangxi 39 nian version), *juan* 17, 36a.

8. Angela Schottenhammer, *The Emporium of the World Maritime Quanzhou, 1000–1400* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 261; Keping Yu, *Globalization and Changes in China’s Governance* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 94.

9. He Lan Han xing zongqinhui, Lanshi zupu bianji bu (eds.), *Lanshi zupo* (Taipei: Lianxing meishu yinshuachang, 1970), p. *lanzhi*-1.

10. Ibid., p. *liezhuan*-1.

devoted to their children's education, either scholastic or military.<sup>11</sup> Their respect for learning was such that they kept emphasising that the way to achieve statecraft reformism (*jingshi*) was through proper education or military training.

Little is known of the older generations' influence on Dingyuan's education, but official biographies given to retrospective projections of the qualities of the man onto the child stress Lan's devotion to study when he was small. At the age of ten, Lan lost his father, leaving his mother, surnamed Xu (1661–1713), as the family's sole source of financial support. If his mother had not been resilient, the young Lan Dingyuan and his brother, Lan Dingguang, would have had an even tougher time, as records show that their childhood years were spent in relative poverty.<sup>12</sup> Financial difficulties, however, did not stand in the way of the children's education as their mother oversaw their daily lessons.<sup>13</sup> This was the period where Confucian ideas such as loyalty and filial piety were strongly inculcated into daily thinking. We know relatively little about Lan Dingguang's formal education, but we do have records showing that Lan Dingyuan began his formal schooling in a place called Zaoshan, where his uncle Lan Tangwen had lectured for a while. Zaoshan was a famed mountain in Fujian, famous because the prominent philosopher Zhang Ruozhong (1612–1695) completed some of his well-known writings while living in a small hut there during the Ming dynasty.

During his five to six years in Zaoshan, Lan's imagination was stimulated by a wide range of studies, including the Confucian classics, military texts, and literature found in traditional literary collections. Under his uncle's guidance, Lan became acquainted with the activism and intense sense of moral mission that had been characteristic of scholars in the previous dynasties. Arguably, Lan Tangwen had stimulated Dingyuan's social conscience and the latter then came to share his uncle's conviction that knowledge in texts was vital only to the extent that it was useful in contributing to society. In turn, this commitment motivated Dingyuan to acquire the rigour necessary to carry out important empirical research, which he regarded as fundamental to the type of scholarship that influenced appropriate political measures to deal with issues related to society and governance. At the age of 17, he had the opportunity to sail off the coast

11. Ibid., pp. *liezhuan* 1–2.

12. Lan Dingyuan, "xingshu," *Luzhou quanji* (Yongzheng renzi nian [1732] version), 1b.

13. Ibid.

of Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong to observe the fishermen, traders, and even the naval stations. This specific 'field trip' in his early days was an extremely important experience in Lan's intellectual maturation, as it exposed him to the actuality of these coastal areas in relation to a variety of maritime affairs. As he later recorded in his own work, 'what I have gained from this journey is abundant, and no one can understand it (*ziwei cixing suode zheduo, ren moneng yuye*)'.<sup>14</sup>

In 1703, aged 24, Lan participated in the regional civil service examination and ranked first among those sitting for this exam. This allowed him to continue along his journey toward success. However, he did not succeed in passing the provincial examination. Despite this unfortunate outcome, however, over the next couple of years Lan was thrust among a circle of scholars of the Zhangpu region and the greater Fujian area. This was a period of tremendous intellectual growth for Dingyuan, one during which he made significant official contacts with like-minded individuals, such as Shen Han, Cai Shiyuan (1682–1733), and Chen Menglin (1664–1739), who then spread Lan's reputation as a serious scholar among officials and nobles. In 1707, Dingyuan met Zhang Boxing, the governor of Fujian at the time.<sup>15</sup> As a practical reformer who had completed several projects in river control, famine relief, and judicial disputes, Zhang held the distinguished reputation of being one of the most competent scholar-officials in the region. He was also impressed by Lan's scholarship and appointed him to a post where he helped establish the Afeng Academy (*Afeng shuyuan*) in Fuzhou, which later became one of the most admired institutions of learning in the province, partly due to Lan's editing of the writings of former philosophers.<sup>16</sup> It is said that when Zhang saw Dingyuan's essays, he so admired his work that he assigned him the post, commenting that '(Dingyuan) possesses steadfastness and determination, he is resolute in his actions, a capable talent for governing the world, and a wing of my path (*Lansheng queran youshou, yiran youwei, jingshi zhi liangcai, wudao zhi yuyi ye*)'.<sup>17</sup> In view of Lan's subsequent rise to national prominence and the esteem accorded him after his death, his social connection with such an established statecraft official as Zhang became of particular importance to the Lan clan.

14. Ibid., 2a.

15. Ibid., 2a–2b.

16. Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, 1644–1912* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1944; reprinted by Global Oriental in 2010), vol. 1, p. 440.

17. Lan Dingyuan, "xingshu," *Luzhou quanji*, 2b.

As Thomas H. C. Lee argued, the Afeng Academy was more than an esteemed scholarly institution. It had been established as a centre where the meanings of Song and Ming Confucianism were to be reinvigorated for practical application.<sup>18</sup> It thus reflected the trend in statecraft learning put forward earlier in the book. Chang Hao, a modern historian writing in the 1970s, has already distinguished the differences between moral idealism and practical statesmanship. Both approaches were adopted by Qing scholars who practised Neo-Confucianism. According to Chang, those who embraced the concept of moral idealism maintained that a desirable moral order could only be realised by one's achievement of sagehood. To those who leaned towards the *jingshi* path, the ruling party, in their view, must also consider actual occurrences and factual circumstances while retaining all of Confucianism's moral values.<sup>19</sup> The practical approach, in retrospect, is more visible in Zhang Boxing's proposal for putting the Afeng Academy in place.

In addition to recruiting Dingyuan, Zhang Boxing also invited a roster of eminent scholars to ensure the success of this enterprise. As a result, Lan's involvement in the academy's establishment appears to have been a remarkable phase in his intellectual upbringing. In 1710, however, quite regrettably, Lan chose to step away from this duty and return to his hometown to care for his aging grandparents and mother. As he stated very expressively,

When I was young, I lost my father, and it was through the toil and care of my grandparents and my widowed mother that I have reached this day. My grandfather is now eighty-nine years old, and my grandmother is eighty-two. Our days are numbered, and such moments are rare. Moreover, I have younger siblings, both of marriageable age but unmarried. In addition, my late father's remains have been delayed for years without being buried, causing me immense distress during rainy and windy days.

18. Thomas H. C. Lee, *Education in Traditional China: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 635.

19. Chang Hao, "On the Ching-shih Ideal in Neo-Confucianism," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i*, vol. 3, no. 1 (November 1974), pp. 36–61; Chang Hao, "The Intellectual Context of Reform," in Paul A. Cohen and John E. Schrecker (eds.), *Reform in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 145–146. See also Daniel McMahon, "Statecraft Values in Early Nineteenth Century China: Yan Ruyi's (1759–1826) Activist Historiography," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 38, nos 1 and 2 (May 2005), p. 19.

Since taking up my duties here, I have immersed myself in the writings of the great Confucian scholars and learned that the most important virtues are filial piety to parents, respect from sons to fathers, brotherly friendship, and respect from younger siblings to elders. Yet now, my paternal grandparents, who possess the imperial pardon, my aging widowed mother who struggles to make ends meet, the unburied remains of my father, and my unmarried siblings all weigh heavily on my heart. Even if I were to travel far to seek wealth and success, it would be meaningless in the face of these responsibilities. Though I am not accomplished, I do understand the distinction between right and gain. How can I willingly receive pity from others and hold out hope, instead of relying on my own efforts?

In years past, I have managed to supply some sustenance, and in the morning I respectfully receive the teachings at your feet, which is all I desire. How can I then undertake a distant journey while my elderly relatives lean on the fence, yearning for me? During my previous service here for a year, I dared not display even the slightest hint of personal desires, fearing that it might seem like I had ulterior motives. Now that I have been summoned repeatedly, I fear that if I refuse due to my own reasons, I will be blamed for abandoning my responsibilities. That's why I dare to express my humble thoughts completely, only asking for your understanding regarding my duties.<sup>20</sup>

Although Zhang Boxing tried every means to encourage Lan to remain in the Academy, the latter eventually decided to resign from his post due to the above reasons. Six years after his return to Zhangpu, his grandparents and mother passed away. Between 1714 and 1720, Dingyuan spent long stretches of time in his birthplace, mourning the deaths of his beloved. For almost 11 years, he did not assume other teaching or administrative positions but became committed to self-study at home. In Chinese, this is called *bimen dushu*, which literally translates to 'shutting the door and studying hard'. It was during this 'mourning period' that Lan became deeply engaged with many other Confucian studies and evidential research (*kaozheng*), which in turn shaped him as a typical, well-trained Confucian scholar. But his vision and beliefs were not confined to the serious study of Confucianism. For instance, he also came across the idea of legalism

20. Lan Dingyuan, "xingshu," *Luzhou quanji*, 2b–3a.

(*faja*), among a 'hundred schools of thought (*zhujibaijia*)', a fact modern scholars have not sufficiently examined.<sup>21</sup> Some of Lan's *faja* principles were later demonstrated in his views about the significance of tight control over some of the natives in Taiwan, which I will further elaborate on in due course. Lan was also passionate about historical events that had contemporary relevance to the problems facing his generation, especially those that had occurred along the coast. In other words, he was also an activist who placed great emphasis on practicalities. His fundamental conviction was that achieving stability in the coastal region depended on the state's control over its people, intelligence, soldiers, and defensive apparatus (*lian bingding, xuansishi, jingqixie, shen jimi*).<sup>22</sup> He felt that the Ming had failed to do justice to proper coastal governance, and he was keen to search for the reasons for its weaknesses as if this would help him discover parallels with the Qing experience. When his cousin Lan Tingzhen, who held a military position in the navy guarding the Nan'ao island, visited him in Zhangpu, Dingyuan's ideas about strengthening the country could not but have made a deep impression on him.<sup>23</sup> Tingzhen must also have seen admirable qualities in Dingyuan. This is probably the time when Tingzhen came to realise that he had to rely on this cousin to formulate various tactics that would lead to the pacification of coastal China in the years to come.

In summary, during his childhood and adolescence growing up in a family of limited means, Lan Dingyuan was given a relatively liberal and variegated model of Confucian education. His family's strong scholarly background assured him of a sound education. He was tutored not only in the classics, which prepared him for the civil service examinations, but he also had a wide variety of training that formed his political commitments and the justification of his activism. Therefore, Lan cannot be neatly pigeonholed as having been a typical Confucian scholar of the time because his scholarly life had been so rich that it reflected a diversity of interests. At a time when most juvenile scholars were wholly devoted to studying the prescribed texts to prepare for the national examinations that ensured their successful entry into the bureaucracy, Lan was exposed to a variety of enriching experiences. And these experiences were arguably shaped by his

21. Ibid., 1b.

22. Lan Dingyuan, "Yu Jingpu jiaxiong lun zhenshou Nan'ao shiyi shu," *Luzhou quanji*, juan 2, 2b–3a.

23. Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, 1644–1912*, p. 440.

proximity to a maritime China that he had been bound to since his early days in Zhangpu.

### Consequences of the Kangxi Emperor's Embargo

After the annexation of Taiwan in 1684, the Kangxi emperor lifted the sea ban he had imposed on the Taiwan Strait and other sea spaces attached to China. During the 23-year-long sea blockade, a significant part of Fujian along the coast had become a wasteland.<sup>24</sup> All commercial networks were forcefully wiped out and the population precipitously declined. As a result of such draconian policy, approximately 5.3 million hectares (*mu*) of land of coastal China lay fallow for over two decades.<sup>25</sup> A report submitted by Fan Chengmo, the governor general of Fujian and Zhejiang in 1673, states that

The people in Fujian predominantly rely on agriculture and fishing for their sustenance. However, with the shift of boundaries further inland, over two million hectares of land have been left uncultivated. This abandonment of land has resulted in the loss of daily resources, amounting to more than two hundred thousand taels of silver. Consequently, revenue shortages have emerged, and once-productive fields have transformed into wastelands. The vulnerable, including the elderly, women, and children, have struggled to survive in makeshift shelters. Countless individuals have been forced to roam in search of sustenance, while those who remain have found themselves unemployed. The recent hardships have escalated to an alarming degree, leaving people distressed. Meanwhile, the rising coastal tide poses a growing threat. Without proper provisions, there is a risk that hunger and cold may drive some to resort to robbery for survival. The potential for law-abiding behaviour among the populace cannot be assured under these circumstances.<sup>26</sup>

24. Chang Pin-tsun, "The Sea as Arable Fields: A Mercantile Outlook on the Maritime Frontier of Late Ming China," in Angela Schottenhammer and Roderich Ptak (eds.), *The Perception of Maritime Space in Traditional Chinese Sources* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), p. 23.

25. Robert J. Antony, *Rats, Cats, Rogues, and Heroes: Glimpses of China's Hidden Past* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), p. 54.

26. This passage could be found in *Qing Shenzu shilu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985–1987), vol. 10, p. 164.

The sea ban strategy, in hindsight, might have had some positive outcomes in isolating the Zheng's force in Taiwan, but the process entailed dreadful costs. Fujian's coastline remained vulnerable until the Kangxi emperor 'reopened the sea'. However, it took a long time for the coastal community and economy to fully recover, not to mention that the emperor proclaimed a halt to all kinds of shipping between China and Southeast Asia (*nanyang*) in 1717, which was commonly referred to as the 'second sea ban'. The second sea ban was put in place for another ten years.<sup>27</sup> In 1727, the Yongzheng emperor lifted the embargo policy as a response to advocates for more open sea trade, including Lan Dingyuan, who favoured abolishing all restrictions on maritime trade.<sup>28</sup> In hindsight, between 1684 and 1727, the coastal communities of China, particularly those in Fujian and Guangdong, had been struggling to restore their coastal economies. The restrictive set of laws had led to both social and economic instability. The coastal region was plagued by various other issues, among them the persistent piracy around Nan'ao island, an area notorious for serving as a haven for pirates.<sup>29</sup> Attentive readers could also draw some parallels between the Ming scenario under the Hongwu embargo, covered in Chapter Three, and the 'post-sea-ban era' discussed here.

Troubled by the strict laws proscribing them from freely conducting sea trade, a sizeable number of the coastal population had no choice but to become petty pirates to overcome the hardships of the time. Meanwhile, even after the first sea ban was lifted in 1684, most of the harbours, shipyards, and canals linking rivers and seaports were not being kept in satisfactory condition, while most of the sea lanes, both domestic and transregional, had already been cut off for decades. Coastal officials had been too occupied administrating the coastal situation. As a result, provincial governments found it difficult to ward off local pirates who were in most cases extremely agile and mobile. Their movements were also

27. William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 165.

28. Zheng Yangwen, *China on the Sea: How the Maritime World Shaped Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 89.

29. Ng Chin-keong, "Maritime Frontiers, Territorial Expansion and Hai-fang," in Roderich Ptak (ed.), *China and her Neighbours: Borders, Visions of the Other, Foreign Policy 10th to 19th Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), p. 232; Akira Matsuura, "Chinese Sea Merchants and Pirates," in Demin Tao and Fujita Takao (eds.), *Cultural Interaction Studies in East Asia: New Methods and Perspectives* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2021), p. 184.

difficult to detect as these petty pirates could maintain several identities. In daytime, they could assume the guise of typical merchants in the marketplace, and of sailors along the coast or even aboard merchant ships; at night, they could easily transform themselves into groups of pirates whose clandestine movements made them difficult to detect. In other words, their identities under the sun were merely a camouflage for the devious ploys they carried out at night.

It is unlikely that these petty pirates would have caused any large-scale disruptions, like the Zheng clan in Taiwan, or Chen Zuyi, the pirate king featured in Chapter Two. However, according to Qing legal records, these marauders were undoubtedly doing harm to the coastal people, eroding the foundation of the local offices and causing regional economic instability.<sup>30</sup> In the words of Dingyuan,

Today the realm is in a state of peace, there are no so-called major bandits; only a few unruly individuals driven by hunger and cold to commit crimes and evade the law. They seek refuge in the vast expanse of the seas, yet often cannot be eradicated. Year after year, they cause troubles for merchants and civilians. This is due to the inability of merchant ships to fend off enemies and patrol ships to encounter the thieves.<sup>31</sup>

To rid the coast of these petty pirates, the Beijing authority imposed a set of laws forbidding all seafarers, excluding soldiers in the navy, to carry any kind of weapon on board. The policy's intention was to disrupt the perceptible supply chain of armaments between the arms dealers and pirates. However, the sanction aimed at deterring these connections failed to solve the problem because most weapons were traded in the shadow market, which officials could hardly regulate or administrate. Lan Dingyuan strongly denounced the government's ill-conceived policy. He asserted that the current ban on weapons would be counter-productive because if the arms traders weren't protected, they would easily be attacked by pirates who still had knives, arrows, and spears, if not firearms, in hand:

30. Paola Calanca, "Piracy and Coastal Security in Southeastern China 1600–1780," in Robert J. Antony (ed.), *Elusive Pirates, Pervasive Smugglers: Violence and Clandestine Trade in the Great China Seas* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), p. 98.

31. Lan Dingyuan, "Lun haiyang mibu daozei shu," *Luzhou quanji*, jian 1, 11a.

Merchants lacked firearms and military equipment to defend against enemies. Additionally, their ships are heavy and sluggish, making it difficult to escape. Upon hearing any suspicious sound, they quickly lower their sails, fearing any delay, and nervously wait as pirates board their vessels for plunder. They release the ships afterward, or sometimes hijack the ships and force them to depart elsewhere. This forced compliance is temporary at first, but over time, it becomes ingrained. As days go by, the number of incidents increases. Eventually, they divide into smaller groups of one or two ships, gradually growing in power. These small-time rogues have no other means. If merchant ships were not to immediately panic and lower their sails, and if they were armed to defend themselves, what could pirates possibly do?

In my opinion, merchant ships all have their own worth and livelihoods; they would not dare to consider becoming bandits and risk losing their lives and reputation. Moreover, every ship that sets sail has its own local neighbours as endorsements, while local officials verify the purposes, provide protective ship licenses, and only then can they engage in seaborne trade. People with such established roots and credibility should not be suspected. Instead of restricting them from carrying firearms and forcing them to surrender to pirates, if the imperial edict could refrain from imposing restrictions and lift the prohibition on arming merchant ships, within a few months, the pirate gangs would be wiped out due to starvation and hardship. There will be no gang left as they have no choice but forced to disband and return home.<sup>32</sup>

In retrospect, Lan also took a holistic view of the matter, arguing that most sea merchants were wealthy enough to protect themselves on the sea without requiring the navy to spend a penny. According to him, if the weapons sanction were to be eradicated, then these merchants could arm their vessels and recruit their own guards to protect the crews and shipments on board their vessels. Furthermore, those merchants would hardly participate in any piratical activities because they simply had no reason to do so. The government should then rebuild the economy along the coast rather than restricting businesses by forbidding them from carrying weapons on board as a way to protect their goods and valuables from piracy. In other words, the respective sanction not only caused suffering among traders, not to

32. Ibid., 11b–12a.

mention overworking the navy, but it also restricted trade, thereby reducing the empire's revenues and, by extension, the standard and effectiveness of local governance. Although it was impossible to guarantee that all merchants would not collaborate with petty pirates, Lan was nonetheless perceptive in showing how such enforcement affected the majority. After all, a decline in trade would create further social discontent and unrest during the so-called 'recovery period', compounding the problems already at hand.

After the Qing navy defeated the Zheng's regime and included Taiwan in the national picture, the navy's morale seemed to improve. Taiwan's annexation might have put the dragon fleet in high spirits, but as Lan Dingyuan witnessed, the fleet's capability was not sustained well enough in the early eighteenth century. According to Lan, after the largest maritime threat to the empire had been eliminated, morale among the navy began to decline:

Nowadays, due to prolonged peace, our navy have grown weary and indolent. The commander-in-chief lives in luxury and refuses to venture into the sea. The appointed commanders and officers are tasked with patrolling and anchoring their ships only near the shore. They indulge in revelry and leisure, using the war junks as entertainment. Meanwhile, the gangs of pirates band together and raid, without anyone daring to intervene. At times, when ordered to carry out their duties, they reluctantly venture slightly offshore. Then they put on a show of grandeur, slowly proceeding with their sails hoisted. They beat drums loudly on board, firing cannons to intimidate, fearing that pirate ships might not be able to hear them coming from afar. The pirates, in return, seem to show mutual understanding, avoiding direct conflict and instead raiding in other areas. After a while, incidents occur, often in other jurisdictions, and the local officials there celebrate, convinced that the pirates would not dare to encroach upon their territories. This, then, is the common problem plaguing today's coastal naval forces.<sup>33</sup>

Compared with the troops that had been led and trained by Shi Lang in the 1680s, the Qing navy, as in Lan's description, lacked the competence that comes with ample, appropriate training, which was lacking. Moreover, crew sizes were reduced, starting from the 1700s. This also had unintended consequences for the naval force's overall readiness. For instance, the

33. Lan Dingyuan, "Yu Jingpu jiaxiong lun zhenshou Nan'ao shiyi shu," 1b–2a.

reduced manpower on board vessels and at shore support facilities, such as beacons and water castles, placed an unmanageable workload onto smaller, less trained and experienced soldiers.<sup>34</sup> There was also a growing backlog for the maintenance of ships, another consequence of poorly trained ships' crews that were unable to maintain an acceptable standard. In fact, most of Qing China's warships prior to the mid-nineteenth century went through proper inspections and maintenance at regular intervals every three, five, and ten years.<sup>35</sup> But due to the lack of proper scrutiny, most of these repairs did not take place in a timely manner in the 30-year period between 1690 and 1720.

Demoralisation among the navy also posed another challenge to coastal stability. As Lan pointed out, the naval force's competency was closely bound to the revival of shipping between provinces, so a competent navy should have been committed to protecting sea merchants and pacifying pirates even during so-called peacetime. The maritime belt attached to China would not have been able to facilitate a suitable environment for various types of maritime activities in the absence of a navy that was properly and professionally carrying out its duties. Fundamentally, the navy should have been taking preventive measures in helping to re-establish order and a better flow between traders and the locals, ports and ports, and land and sea, and in proactively responding to emergencies. The navy's demoralisation, as such, had generated an inertia among the crews that manned its fleet and this inhibited the development of a proficient and well-rounded navy and further eroded the efficiency of coastal governance.

The navy was also confined by an organisational problem where the connections between naval generals and the sailors they commanded had been loosely maintained. This problem originated from the fact that the Qing had a policy of rotating naval leaders on a regular basis. By rotating these military commanders from squadron to squadron, fleet to fleet, and place to place, the authorities in Beijing believed they could prevent sailors and their commanders from developing close bonds. Quite sensibly, if any solid bonding between the generals and the soldiers were formed in the military, the ruler would have felt insecure about the concealment or consolidation of these local forces, which might eventually have led to the potential fragmentation of imperial control and intervention over regional affairs, particularly those in the frontier regions located far from the capital.

34. Ibid.

35. Zhao Erxun et al., *Qing shi gao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), *juan* 135, p. 3981.

The Manchu monarchs were, in fact, not the only ones to remain wary of allowing close bonds to develop within an army or navy. The Song, Yuan, and Ming emperors also applied similar tactics to maintain the type of balance they felt would cement power and domination across their empires.<sup>36</sup> From a nation-wide, administrative point of view, the respective rotations turned out to be sensible and effective in maintaining national stability, but they also became an impractical measure in maintaining a strong navy that could deter aggression and protect the country's security interests.

Meanwhile, as Lan indicated, the naval commanders themselves neglected to establish a moral example that would effectively discipline their soldiers and foster a strong sense of unity within the navy:

In the present day, those who hold the position of commander-in-chief seem to focus on establishing their authority. However, they become excessively self-important and view the lives and deaths of their soldiers as trivial matters. They handle minor mistakes with excessive punishment, causing those around them to be constantly anxious and fearful. This approach, lacking generosity and empathy, leads to division among the troops and renders them incapable of facing the enemy. On the other hand, those who attempt to appear magnanimous and lenient end up neglecting discipline, allowing the soldiers to become arrogant and uncontrollable. Orders are disregarded, and chaos ensues. In such cases, commanders merely become lifeless puppets on the stage, lacking vitality.

The key to leading troops lies in understanding human nature, empathizing with their experiences, considering hunger, cold, sickness, discomfort, and the complexities of personal lives, such as marriage and death. This ensures a sense of camaraderie, where soldiers are treated like close relatives who cannot be separated. Nonetheless, once orders are issued, they must be unswerving, and violations should be met with unwavering punishment. Just as there was no pardon for the likes of Zhuang Jia who disobeyed orders and were executed by Sima Rangju, or when Zhuge Liang (180–234) wept as he ordered the execution of Ma Su (190–228), ensuring that soldiers know that military laws cannot be violated. This approach leads to the execution of all orders and the

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36. Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 125–126.

enforcement of all prohibitions. The soldiers of the three armies carry a sense of gratitude and fear, indicating the mastery of the art of winning their hearts.<sup>37</sup>

These conditions compelled Lan to write a series of inspiring essays on how to render the decaying navy more effective. As Lan saw it, the core of most of the aforementioned problems was the lack of stewardship and coordination among the naval generals at the top. Therefore, the first thing to improve the situation would be to strengthen the bonding between the commanders and their sailors. Lan was not worried about the danger of naval generals having too much power; he regarded the lack of trust and team spirit within the navy as even more critical, for much could be enhanced only if the commanders could lead the troops in an effective, impartial, and professional manner. In fact, most of the leaders of the Fujian navy had been appointed from districts far away from the county. They were either officials, who had assumed duties in inland provinces, such as Sichuan or Hebei, or they were superiors in the army who had received their training in maritime provinces in the northeast. These military officers served as examples of those who were being brought to the coastal frontier and thereby having their lives and identities shaped by a maritime China. Given the fact they would only stay in office for a defined period, these generals could hardly have established solid bonds with the personnel under their supervision, let alone have effectively communicated with them, as they did not speak the same dialects. Add to this the dissimilar cultural habits and customs between these commanders and their charges, due to regional differences, and the overall picture would have been one of a series of nearly insurmountable barriers.

In addition to the lack of bonding, if not brotherhood, among the navy, Lan also saw that it was crucial to reconstitute the hitherto poorly defined responsibilities among the sailors on board. Poor leadership had led many naval officers to neglect some of their assigned duties, such as regular patrolling and warship maintenance, thereby leaving the coastal frontier inadequately protected. Some of them even lost the necessary training, passion, and skill to crack down on piracy. As Lan and a few of his contemporaries observed, a handful of petty pirates could easily plunder several villages at any given time. In light of the deteriorating scenario, Lan's remedy was to tighten the chain of command at the top, enhance the selection process for

37. Lan Dingyuan, "Yu Jingpu jiaxiong lun zhenshou Nan'ao shiyi shu," 7b–8a.

capable sailors, dispatch the navy's old and weak, refine the weapons and equipment, and make the naval generals responsible for conducting sea patrols across the inner sea more often as well as being more effective and proactive in guarding key locations, including coastal cities and offshore islands. His proposal exhibited an impressive level of specificity and practicality. For instance, this was evident in his approach of replacing older and weaker soldiers with individuals who possessed greater capabilities:

Among the soldiers stationed at Nan'ao, half are elderly and weak, sons of the privileged who reside in the ranks, causing troubles with gambling and evasion of military service. This cannot go unchecked. However, due to long-standing practices, abrupt reforms may lead to heated complaints and claims of severity. In my humble opinion, the soldiers who are elderly and weak, as well as those unfit for naval duties due to illness, should be listed separately. Extra conscripts should be called up to replace them, without distinguishing between true conscripts and falsified ones. Only those who are physically fit and skilled in combat should be selected.

If the first recruitment is unsatisfactory, there should be a second chance; if the second is still inadequate, then a third. If three attempts prove unsuccessful, they should be dismissed, and the officials should recruit brave and strong individuals to fill the gaps. Profiting from this process should be avoided, ensuring that the troops are all capable. There will be no misuse of provisions under false names, and regular training exercises will be held every three, six, and nine months to evaluate their skills and reward or punish accordingly. This way, soldiers will understand the intentions of their commanders, and commanders will understand the situation of their soldiers. They will stand as formidable defenders of the region, knowing themselves to be invincible in their chosen path.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to recruiting more capable soldiers, Lan suggested that the navy should devise more creative tactics to stamp out the chronic problem of piracy. For instance, a battleship could pretend to be a merchant vessel (*shangchuan*) by not raising its naval flag or signalling any signpost (*wuzhang*

38. Ibid., 4a–4b.

*qizhi*, *wugua paidao*) when patrolling the assigned area off the coast. The rationale for so doing was elaborated by Lan as follows:

Pirates approach merchant ships cautiously while evading patrol boats. Patrol boats are nimble and agile, moving swiftly, whereas merchant ships are ponderous and slow-moving. Patrol boats proudly display banners (*qizhi*) and brandish sabers (*paidao*), distinguishing themselves from merchant vessels that lack such features. This discernment aids the pirates in distinguishing between the two types of ships. In my perspective, patrol boats should adopt a strategy akin to that of merchant ships, refraining from raising banners or showcasing sabers. They could discreetly carry small stones for ballast, creating the illusion of cargo, which could also serve as makeshift weapons in urgent situations. Actions should be neither too predictable nor too continuous, proceeding according to circumstances and allowing for adjustments. When encountering enemy ships, raise the signal of the large cannon, gather the patrol forces, intercept, encircle, and capture the enemy ship. The chances of success will far outnumber failures.<sup>39</sup>

As a result, according to Lan's plan, if the pirates nearby decided to attack the 'mock ship', they would then be easily arrested by the sailors hiding below deck. This was similar to using a fake merchant vessel as bait to entice pirates as prey and then trap them.

In the early eighteenth century, the navy had also been beset by an additional obstacle concerning its proclivity for evading responsibility. At times, there were competitions between different parties in the navy whenever easy victories were expected. However, when facing a strong pirate clan, only a few generals would assume responsibility for taking action. Suspicion and rivalry also permeated the ranks as some of the sailors distrusted each other. There were even reports indicating that some marines not only bullied and preyed on the commoners but even supported pirates by providing food, water, and sensitive intelligence.<sup>40</sup> To curb these pernicious practices, Lan called for a more careful selection procedure for capable sailors serving the navy as well as an introduction of a tighter rubric to regulate the marine corps:

39. Ibid., 6b–7a.

40. Wang Rigen and Zhang Guang, "Lun Lan Dingyuan de haiyang jingshi sixiang," *Anhui shixue*, no. 2 (2015), p. 40.

Although there may be fierce tigers, without claws and teeth they lack intimidation; similarly, renowned generals are formidable with capable subordinates. Moreover, in the weighty matter of vanquishing enemies, can one afford to disregard the lives of close and loyal soldiers? In my opinion, the garrison forces should be carefully chosen for their strength and robustness. Among these, approximately three hundred individuals should be selected as dedicated patrol soldiers due to their exceptional martial skills and outstanding abilities. These individuals should receive special privileges and accompany every voyage. Furthermore, from this group of three hundred, around fifty to sixty individuals who exhibit extraordinary martial prowess and unwavering loyalty should be chosen as close companions, fostering a bond of trust and mutual support. In cases of leadership vacancies, the most capable should be promoted to encourage their zeal. When capturing pirate ships containing gold, silver, and goods, the spoils should be evenly distributed based on their quantity. All those who participate in the patrols should share in the benefits, eschewing self-interest. Those who show exceptional effort in battle and outperform others should receive double rewards. When there is a vacancy, it should be swiftly filled, as those who fearlessly confront danger become invincible in their courage. When facing enemy ships, they act like hawks seizing rabbits. Achievements, fame, and wealth all lie within this framework, motivating each member to put forth their utmost efforts, anxious only that the garrison commander does not neglect patrol duties.<sup>41</sup>

Although Lan's diagnosis of the naval force in the early eighteenth century was not entirely original, his analysis was strikingly perceptive. However, some of his proposed reforms appeared to be unrealistic. For example, it is very unlikely that the central government would have allowed a naval general to lead a particular fleet for too long as this would encourage localism. In essence, the Qing military system, as a whole, had been designed to prevent the concertation of regional powers.<sup>42</sup> It was not until the 1850s, when the Manchu authority was threatened by the Taiping rebels, that the central authority tolerated the emergence of personal armies, such as that organised by Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) and Li Hongzhang (1823–1901). However,

41. Ibid., 4b–5b.

42. Nicolas Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Art of Governing Soldiers* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), p. 26.

despite the fact that both the Zeng and Li armies had proved to be successful in suppressing the Taiping rebels, the government still viewed these generals with disfavour, while their militia were not considered universally desirable. As a consequence, after Taiping was subjugated, the rise of Zeng and Li came under surveillance due to fear and suspicion. The cautious Manchu government still preferred the Banner and Green Standard forces.<sup>43</sup>

The other hurdle to actualising Lan's plan was to ensure that the navy had been well-trained and well-led. At the time, it had been difficult to recruit a capable naval general. The existing selection model had been founded on Confucianism, which meant scholars were selected to administrate the navy. These were men of high moral principles who had also passed the civil service examination. Those chosen were then expected to deal with all matters pertaining to local governance.<sup>44</sup> But such ideal candidates rarely existed, and it was not always easy to find a civil official who was capable of commanding the navy. Shi Lang, who trained and led the Qing fleet to destroy the Zheng's force in Taiwan, was one among a few exceptions who were proficient in naval warfare, due to his extensive military experience on the sea. In other words, Lan's proposal to enhance the overall quality of the navy would take a long time to materialise on a large scale. Although the Qing navy had succeeded in pacifying the Zhu Yigui rebellion, on the other side of the Taiwan Strait (to be discussed later), this was probably because Zhu and his followers had been too disorganised and inexperienced in the face of the dragon navy's capability on the sea. Despite the fact that this campaign was thought to have been a 'glorified achievement', it was still a questionable one, considering the weak and unprepared opposition.

### Taiwan and the Mother Duck King

The year 1721 was a turning point for Dingyuan. At 41 years of age, he had been involved in the heady atmosphere of Taiwan. This was the year the Zhu Yigui rebellion broke out in the city of Tainan. The emperor appointed

43. David Pong, *Shen Pao-chen and China's Modernization in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 39–40.

44. Ichiisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 111–112; William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 48–49.

Dingyuan's cousin Lan Tingzhen to suppress the upheaval. Tingzhen believed that Dingyuan would be a huge asset, given his knowledge and foresight. He thus invited him to take part in the campaign, and Dingyuan agreed.<sup>45</sup> Owing to his participation in battles against the rebels, Dingyuan became even more popular among the officials along the coast of China. His reputation as a master of the sea was thereby further consolidated, while his views on how to administrate Taiwan remained applicable to the Qing rulers in the years to come. In hindsight, the exigencies of the time and Dingyuan's close relationship with Tingzhen, who had himself been catapulted to an important position in the navy, were contributing factors in Dingyuan's popularity and legacy. At the same time, however, his prominence was entirely the result of his own achievements. In this section, we shall first examine the rise of Zhu Yigui in Tainan, which in my view did not occur by accident, and then we will move on to discuss Lan's active engagement in the suppression of Zhu and his followers in 1722.

Taiwan was never calm and peaceful after its annexation under the Kangxi emperor in 1683. After all, as argued by the renowned historian Emma Teng, 'since the Qing had not intended to acquire Taiwan permanently when it sent Shi Lang into battle, in annexing the island it became, in effect, an accidental colonizer rather than a colonizer by design'.<sup>46</sup> It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that the Qing court began to consider the potential effort involved in embracing 'the idea of colonizing the island'. Yet the way the Qing attempted to colonise Taiwan was drastically different from the way their European counterparts' colonies materialised overseas. The Manchu monarchs, namely the Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors, showed no interest in turning the island into a trading hub or an agricultural colony. Their primary concern was to ensure that Taiwan did not become a pirates' lair and, more importantly, that it did not revert back to a rebel base. Meanwhile, the more than two decades long conflicts with the Zheng family had left a scar on the Qing, in which the orientation of its maritime policy, particularly that applied in southeast China, could hardly have escaped being oriented toward dealing with piracy and rebel factions throughout the first half of the long eighteenth century. As a result, the Qing court did not develop any substantial, long-term plan to govern the island to the east. Administratively, Taiwan was simply

45. Lan Dingyuan, "Preface (*xu*)," *Pingtai jilüe* (collected in *Luzhou quanji*, vol. 9), 2b.

46. Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683–1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 81.

integrated into Fujian province and only headed by a prefect, who was subordinated to the intendant as well as the governor of Fujian and the governor general of Fujian and Zhejiang, despite the fact that 180 kilometres of sea space separated the mainland and the island. Needless to say, the eastern part of Taiwan's Central Mountain Range was left undisturbed. The central authority considered the area if not an empty space or 'uninhabited terrain (*wuren zhi jing*)', then beyond imperial control.<sup>47</sup>

To ensure the Qing would not see another Zheng force or any similar vagrants emerging on the island of Taiwan, in 1684, the Kangxi emperor enacted a set of quarantine policies intended to limit communication between Taiwan and the mainland. The emperor also set up a series of regulations to restrict Han-Chinese from migrating to the island as a way to keep settlement there to a minimum.<sup>48</sup> These policies were illustrative examples demonstrating that, at the outset, the Qing was not at all interested in making use of Taiwan's geopolitical advantages to consolidate control across its maritime frontier. What mattered to the Manchu monarchs was the Taiwan Strait, where the navy was assigned to patrol regularly, but not the western part of the island itself. Perhaps the only contribution Taiwan made to the grander blueprint of securing the empire's maritime frontier was arguably its abundant resources of timber, in the mountains, that proved to be suitable to construct warships.<sup>49</sup> In the early days of Qing rule on the island, nothing formidable had been built to match Fort Zeelandia, a fortress established by the Dutch East India Company over the ten years between 1624 and 1634. The governor of Fujian also rarely recruited native Taiwanese to join the navy, although around 10,000 land and marine troops had been garrisoned in Tainan.

Although the Qing court was devoted to maintaining Taiwan's 'ethnic status quo' by promulgating the above-mentioned policies, a sizeable number of Han-Chinese, mainly from Fujian, had been keen to exploit the island's many valuable resources, such as deer, tea, sugar, timber, and camphor, to maximise their profits.<sup>50</sup> Some were even brave enough to break the existing

47. Ibid., p. 86.

48. Concerning these quarantine policies, see John R. Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier 1600–1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 137–238.

49. Chen Guodong, "Jungong jiangshou yu Qingling shiqi Taiwan de famu wenti, 1683–1857," *Renwen ji shehui kexue jikan*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1995), pp. 123–158.

50. Shelley Rigger, "Taiwan: Margin, Center, Node," in Michael Szonyi (ed.), *A Companion to Chinese History* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017), pp. 332–334.

regulations against conducting business there. In theory, the aborigines in Taiwan were somehow protected by the quarantine policy, as their rights were maintained, but in actuality, those Qing policies only had the limited effect of sheltering the island's natives as the Fujian government had been guided by a principle that aimed to maintain control of the island at the lowest possible cost. To put it simply, the Qing had inadequate resources, both administratively and militarily, to defend the aborigine communities against the Han-Chinese. As a consequence, disagreements between the Han migrants and the aborigines led to numerous clashes between the two communities. The latter constantly complained about their homelands being destroyed and their natural resources being exploited by the 'Han-intruders', whom they viewed as Chinese opportunists. As the saying goes, it was not surprising at the time to see 'small turbulences (*xiaoluan*)' every three years and 'large-scale disorder (*dalu*)' every five years on the island. In retrospect, most of these disturbances were 'attributable to the misdeeds of Chinese'.<sup>51</sup>

Understandably, the appointed prefect stationed in Tainan was not always capable of resolving these disruptions. He lacked the resources and manpower to do so and some of these problems were too complicated to tackle. The unsettled situation in Taiwan, therefore, led to the rise of Zhu Yigui, a native of Changtai county, Zhangzhou prefecture, who had moved to Taiwan in 1713 as a servant to the administrator of the Circuit of Taiwan and Amoy. Zhu's life history is quite a story. He did not serve the administrator for long but took to raising ducks in rural Fengshan, where he became famous among the villagers for being able to train his ducks to march in a disciplined, 'military' formation – hence his reputation as 'the mother duck king (*yamu wang*)', which spread widely across the region. In the words of Lan Dingyuan,

(Zhu Yigui) lacked any particular skills and was inclined towards forming connections with dubious characters. This earned him the jealousy of his fellow villagers. In the 52nd year of the Kangxi reign (1713), during the period of Taiwan's history, he was enlisted as a labourer for road construction in the Tainan and Zhanghua regions. However, he was soon dismissed from this position. He then resided

51. John R. Shepherd, "The Island Frontier of the Ch'ing, 1684–1780," in Murray A. Rubinstein (ed.), *Taiwan: A New History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 109.

on a grassy hilltop, raising ducks as a means of subsistence. His ducks would parade in and out twice a day, creating a spectacle for the village. Whenever bandits passed through, he would warmly entertain them, preparing duck dishes and feasting with them, aiming to please. During this era of prolonged peace and tranquillity, where the local administration paid little attention to governance and the well-being of the people, Yigui's actions stood in stark contrast, reflecting his easily swayed disposition.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to spending time on a duck farm, according to the above, Zhu also expanded his circle by befriending depressed and lawless settlers on the island, including the aborigines and those who had migrated to Taiwan as low-paid workers or slaves of their Chinese masters. In the spring of 1721, one of the officials in Tainan failed to mediate a dispute between the locals and the Han immigrants. In this case, Zhu Yigui and his like-minded followers, most of them desperados such as Li Yong, Wu Wai, and Zheng Dingrui, were then able to take advantage of the discontent to initiate an uprising. Because his last name, Zhu, was the same as that of the defunct Ming imperial family, he was chosen as leader in the hope of rallying more support 'under the banner of a Ming restoration'.<sup>53</sup> On 14 May the same year, Zhu Yigui, together with 51 other captains, assembled in a place called Gangshan, which was located along the border of Fengshan district, to take an oath of brotherhood (*fenbiao jiemeng*).<sup>54</sup>

In her classic study *The Origins of the Tiandihui: The Chinese Triads in Legend and History*, Dian Murray eloquently suggested that 'the sworn brotherhoods of the Kangxi era can be said to have represented the first phase in the development of Chinese secret societies.... [They] also gave way to societies known as *hui* (during the Yongzheng era)... and sometimes served as the vehicles for rebellion'.<sup>55</sup> According to Murray, these groups of people were mainly disorganised, even though they were, in essence, bound together to defend themselves from being exploited by factions that opposed them. Along a similar vein, this lack of organisational structure encouraged Zhu Yigui and his followers to consolidate in a similar brotherhood. After

52. Lan Dingyuan, "Zhu yigui zhi luan," *Pingtai jilüe*, 1a–1b.

53. Robert Antony, *Rats, Cats, Rogues, and Heroes*, p. 3.

54. Lan Dingyuan, "Zhu yigui zhi luan," *Pingtai jilüe*, 2a.

55. Dian Murray, in collaboration with Qin Baoqi, *The Origins of the Tiandihui: The Chinese Triads in Legend and History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 51.

several victorious campaigns over the local army on the island, Zhu's troops gained control of the central office in Tainan and took over more than a quarter of Western Taiwan, covering both Fengshan and Zhuluo counties. Zhu even proclaimed himself as the 'king of revival (*zhongxing wang*)', formed a government, and adopted the title 'Yonghe', meaning eternal peace. However, rather ironically, the revival king soon realised that eternal peace could hardly be obtained. A few months later, he placed his followers in various offices, whereupon the various leaders in the camp began to have their own visions of how to run things.<sup>56</sup> This led to a bloody power struggle, which then profoundly weakened Zhu's leadership.<sup>57</sup> Despite this setback, the Qing court did not simply sit and wait until the rebels decimated themselves. Instead, Beijing chose this moment to order Lan Tingzhen and his superior Shi Shipiao to eliminate these bandits.

### The Campaign

The instant Lan Tingzhen was tasked with eradicating the opposing force, he recalled his conversation with Lan Dingyuan on coastal defence and maritime matters, when they had been traveling together in Fujian. He had strongly urged Dingyuan to join his personal staff to serve as his private advisor. Dingyuan's assistance was especially desirable because he was probably one of the very few experts at the time who had studied the navy and the coastal conditions in the Taiwan Strait in great detail. Dingyuan accepted the invitation. And although it is well-known that he served Tingzhen as a military adviser, it was unlikely that Dingyuan had officially become his cousin's personal assistant (*muyou*). After all, Dingyuan was not on Tingzhen's payroll and he did not carry any official title throughout the campaign.

Although historians consider the Zhu Yigui rebellion the first major uprising of Chinese settlers since the annexation of Taiwan, which 'posed a serious threat to Qing rule on the island' or 'threatened the state's sovereignty',<sup>58</sup> it was very much a weakly organised rebellion. As noted earlier, Zhu's clan had become a cluster of factions. On 10 July 1721,

56. Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Qing Period: Revised Edition* (Massachusetts: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2018), p. 927.

57. Lan Dingyuan, "Zhu yigui zhi luan," *Pingtai jilüe*, 8a–8b.

58. Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography*, p. 92; Mark A. Allee, *Law and Local Society*

the Qing navy, led by Shi Shipiao and Lan Tingzhen, reached Luermen, a wetland connecting a few riverways and the city of Anping, and fired on the fort Zhu's army had been guarding. Since this fort was poorly defended, the rebels had no choice but to retreat after being at their checkpoints for only a few hours. The Qing's troops then landed and swiftly took over Anping as their commanding base. Serious fighting between the two sides ensued, but it only lasted for a week as Zhu Yigui had fled from the frontlines. Together with a handful of his followers, he was captured on 30 July and sent to Beijing. On reflection, the riot did not last long as the Qing navy only took slightly over two months to stamp out the rebellion, and Zhu Yigui was executed. Records show that the island had been cleared of insurgents by mid-1723. However, despite the fact that this revolt was short-lived and the insurgents were removed, in the words of Emma Teng, it did serve to intensify the existing debate over the relative merits of the Qing's 'quarantine and pro-colonisation polices' in its management of Taiwan.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, Dingyuan's service under his cousin in this campaign, though brief, had a significant impact on his later career.

Lan Dingyuan's participation in this military operation across the strait provided him with a chance to visit Taiwan's terrain in person. Based on his experiences in the navy, he also completed an account that featured the Qing's campaign against the rioters, titled *Record of the Pacification of Taiwan* (*Ping Tai ji*), which he published in 1723. In addition to this military and rather triumphant record, he also penned a collection of travel writings titled *Record of an Eastern Campaign* (*Dongzheng ji*). Both his position and his scholarship, in a way, drew the attention of many tacticians, military commanders, scholars, and, later on, even the Yongzheng emperor. His involvement in this suppression under the command of his cousin thus provided him with a wide circle of well-placed intellectuals, several of whom subsequently became quite influential. In retrospect, it is no doubt that Lan's appointment as his cousin's private advisor was itself an indication of his growing importance at the time. But his fame, to a substantial extent, was also very much shaped by the turmoil that had erupted in Taiwan, an island closely bound to the everchanging maritime world.

*in Late Imperial China: Northern Taiwan in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 95.

59. Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography*, p. 26.

After this transient rebellion, the importance of Taiwan was recognised not only by Lan but also by his ‘admirers’. In fact, Dingyuan made it pretty clear that Taiwan was strategically important in multiple ways:

Taiwan stands prominently in the sea, directly impacting the southeastern half of the mainland. The coastal provinces are interconnected, and their stability or turmoil holds significant implications for the nation. The causes and strategies for chaos, the sacrifices of heroes and the loss of integrity, the tactics of planning and confronting challenges – all of these involve the wielding of power and responsibility, serving as timeless lessons.<sup>60</sup>

However, despite its strategic location, a sizeable number of officials in Beijing considered the island itself as troublesome, wearisome, and difficult. To persuade those with outdated ideas, Lan Dingyuan felt the need to reflect on what he had seen and experienced on the other side of the strait. For instance, he objected to the view that Taiwan was not suitable for any agricultural settlement simply because, as argued by those ‘land-bound’ officials, it was located on the sea and further away from the coast. To Lan, Taiwan was a ‘bountiful paradise’, where a lot of natural resources could be obtained.<sup>61</sup> This view is quite similar to that of the Portuguese when their sailors once christened the island ‘Formosa’, meaning a beautiful island. Dingyuan therefore proposed that the Qing court further develop Taiwan by ‘opening up the land and gathering subjects’ in order to make the best of this treasure island. In his assessment, Taiwan also played a crucial role in the broader maritime world:

Taiwan, a natural fortress overseas, holds the fate of order and chaos, peace and danger, with immense implications for the nation’s southeastern region. Its terrain features numerous towering mountains and vast plains, with waterways connecting in all directions. On the outside, it borders Japan, Ryukyu, Luzon, Calaguas, Siam, Annam, the Western Ocean, and the various Dutch territories – all accessible by a single reed boat. Internally, it neighbours Fujian, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangnan, Shandong, and Liaoyang, living like close relatives under the same roof, with interconnected doorways. It has never been confined by

60. Lan Dingyuan, “Preface,” *Pingtai jilüe*, 2a–2b.

61. Lan Dingyuan, “Fujian quansheng zongtu shuo,” *Luzhou chuji*, juan 12, 3a.

fences or barriers, unlike ordinary islands and counties that can easily be disregarded.<sup>62</sup>

This passage serves as an extended evaluation of Taiwan, building upon the earlier translated excerpt, while Lan's perspective here widened as he examined the island from a broader standpoint, encompassing various other Asian countries at the time. All in all, it is obvious that Lan did not consider Taiwan as desolate or remote due to its location on the sea from a number of his other writings. He saw it as being full of unimaginable potential to invigorate China's coastal economy, especially the regions of Fujian, Zhejiang, and Guangdong. Contemporary scholars have written extensively on Lan's views on Taiwan, so it is not necessary to recap what has already been studied.

In summary, Lan's involvement in the Taiwan campaign represented a critical turning point, if not the most important event, in his career. Although by then he had not sat for any subsequent civil examinations or entered officialdom, he had nonetheless stood out as an advisor noted for his valour, dedication, wisdom, and loyalty. Only a few non-officials at the time were similarly eulogised in *The Draft History of the Qing* (*Qing shi gao*), while Lan's two writings, namely the *Ping Tai ji* and *Dongzheng ji*, were included in the *Emperor's Four Treasuries* (*Siku Quanshu*). Meanwhile, during the military operation in Taiwan, Lan had worked well with his cousin and other naval generals, such as Shi Shipiao, had won their confidence and was able to establish useful connections with officials, intellectuals, technocrats, and military planners. Among these individuals his cousin Lan Tingzhen was the one who had worked closely with him to articulate, express, and actualise his ideas. In hindsight, it should not be seen as an exaggeration to suggest that Dingyuan had been Tingzhen's right-hand man.

### Days in Beijing

Lan's military exploits in Taiwan also provided an opportunity for him to work even closer to the central authority in the capital. In 1723, he was assigned a role in the Forbidden City to help compile a grand book project titled *Records of the Unity of the Great Qing* or, as scholars would

62. Lan Dingyuan, "Fu zhijun Taijiang jingli shu," *Dongzheng ji* (collected in *Luzhou quanji*, vol. 10), *juan* 3, 10a–10b.

name it, *A Comprehensive Geography of the Empire* (*DaQing yitong zhi*). This compilation project was not merely a process of collecting historical materials but an enterprising effort to historicise the rise and success of the Qing empire, through cartography and recording its geography, customs, the expanse of its frontier, as well as its local cultures, and so forth. The project began in 1686, three years after the Kangxi emperor annexed Taiwan. It then continued throughout the Yongzheng, the Qianlong, the Jiaqing, and the Daoguang eras, covering more than a century. Given the scale of this venture, Lan Dingyuan was not the only one the Yongzheng emperor had appointed to take part; another Chinese nobleman, orator, and philosopher, Fang Bao (1668–1749), was also involved in the compilation enterprise. Little is known of Lan's relations with Fang Bao during this period. In all probability they had known each other prior to the project and devoted significant time and energy during the work.<sup>63</sup> However, we know relatively little of Lan's actual duties as one of the editors of the *DaQing yitong zhi*, although contemporary accounts indicate that he was an influential figure who dispatched officials across the country to collect information with which to revise and update the tome's content.<sup>64</sup> It was also recorded that Lan was rigorous and professional, which is also in agreement with our understanding of his other publications featuring Taiwan and the maritime frontier. Furthermore, owing to this compilation role, Lan's reputation as a geographer spread as 'ministers leaving the capital to undertake duties in the provinces flocked to him for information concerning the regions in which they were to be stationed'.

In addition to editing the *Comprehensive Geography of the Empire*, Dingyuan did not stop recording his adventures of the past few years and publishing his thoughts pertaining to short- and long-term coastal governance and management. Most of the thoughts he recorded during this period could echo well with what was summarised earlier in this chapter. What perhaps made his stay in the capital even more significant is that it allowed him to further extend his official contacts. One key connection he made was with Zhu Shi (1665–1736), the grand secretary in Beijing. In 1727, Zhu Shi had been so impressed by Lan's writings about Taiwan and the navy that he strongly recommended that the emperor summon

63. Fang Bao and Zhang Boxing were in fact two key linkages in the so-called *Minxue* network in Fujian. See Li Guotong, *Migrating Fujianese*, p. 25.

64. Jiang Shiche and Xue Shaoyuan; Taiwan yinhang jingji yanjioshi (ed.), *Taiwan tongzhi* (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang jingji yanjioshi, 1993), vol. *xia*, p. 499.

Dingyuan to the Forbidden City. The Yongzheng emperor gladly agreed. In his first meeting with the emperor, Dingyuan elaborated on his proposals to administrate Taiwan and the coastal frontier. Like Zhu, the emperor was equally impressed with Lan's talent and vision. He even commented on Lan and his *Dongzheng ji* as follows:

I have perused the book titled *Collection of Eastern Expeditions* authored by Lan Dingyuan, and his discourse holds much valuable insight. I have instructed Chang Qing (1713–1793) and Li Shiyao (?–1788) to acquire and carefully review this work. In the process of handling post-war affairs, I will thoroughly examine the situation described therein. Among the various matters discussed in the book, those that align with the considerations in the chapter “*shiyi*” should be further consulted. This will ensure that the management of the maritime frontier is executed with excellence in every aspect.<sup>65</sup>

After the meeting, Lan was immediately appointed the district magistrate of the city of Puning, and a month later, acting magistrate of Chaoyang, a district of Beijing; both places are located in Guangdong province. The emperor did not send Lan back to Fujian, the county of his birth, probably because of his intimate connections with the region. This was a common practice when it came to official appointments in imperial China, especially during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Along a similar vein, the emperor also preferred to have his censor Huang Shujing (1682–1758), rather than Lan, investigate Taiwan after the Zhu rebellion, even though Lan was a better candidate, on paper, for this specific mission.<sup>66</sup>

After having served for more than 30 years as a mere scholar, advisor, and compiler of the aforesaid grand book project, Lan Dingyuan was now being catapulted into local officialdom, after a long period of having been on ‘furlough’. This meant he was now obliged to have face-to-face encounters with the people and, supposedly, to administrate all aspects of government on behalf of the emperor. Although county magistrates were not considered high officials – they were in fact situated among the lowest ranks in the bureaucracy – they were informally known as the ‘mother and father’ or ‘parental official’ (*fumu guan*) of the government and were

65. Ibid., p. 499.

66. After this inspection tour, Huang wrote the *Taihai shicha lu* (*Record of missions to Taiwan and adjacent waters*) in 1722.

very close to provincial affairs and the local scene. The Yongzheng emperor had repeatedly valued the role his magistrates played in provincial affairs, praising them as the core ingredient of proper administration.<sup>67</sup>

In most cases throughout the Qing dynasty, the emperor only appointed magistrates from among those who had successfully passed the imperial examinations, implying that they were able to master the Confucian classics and had a shared principle in working to unify the empire. In the words of Yongzheng, these magistrates were ‘those with integrity’ while, at the same time, they understood the Confucian doctrines very well. These people were not supposed to have any practical training before assuming their duties but were required to develop a range of specialised skills after taking up positions in office.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, it would have been fairly unconventional for the emperor to have appointed Lan Dingyuan as magistrate of two counties at the same time. Except for the first round of the civil examination, which took place at a local level, Lan did not sit for any examinations at higher levels. It was not the norm for the emperor grant such an exemption.

### Serving as a Magistrate

One question we could ask is whether Lan’s appointment was the result of his established social network with Lan Tingzhen, Shi Shipiao, Zhu Shi, and some other high officials. His brief service under Tingzhen in the Taiwan campaign undoubtedly helped: at least his cousin and the general commander, Shi Shipiao, would have had first-hand knowledge of him. His meticulous writings were also important here, otherwise administrators in Beijing like Zhu Shi would likely not have persuaded the emperor to meet Lan or to have recommended him for an official post. Taking all these factors into account, Lan’s appointment was owing to his patronage, proven abilities, and reputation, especially that derived from his significant role in suppressing the riot in Taiwan. It may also have been due to the exigencies of time. That is, after the outbreak of the Zhu Yigui rebellion, the Yongzheng emperor saw the importance of consolidating control of his empire’s maritime frontier. Whatever the reason, all who had a hand in Lan’s ascendancy also had

67. William T. Rowe, *China’s Last Empire*, p. 49.

68. Jianpeng Deng, Li Chen, and Yu Wang (trans.), “Classifications of Litigation and Implications for Qing Judicial Practice,” in Li Chen and Madeleine Zelin (eds.), *Chinese Law: Knowledge, Practice, and Transformation, 1530s–1950s* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 24.

high expectations of this 'master of maritime affairs', not the least of whom was Tingzhen, who maintained a close relationship with Dingyuan and relied on him to draft many of his memorials to the emperor. Finally, Lan's appointment is also noteworthy because his writing, reputation, career, and even his legacy were all bound to the maritime world. His life and times, at least by this stage, had been shaped by a maritime China. This set him on a different path from the one traditional scholars took when attempting to climb the ladder of success through the civil service examination system.

In his capacity as a provincial officer, Lan's career became one of practical politics and administration. In broad terms, as a county magistrate, Lan's primary function was to handle local day-to-day matters, such as tax collection, road repairs and construction, water management, and legal disputes; he also had to perform official ceremonies, promote popular welfare, encourage education, administer schools, conduct censuses, and arrange relief for the poor and affected if needed. This would have been an extremely demanding job, but nevertheless, it was a position Lan could effectively carry out as it enabled him to make real contributions to the people. Somehow, it is possible that Lan Dingyuan might have asked for this magistrate appointment himself, and the emperor might have complied even if he might have preferred to offer him a higher position, given his outstanding performance in the Taiwan campaign and all of the recommendations he had received from his officials. As Lan Dingyuan had once suggested that a successful government should induce effective and direct governing policies down to the local level, he would have viewed a magistrate as being a crucial person who was responsible for his district's wellbeing.

The ultimate objective of government was to enhance its people's livelihoods by promoting agriculture and contributing to their moral wellbeing, and these were objectives Lan espoused. In the case of Puning and Chaoyang, the situation was somewhat different compared to agrarian society. Although farmers had been engaged in agriculture in the two cities, the region's economy depended very much on a variety of seafaring activities, ranging from fishing to domestic and overseas shipping. As Melissa Macauley articulately put it, 'the translocal world of maritime Chaozhou (which is only about 74 km from Puning and Chaoyang) was driven by centuries of international commerce (via the sea) and labour migration that accelerated in the nineteenth century'.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, Lan

69. Melissa Macauley, *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 4.

did not overlook the importance of coastal defence, naval development, sea/river transportation, and seaborne trading even during his three-year appointment in Guangdong. In practice, however, when magistrates sought knowledge and/or resources, they were always at the mercy of the local elites; as a result, there was often a temptation among those magistrates to leave their regions' difficult problems to their successors or to push them into a neighbouring magistrate's jurisdiction. Thankfully, Lan was not too bothered by these hurdles. On the one hand, he was already familiar with the situation in southeast China and the coastal fringe of the empire, based on his personal experience and his days in Beijing when compiling the *DaQing yitong zhi*; on the other hand, he arrived in these regions as a reputable figure who was a knowledgeable writer, geographer, and visionary, and also a military advisor who had helped the navy eradicate a rebellion that had taken place across the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, his well-established connections with a number of officials, cognoscenti, coastal residents, and merchants also provided him with the requisite support when encountering these challenges. It is therefore unlikely that the local gentry would have caused problems for him. In retrospect, maritime and coastal control were two prominent issues that had already commanded Lan's attention during his days in Puning and Chaoyang. After all, he was convinced that the country's seven maritime provinces were of essential economic and strategic importance and that, if the country were to thrive and prosper, the central government and its local offices would need to stabilise the maritime frontier by every means possible. Among his contemporaries who also served as county magistrates, Lan was plausibly the most active in being dedicated to ensuring proper and effective coastal rule.

Lan also understood that the need for justice and fairness among the people was paramount in local administration. In other words, whether or not one could carry out one's policies greatly depended on the loyalty and support of one's people. To actualise his plans and to avoid difficulties in collecting tax revenue, Lan tirelessly promoted Confucian learning and the importance of state orthodoxy, especially among the scholar-gentry class, in the hope of using them as models.<sup>70</sup> As the governor, he also saw official rectitude as having a similar effect, including among staff and their superiors in the local offices (*juguan zhe dangyi junfu zhixin wei xin, yi*

70. Lan Dingyuan, "Xiancun lu," *Mianyang xuezhun* (collected in *Luzhou quanji*, vol. 14), *juan* 4, 1b–2b.

*baixing zhixin wei xin, buke yi yiji zhixin weixin*).<sup>71</sup> Although, in hindsight, Lan's objectives and attempts to carry them out reflected what may be considered as Confucian idealism – after all, a direct task to implement was the encouragement of popular morality, which Lan maintained was the essential foundation that underpinned an orderly society and incorrupt officialdom. Major uprisings could also be avoided through the power of persuasion and a fair judicial process.

In addition to the above, Lan was open to the idea that 'girls and boys should be educated in order to better fulfil their functions' in society. In his book *Women Learning* (*Nüxue*), published before he became a magistrate, Lan discussed the importance of women's education not only as a means of helping them manage household affairs but also to prepare them to take part in meaningful discussions on society and politics on an equal basis with their partners. Inspired by the example of Ban Zhao (45–117), the extraordinary female historian of the Han Dynasty, and Madam Zheng in the Tang Dynasty, who compiled the *Decrees for women* (*Nü xiaojing*), Lan held that women should study literature, history, and a range of Confucian classics.<sup>72</sup> He did not comment on the role women should be playing in seafaring activities. However, 'the writing of elite southeast coastal women shows that some of them also accompanied their husbands, fathers, or sons travelling as far northeast as Manchuria, crossing the Strait west to Taiwan, or journeying southwest to western Guangdong and near Macao'.<sup>73</sup> As succinctly argued by Li Guotong, such 'empire-wide sojourning' in the early eighteenth century should be considered a phenomenon that 'played a vital role in shaping the Fujianese (and to a substantial extent, Cantonese) experience of the larger Qing polity'.<sup>74</sup> In light of Li's analysis, it can be said that these experiences were also imperative in shaping the maritime identity of the people settling in these places, including both men and women.

Furthermore, Lan also advocated the need to strengthen the connection between the state and the wealthy community along the coast. Surprisingly, this is a correlation that has not yet been properly featured or identified in the field. In Dingyuan's view, the wealthy should have felt obligated to help protect the state, while the central authority should, in turn, have respected these merchants and allowed their businesses to flourish. From

71. Ibid., 33a–34a.

72. Lan Dingyuan, "Preface (*xu*)," *Nüxue* (collected in *Luzhou quanji*, vol. 15), 1a–4a.

73. Li Guotong, *Migrating Fujianese*, p. 10.

74. Ibid.

Lan's writings, there is a sense that once the bond of trust between the two sides was sustained, the maritime frontier would then be secured in multiple ways. Before moving on to examples that demonstrate Lan's view that the wealthy should be obliged to help maintain and sustain the stability of the maritime border, it should be noted that unlike most of his contemporaries, Lan respected the social roles of traders, businessmen, and brokers even though they were considered morally inferior and to belong to the lowest class in the social hierarchy, while scholar-officials held the highest status. The reason behind such stratification is because wealth was evaluated negatively in imperial China. In the words of Timothy Brook, profits (*li*) could serve righteousness, but righteousness (*yi*) could hardly be collapsed into profits.<sup>75</sup> It was generally believed that more collaborations between the merchants and the state were promoted and actualised only in the nineteenth century. The system of 'official supervision and merchant management (*guandu shangban*)' should serve as a prime example.

Similar to those statecraft scholars of almost a century later who advocated for the significance of the pursuit of 'wealth and power (*fuqiang*)' by elevating the status of merchants from the bottom of the social pyramid, Lan Dingyuan already saw the many advantages of bringing the gentry and merchant class closer together. One of his arguments to augment state power and maintain national stability was to '*zhuzhong baigong, fazhan gongshang*', or to promote and endorse industrial and business development. According to Lan, the country could benefit from business development not only for the short term but for many generations to come.<sup>76</sup> He was, as such, very supportive of the idea of opening up the sea and encouraging traders to conduct business overseas. In his *Luzhou chuji*, a collection of Lan's shorter essays up to the year 1726, he made it clear that the emperor should 'lift all restrictions constraining the sea trade'. Meanwhile, he also felt the government should 'support sea traders because the benefits reaped from overseas shipping had the potential to make up for the deficiencies in the destroyed economy of the mainland before it is too late (*yi dakai jinwang, tingmin maoyi, yi haiwai zhi youyu bu neidi zhi buzhu, ciqi ronghuan xuyu zai*)'.<sup>77</sup> It is obvious that Lan

75. Timothy Brook, "Profit and Righteousness in Chinese Economic Culture," in Timothy Brook and Hy V. Luong (eds.), *Culture and Economy: The Shaping of Capitalism in East Asia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 40.

76. Lin Yibin, *Lan Dingyuan yanjiu* (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1994), p. 148.

77. Lan Dingyuan, "Lun Nanyang shiyi shu," *Luzhou chuji* (collected in *Luzhou quanji*, vol. 15), *juan* 3, 1a.

regarded traders and businessmen as the engine that would revitalise and further develop the coastal economy. This is possibly the reason why some contemporary historians in China tend to label Dingyuan as a mercantilist.

Unquestionably, Lan Dingyuan valued the contribution businessmen could make as a substantial part of the Qing empire's economic foundation; however, this does not mean that those merchants could do whatever they wanted or had no social obligations. According to Lan, these merchants, particularly the wealthy living in coastal cities, were also responsible for maintaining order along China's coast. He considered that wealthy sea traders, for instance, should have been collaborating with the local government in facilitating sea transport (*haiyun*) between northern and southern China.<sup>78</sup> In so doing, the merchants in Fujian and Guangdong could then have been helping the state to engineer a plan for a shipping tax on grain coming from the south to the port city of Tianjin in northern China. Lan stated that

The nation's path to grand prospects lies in the exercise of maritime transportation. The practice of maritime transportation has already been proven during the Yuan Dynasty; it is not a view concocted by the ignorant. During the initial years of the Yuan Dynasty, as river transport became inconvenient, the idea of maritime transport was advocated by Bo Yan (1236–1295), and people such as Zhu Qing (1237–1303), Zhang Xuan (?–1302), Luo Bi (?–1279), and others who were knowledgeable about sea routes. They established a system to transport grain for ten *shi*, with three officials in charge. Maritime transport flourished as a result. In the beginning, over forty thousand *shi* of goods were transported annually, which gradually increased to over three million. The people were spared from the labour of carrying burdens, and the nation accumulated wealth through savings. The Yuan Dynasty regarded this as a beneficial policy for their era.

The maritime routes are now smooth and well-known among Fujian and Guangdong merchants. Having grown up by the seaside, I have witnessed the advantages of sea vessels first-hand. Merchants construct boats and transport goods. Ships depart from Xiamen in Fujian and reach Tianjin in ten or so days with favourable winds. Whether going north to the border regions or south to Jiaozhou Bay, or even to Shanghai,

78. Lan Dingyuan, "Caoliang jianzi haiyun," *Luzhou zoushu* (collected in *Luzhou quanji*, vol. 23), 15a–20a.

Zhapu, and Ningbo, they are all trading hubs for Fujian and Guangdong merchant ships, and such trade has been commonplace for years.

I believe that the method of maritime transport is certainly feasible today. I propose allocating ten thousand *shi* of grain from Suzhou and Songjiang as a trial. Appoint a trustworthy official to oversee the matter and hire Fujian and Guangdong merchant ships. Transport the grain from Suzhou to Tianjin and use small boats to transfer it to Tongzhou. Examine the difference in transport costs compared to river transport. If the trial proves successful, I suggest transitioning grain transport from Jiangnan, Zhejiang, and the coastal regions to maritime transport, while Henan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Anhui, and parts of Jiangsu continue with river transport. A Supreme Superintendent of Maritime Transport (*zongdu haiyun dachen*) shall be appointed to oversee these operations and stationed in Shanghai, Chongming, and other locations. They will also supervise the naval forces of the three provinces and manage the naval affairs. The naval forces of Jiangnan, Zhejiang, and Shandong will be placed under unified command and deployment, patrolling various sea routes.

The advantages of water transportation across the empire are unparalleled, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong. Jiangnan follows Zhejiang in this regard, with Shandong trailing behind Jiangnan. The vast oceans stretch for tens of thousands of miles, rendering them as accessible as neighbouring segments. Ships from all corners of the country can easily reach Shandong. Even Japan and Ryukyu are merely a short distance away across the waters. The eastern region surrounding the capital is in proximity to the sea, boasting open harbours and devoid of barriers or obstacles. The establishment of the Tianjin Naval Forces, thanks to your (the emperor's) insightful considerations, is an achievement that eluded both the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. This paves the way for enduring peace and prosperity. Should maritime transport be reinstated, the creation of a unified naval force under the Maritime Superintendent, encompassing Shandong, Jiangnan, and Zhejiang, will effectively combat maritime piracy and quell any potential or perceptible rebels. Moreover, it will expedite the upstream transportation of grain and enhance the downstream flow of goods. This strategic decision will immensely benefit the entire realm for generations to come.<sup>79</sup>

79. Ibid., 15b–16a; 16b–17a; 19a–19b.

Lan paid particular attention to the development of sea transport because he realised that it would be problematic in the long run if there were an overreliance on the canal system that had been operated for ages.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, should grain be transported from the south to the north via the sea, this could also help foster the volume and velocity of coastal shipping. At the same time, wealthy businessmen should have been supporting such a proposal by taking part simply because they would benefit from facilitating a domestic sea trade. Although Lan's proposal seemed to be constructive in many respects, it was not being actualised in the Yongzheng era as a series of factors were discouraging the emperor from shifting marine transport from the present canal transport system to sea transport. At the time, there had been no consensus about this ambitious plan. It was not until the Daoguang era, in 1826, that a scheme to ship taxed grain from Shanghai to Tianjin was successfully and officially designed and carried out.<sup>81</sup>

In pursuit of a proper social order, Lan Dingyuan stressed the importance of the wealthy class being involved in the *baojia* system, a community-based system of law and civil control through policing and mutual surveillance. The system itself had been enforced for a long time in the Ming and Qing dynasties, if not earlier, but with mixed success. According to Joanna Waley-Cohen, 'it did contribute significantly to the government's ability to extend control below the lowest level of the centralised bureaucracy into the heart of the local communities'.<sup>82</sup> Since the wealthy were as important as the local gentry in the region, Lan made it clear that they should make use of their resources to help the government reify the *baojia* system more effectively. In Lan's assessment, this community-based system using the locals to monitor and control the locals had been successful in maintaining stability as it could keep track of the flow of people, including suspicious individuals, within a particular jurisdiction, by reporting crimes to local authorities, and helping in the arrest of lawbreakers.

In every household, self-purification (*qingge*) should be practiced to

80. Sui-wai Cheung, *The Price of Rice: Market Integration in Eighteenth Century* (Bellingham: Western Washington University Press, 2008), p. 16.

81. For details, see Jane Kate Leonard, *Stretching the Qing Bureaucracy in the 1826 Sea-Transport Experiment* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Ni Yuping, *Qingdai caoliang haiyun yu shehui bianqian* (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2005).

82. Joanna Waley-Cohen, "Collective Responsibility in Qing Criminal Law," in Karen Turner et al., *The Limits of the Rule of Law in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), p. 114.

prevent the emergence of thieves and bandits. Through communication and mutual support, communities can guard and assist each other, much like the snakes of Changshan. When the head is attacked, the tail responds; when the tail is attacked, the head responds. This way, thieves and bandits will find no foothold.<sup>83</sup>

Lan also argued that the wealthy should have been focussing on their social moral values in society. This included restraining themselves from spending too much on luxury items, on exorbitant banquets for special occasions, and also on gambling. In fact, Lan Dingyuan found the situation in Punning, Chaozhou, and its neighbouring region particularly disturbing because the wealthy did not even try to maintain any social morality. For instance, he realised that a sizeable number of people in Chaozhou wandered around the city with hookers, partied all day, and did not spend wisely but lavishly. All of these social habits, Lan reasoned, were derogatory and would bring harm to society, and in turn, to the overall stability of the maritime border as well as the empire as a whole.<sup>84</sup> Lan had arrived in these cities during a time when Chaozhou had been encountering a severe, three-year famine.<sup>85</sup> These inappropriate habits would have had no positive outcome but would have exacerbated social animosities and disputes that had no doubt already been percolating among the people.

Judging from his writings, what had worried Lan the most was that, in most cases, these inappropriate social habits were led by the wealthy, both men and women, and he feared commoners would imitate those behaviours. As recorded in the *Xiamen Gazetteer*, 'gambling was a foreign pernicious habit, which became a major societal problem in the city because the seafarers who conducted sea trade introduced gambling to the coastal population. The wealthy were then affected and got addicted to various forms of gambling'.<sup>86</sup> In other words, the problem of gambling had become so apparent among the wealthy, and even the scholar-officials (*shidafu jia yiran er*) who had settled in coastal cities, that it seemed to have become

83. Lan Dingyuan, "Qing xing baojia zecheng xiangzhang shu," *Dongzheng ji*, *juan* 4, 23b.

84. Lan Dingyuan, "Chaozhou fengzu kao," in *Luzhou chuj*, *juan* 14, 17a–18b.

85. Melissa A. Macauley, "Civil and Uncivil Disputes in Southeast Coastal China," in Kathryn Bernhardt and Philip C. C. Huang (eds.), *Civil Law in Qing and Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 109.

86. Cited from Du Songnian, *Chaoshan da wenhua* (Beijing: Zhongguo kexue jishu chubanshe, 1994), p. 296.

a 'maritime tradition'.<sup>87</sup> To mitigate the problem, Lan believed that the wealthy and scholar-officials should have set a good example by distancing themselves from gambling in public and private spaces and not being stigmatised as a disfavoured group in society. In his "An Examination of the Customs of Chaozhou (*Chaozhou fengzu kao*)", Lan also held the position that such a perverted sense of morality, including gambling and spending luxuriously, should have been corrected sooner rather than later. To this righteous scholar and administrator, these were the crucial steps required to maintain peace and order for generations to come.<sup>88</sup>

Lan had distinguished himself as a strong and competent administrator when he served as the magistrate of Puning and Chaoyang. He maintained high standards in judging the behaviour of the bureaucrats, gentry, wealthy, and ordinary citizens. At the same time, he was also a caring and sensible *fumu guan*, who defended merchants' rights and advocated that both men and women receive a certain level of education. On his energetic administrative style, particularly in legal matters, the compiler of the *Biographies of the Qing Dynasty (Qishi liezhuan)* has this to say: 'Lan was exceptional in settling legal cases and suppressing bandits, his judgement was objective and beyond question (*shanzhi dao yi songshi*)'.<sup>89</sup> Apart from his involvement in administering jurisdiction, the way he handled maritime affairs reveals his initiative and vision, while his 'naval reform' suggested a willingness to at least attempt to make large-scale systematic changes. It also shows an ability to work with friends and colleagues in the navy as well as with the official and scholarly circle. It is unfortunate that Lan did not manage to actualise all of the naval, financial, and administrative proposals he favoured, but he did make full use of the mechanisms the system provided.

Rather ironically, although Lan had been popular and respected in Guangdong, his career as a magistrate did not end well, as the intendant of Chaozhou and Huizhou indicted him for having failed to equitably distribute grain to these cities' people during a famine. Altogether, the intendant brought forward six charges against Dingyuan, the first of which was bribery. Although it is clear that 'most eighteenth-century observers believed corruption to be a ubiquitous problem' within the

87. Lan Dingyuan, "Chaozhou fengzu kao," in *Luzhou chujī*, juan 14, 19a.

88. *Ibid.*, 31a.

89. Taiwan yinhang jingji yanjiushi (ed.), *Qingshi liezhuan xuan* (Taipei: Taiwan Yinhang jingji yanjiu shi, 1968), p. 169.

Chinese bureaucracy,<sup>90</sup> it was still regarded as an unacceptable crime to be handled by the Qing's central judicial system according to a set of fundamental principles. In the words of Nancy E. Park, '[W]hat was most important was not the form of the exchange, but whether it had the potential of influencing official judgement'.<sup>91</sup> Owing to these accusations, the Yongzheng emperor issued an imperial decree that removed Lan from office, and then he was imprisoned even before a proper trial had been conducted. However, Dingyuan did not dread the result; he even drew upon his 'maritime experience' as a metaphor to articulate his response in the following manner:

I have traversed the vast sea, navigating through the waves and currents around Penghu and Taiwan; braving arrows and stones, venturing deep into treacherous valleys, confronting noxious mists and poisonous fogs, without the slightest intimidation. Yet now, would I lower my head in submission to the authorities?<sup>92</sup>

After Lan was detained, the intendent who prosecuted him was promoted to provincial judge. However, the latter was soon replaced as Lan was proved innocent. In fact, those charges against him were generally not recognised by the common people and the officials in Puning and Chaoyang. Lan was then released from jail but he did not resume his duties as magistrate. Instead, he was invited by Omidā (1685–1761), the Viceroy of Huguang, formally referred to in Chinese as the 'Governor General of Hubei and Hunan Provinces and the Surrounding Areas', to work with him as an advisor. In 1732, Omidā even petitioned the emperor to vindicate Lan of all guilt in the bribery affair. After carefully reading the memorial Omidā submitted, the emperor summoned Lan to Beijing.<sup>93</sup> This was the second time Lan was able to see the emperor in person, even though he had never been accorded a high official title. On this second visit, Yongzheng honoured Lan with a number of gifts, perhaps as compensation and then appointed him acting prefect of Canton, a place where European traders had begun to gather to conduct business with Chinese merchants. It should be noted that although

90. Nancy E. Park, "Corruption in Eighteenth-Century China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 56, no. 4 (November 1997), p. 968.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 971.

92. Taiwan yinhang jingji yanjiushi (ed.), *Qingshi liezhuan xuan*, p. 169.

93. *Ibid.*

Lan excelled in maritime tactics, his education and experience provided little guidance when it came to managing foreign affairs, nor was he aided by an administrative apparatus familiar with these matters back then. The Canton system had yet to be crystallised as a reliable governing structure. Despite these difficulties, however, Lan Dingyuan showed enthusiasm in carrying out these duties, despite having had limited contact with foreigners in the past. What was most unfortunate is that he passed away a month after arriving in Canton. If he could have had the chance to manage trade issues between China and the West, this may have provided a very different picture of the harbour front of Guangdong in the middle of the eighteenth century, as it would have been led by a Qing bureaucrat deeply immersed in Confucian values but at the same time shaped by a broader maritime world.

### Concluding Remarks

A master of the sea, as some contemporary scholars would put it, Lan Dingyuan lived a life that was rich, productive, and adventurous. The Qing empire in the middle of the eighteenth century had not been free from turbulence and challenge. Although most writers at the time preferred to celebrate the Qing's seeming prosperity and success, some of the progressive visionaries were attentive enough to recognise that problems lay within the empire's time-honoured but ineffective institutions. Lan was clearly one of those intellectuals not to be blindfolded by a superficial reality. He was bold and direct enough to express his concern by diligently promoting his ideas through writing, teaching, and attending to administrative details and public works. This is how he responded to the so-called 'golden age' of the Qing, a dynasty that was, in actuality, full of perceptible and potential crises.

When Lan began his education, it seems he was exposed only to practical ideas on statecraft, whereas the fact he also had the chance to journey to the empire's various coastal cities is often overlooked. This experience served as an important juncture in his upbringing and helped him consider how to put ideas into practice. The sea and its related matters were not usual topics among the Confucian classics. However, Lan's vision was already associated with the maritime world back then. When he came of age, he had already begun to think of the importance of proper coastal governance. Although he did not successfully pass the civil service examination, Lan had long been willing to contribute to a

substantial coastal rule, as evidenced in his publications. Some would argue that Lan's scholarship reflected a diversity of interests and was wide-ranging and eclectic in character. As this chapter has demonstrated, however, Lan's central focus of commitment was to orient the sea within the Qing's agenda for governance and frontier management. His work, both sweeping and comprehensive, showed a pragmatic and visionary quality that enabled him to undertake a penetrating and critical review of various types of 'marine issues (*haiyang zhishi*)' and to explore radical changes in coastal institutions and administrative practices. In this, he differed from many of his contemporaries, who gave little thought to the maritime frontier of an empire which, to them, seemed peaceful and worry free. Lan shaped a dynamic and effective approach to ruling the waves, one that endured at least to the end of the mid-Qianlong era.

Lan's growing patriotism might also have been fired up by the coastal region's poor economy and his hometown's instability even after the sea ban policy had been lifted. Be that as it may, Lan decided to devote his time and energy to writing numerous statecraft essays and expanding his scholarly circle as a way to make his thoughts visible and hearable. Throughout his life and career, he had always been bound to maritime provinces, maritime control, maritime shipping, and a maritime identity. In his devotion and dedication to contributing to a more stabilised maritime frontier, Lan can be seen as having been a truly loyal and patriotic scholar. But we should be reminded that he had not always been ready to serve the government. After having spent some time in the Afeng Academy, he repeatedly declined assuming offices even when his service was needed in some towns and cities in Fujian. He needed to mourn his parents and grandparents, as required by Confucian values and filial piety. Loyalty and filial piety, in fact, were two fundamental, if not competing demands in the Confucian ideal and, apparently, before he became embroiled in the rebellion in Taiwan, Lan had valued the latter over the former. We might not know why Lan accepted Tingzhen's offer to serve as his military advisor, but it is possible that, by joining the navy, Lan was trying to signal the importance Taiwan, the Strait, and the blue frontier deserved. Whether this was so, Lan made a strong personal statement on the need for the scholar and intellectual to engage in maritime matters.

The Zhu Yigui rebellion in Taiwan had, without a doubt, turned Lan into an instant legend, a paragon of most of the Confucian qualities found only in the greatest scholar-officials. He proved to be knowledgeable, farsighted, practical, experienced, diligent, patriotic, and brave. Romanticised accounts

highlighting the contribution Lan Dingyuan's campaign made were widely circulated. The Qianlong Emperor himself proclaimed the following:

I have reviewed the *Eastern Expedition Collection* (*Dongzheng ji*) written by Lan Dingyuan, which relates to the disturbances caused by the Taiwanese rebel Zhu Yigui during the Kangxi period. At the time of the official military campaign against him, he was in the camp of his brother, Lan Tingzhen, discussing the situation in Taiwan and matters of administration. His opinions are very much worth considering... I also notice that the circulation of Lan's work in Fujian is wide and extensive. I hereby instruct Chang Qing and Li Shiyao proceed to purchase and review the book in detail... If the various discussions in the book accurately reflect the advantages and disadvantages of current affairs, they should not be disregarded. By considering these insights for the administration of the maritime frontier, every aspect can be thoroughly improved, aiming for a solution that provides lasting peace.<sup>94</sup>

Endorsed even by the emperor, Lan Dingyuan's legacy has exceeded that of both his cousin, Lan Tingzhen, and the naval commander Shi Shipiao. Less flamboyant narratives continued to appear in private writings long after the Qing empire had collapsed. In Fujian, Guangdong, and Taiwan, in particular, Lan Dingyuan's legacy was still proudly praised among the Lan clans. Although Lan's journey was not as heralded as the one Shi Lang undertook, these two gentlemen might be worthy of comparison in terms of how their legacies percolated over time and space. Unlike Shi Lang, who stirred up relatively more controversial debates about the various interpretations of 'hero' and 'traitor', Lan, by contrast, maintained a favourable, national stature for generations in Taiwan and on mainland China. His practices and achievement shielded him from many conservative, biased, or politicised attacks in the later centuries, owing to the virtues they were purported to represent.

94. See *Qinding Pingding Taiwan jilüe*, collected in *Taiwan lishi wenxian congkan* (Taipei: Taiwan wenxian weiyuanhui yinxing, 1959–1972), p. 338.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

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# The Envoy

### The Forgotten Linkage

Maritime historians in the West specialising in late imperial China have often directed their focus towards Ming and Qing interactions with Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and countries encompassing the Indian Ocean World. In stark contrast, China's extensive connections with the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429–1879) have received relatively little scholarly attention. Readers outside academia and those who come from the opposite side of the Eurasian or Pacific divide might even find that they don't know where this seemingly remote, yet captivating island kingdom was located, not to mention its rich history, unique geography, and profound geopolitical and economic significance within the broader Asian Pacific context. Unbeknownst to many, the Ryukyu Islands enjoyed a distinguished reputation for exporting horses, sulphur, pearls, and the coveted red dye that has been extracted from Akagi trees since early modernity.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, these remarkable aspects of the Ryukyu Kingdom's heritage remain relatively obscure, having been overshadowed by products coming from its more prominent Asian counterparts. Notably, it was not until the esteemed American diplomat George H. Kerr, affiliated with the Hoover Institute at Stanford, conducted his seminal 1953 study titled *Ryukyu Kingdom and Province before 1945* that

1. Richard J. Pearson, *Ancient Ryukyu: An Archaeological Study of Island Communities* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), p. 196; Ts'ao Yung-he and Leonard Blussé, "Xiao liuqiu yuanzhumin de xiaoshi: Chongshi shiluo Taiwan lishi zhi yi ye," in Can Yonghe (ed.), *Taiwan zaoqi lishi yanjiu xuji* (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 2000), pp. 413–444.

the historical narrative of the Ryukyu Islands began to be fully unravelled.<sup>2</sup> Revered as the first comprehensive and authoritative monograph on the subject, Kerr's work still stands as a treasured masterpiece in the realm of Ryukyu, Japanese, and Pacific studies, not to mention its solitary status as a serious scholarly examination of the era.

Nearly six decades later, Richard Pearson and Mamoru Akamine made notable contributions to the study of Ryukyu's history, with their publications *Ancient Ryukyu: An Archaeological Study of Island Communities* and *The Ryukyu Kingdom: Cornerstone of East Asia*, respectively.<sup>3</sup> These monographs ambitiously delve into the origins of Ryukyu, spanning from ancient times to the premodern era. Although these two books touch on crucial aspects such as the strategic positioning of the islands, their environmental context, and the historical activities of various human communities, it is important to note that these works represent only a fraction of the limited English-language historical studies available since the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the extensive corpus of Anglophone scholarship on Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, the history of Ryukyu remains a realm rife with unexplored avenues and untapped narratives, necessitating further exploration and examination to comprehensively reorient our understanding of its expansive 3,000-year trajectory. Specifically, it is imperative that we re-examine its intricate and multifaceted maritime connections with the Ming and Qing empires by approaching the subject from various analytical edges. For instance, the question of whether it is more intriguing to construct 'the Ryukyu story' from a China-centred viewpoint or to compile 'the Chinese story' from a Ryukyu-centric approach is a captivating topic open to meaningful debate. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognise that there were individuals in late imperial China whose lives, careers, perceptions, and identities were

2. George H. Kerr, *Ryukyu Kingdom and Province before 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Pacific Science Board, National Research Council, 1953).

3. Richard J. Pearson, *Ancient Ryukyu*; Mamoru Akamine; Lina Terrell (trans.), *The Ryukyu Kingdom: Cornerstone of East Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).

4. In addition to the two volumes mentioned here, Takeshi Hamashita also explicated the Ryukyu maritime network connecting its neighbouring countries in Asia, while a few Japanese scholars such as Yoshinari Naoki and Yamazato Junichi have likewise published books and articles in Japanese featuring the importance of Ryukyu from an economic, historical perspective. See, for instance, Takeshi Hamashita, "The Ryukyu Maritime Network from the Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries: China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia," in his *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*, pp. 57–84.

shaped, to varying degrees, by dynamic interactions that took place between the Qing empire and the Ryukyu Kingdom. In retrospect, neglecting to integrate the Ryukyu Kingdom into the broader historical landscape of maritime Asia during the early modern period would show the latter as having been considerably less vibrant and eventful than it was.

This chapter is about one of those individuals whose life and career were an integral part of the Qing–Ryukyu dynamic. Zhou Huang was a native of Fuzhou, in Sichuan province, who began his journey to the top of Qing officialdom after having passed the civil service examination. In 1737, at the relatively young age of 23, he obtained a *jinshi* degree. He then served as an editor of the Hanlin Academy (*hanlin bianxiu*), a secretary of the cabinet (*neige xueshi*), a minister of works (*gongbu shilang*), and a minister of war (*bingbu shilang*). His career closed with a brief year acting as left censor-in-chief (*zuodou yushi*), where he oversaw the censorate, a top-level supervisory agency directly responsible to the emperor.<sup>5</sup> As a pivotal administrator in the Qianlong regime, Zhou Huang's public life was involved with most of the significant aspects of the Qing bureaucracy. Despite his rather starry official trajectory over 48 years, Zhou Huang is best remembered as having been handpicked by the Qianlong emperor as an envoy to the Ryukyu Kingdom, where he was dispatched to attend the investiture of Sho Boko (1739–1794), who ruled the islands between 1752 and 1794. Why did the emperor send Zhou Huang on such an important mission? How were Zhou's reputation and legacy shaped by this small maritime kingdom? An examination of this specific character will provide some answers.

### An Overview of an Island Kingdom

Before we begin discussing the man, we need to take stock of our inherited understanding of the historical connections between China and the Ryukyu Kingdom during the early modern era. We are, in fact, less familiar with the history of Ryukyu and its outward connections with other Asian powers prior to its inclusion as an official and inseparable part of Japan's Meiji empire during the 1870s. One of the most comprehensive and up-to-date accounts detailing the history of Ryukyu was the aforementioned study

5. Zhonghua quanshiliu shi bianweihui (ed.), *Zhonghua quan ershiliushi* (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqian chubanshe, 2005), vol. 11, p. 9278.

written by Mamoru Akamine. In it he succinctly argues that ‘present-day Okinawa is just one of Japan’s forty-seven prefectures, but there was a time when, as the Ryukyu Kingdom, it was an independent nation playing an important role as the cornerstone of Asia’.<sup>6</sup> It might be an exaggeration to consider this island kingdom the ‘cornerstone’ of such a large continent. However, given the size of its landmass, population, and economy, and its limited military capability, this segment of the Asian Pacific region had nevertheless been quite central in fostering various kinds of interregional and transcultural exchanges between China and Japan. It served as a key middleman between the two powers, and the Ryukyu government itself benefited diplomatically from both sides.

Geographically, the Ryukyu Islands are situated southwest of the main islands of Japan. It is therefore quite sensible that the Japanese had exercised brief contacts with this chain of islands as early as the seventh century. Yet at the same time, in developing the region the Ryukyu government also had to rely on the Chinese. It was recorded that Chinese, particularly those from the coastal communities in Zhejiang and Fujian, began to settle in Ryukyu to conduct business and help foster local development.<sup>7</sup> At that time, the Ryukyu Kingdom had not been officially established. In Ryukyu and Asian history, this was a period better known as the Three Kingdoms era, or the Sanzan, meaning ‘three mountains’, and it is recorded that there were three domains scattered on Okinawa Island, namely the Hokuzan, Chuzan, and Nanzan.<sup>8</sup> It was not until 1429 that the chieftain of the Chuzan principality defeated the other two domains and united the island of Okinawa for the first time to form the Sho dynasty. This is the Ryukyu Kingdom we feature in this chapter.

The connections between the three kingdoms and the Ming empire can be traced back to the Hongwu era, when the monarch who founded the Sho dynasty was in power. The Hongwu emperor, featured in earlier chapters, had initiated a series of sea blockage policies to limit a wide range of seafaring activities along the coast of China. As discussed in Chapter Two, however, the implementation of these sea ban policies did not necessarily mean that China was completely disconnected from the maritime world. Some specific

6. Mamoru Akamine, *The Ryukyu Kingdom*, p. 2.

7. Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 144.

8. Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Imagined Geographies: The Maritime Silk Roads in World History, 100–1800* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2021), p. 200.

types of maritime connections were permitted, if not encouraged, namely those conducted within the tributary system. In hindsight, the Ming's administration of its tributary system was a deliberate and guarded policy to ensure peace and maintain order within the broader maritime framework it had carved out across the Asian seas. The three kingdoms in the Ryukyu Islands were instrumental in contributing to the substantiation of this maritime order, from the beginning of the fourteenth century until 1429. Yet this part of the three kingdoms' story was not as straightforward as it can often seem to have been.

To consolidate the tributary system, the Hongwu emperor believed that it was imperative to dispatch his envoys to several countries in maritime Asia, including Annam, Champa, Java, Korea, and Japan, and to demand that they declare loyalty to China. From 1368 to 1369, the Ming court sent multiple diplomatic missions across the region.<sup>9</sup> Most countries were willing to offer tributes and thereby subordinate themselves to the Hongwu emperor. The emperor, in turn, confirmed each respective ruler's status as 'king', in a diplomatic act that not only provided them with the recognition to navigate within the tributary system to conduct trade and diplomacy but also with a certain degree of protection from any incursions, when needed. Among the countries to which the Ming court had dispatched envoys, Japan was the only one to respond differently to the Hongwu emperor's request. The confrontation between the Ming court and the Japanese in 1369 was also crucial to explaining why the three Ryukyu kingdoms eventually proved to be essential to the Ming's success in maritime Asia.

According to the *Veritable Records in the Ming Dynasty* (*Ming Taizu shilu*), Yang Zai and Wu Wenhua (1521–1598) were the two diplomats dispatched to Japan in 1369, the former serving as chieftain and the latter as an associate. Unlike the other envoys being sent to Vietnam or Korea, Yang and Wu were tasked with negotiating with the Japanese in the hope of sorting out the *wokou* problem. Although we are now more convinced that most of the *wokou* who were disturbing southwestern China at the time were Chinese instead of Japanese pirates – as discussed in previous chapters – the Hongwu emperor alleged that it was the Japanese who were stirring up trouble behind the scenes. In other words, the reason why the coastal population of China was being killed, plundered, or tortured by the *wokou* was very much because the Japanese failed to exert proper control

9. See Felix Kuhn, "Much More Than Tribute: The Foreign Policy Instruments of the Ming Empire," *Journal of Chinese History*, vol. 5, issue 1 (January 2021), pp. 59–82.

over their coastal dwellers and sea traders. The emperor made it very clear that the Japanese leader was responsible for all of those perceptible attacks that were threatening the coast of his empire. He gave an ultimatum that if no immediate and serious action were taken, the Ming navy was prepared to crush the *wokou* who were sheltering in the islands around Japan and even to sail across the Yellow Sea and ‘bind the King of Japan with ropes’.<sup>10</sup>

In March 1369, Yang Zai arrived in Japan, with the emperor’s intimidating letter in hand, and arranged to meet with Prince Kaneyoshi (1329–1383), son of Emperor Godaigo and also the head of the Office for the Subjugation of the West (*seiseifu*), an administrative unit assigned to handle diplomatic affairs between Japan and the rest of the world.<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning that, at the time, Japan had been split between two rival factions commonly known as the Northern and Southern courts. Emperor Godaigo was the head of the Southern Court, while the Ashikaga shogunate led its northern counterpart.<sup>12</sup> This meant the Ming court was merely dealing with one of several Japanese monarchs through Yang Zai’s mission, as Japan had yet to become a unified power. The country was still very much divided and full of uncertainties. Taking such uncertainties into consideration, readers might have thought that Prince Kaneyoshi, representing the Southern Court, would have been willing to restore harmony with the Ming court in order to avoid confrontation on both sides (i.e. between the Northern Court and the Ming government). The last thing he would have gone for was to further worsen the tension between them. However, things did not proceed smoothly. Prince Kaneyoshi was furious after he read the Hongwu emperor’s menacing letter. He saw it as nothing but arrogance and swagger. Ying Zai and Wu Wenhua were therefore imprisoned for three months, while five other members who had been assisting the envoys were executed in Kyushu.<sup>13</sup> For the Chinese, as recorded in the *History of the Ming* (*Mingshi*), this was obviously a mission that bore no fruitful results.<sup>14</sup>

10. *Ming Taizu shilu* (Taipei: Taiwan Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 1962–1968), *juan* 39, p. 787.

11. Kawazoe Shoji, “Japan and East Asia,” in Yamamura Kozo (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vol. 3, p. 425.

12. Ji-young Lee, *China’s Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 98; William E. Deal, *Handbook to Life in Medieval and Early Modern Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 16.

13. Tokyo Daigaku Shiryo Hensanjo (ed.), *Dainihon shiryo* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku, 1976), vol. 6, part 37, p. 1f.

14. Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 322, p. 8341.

A year later, in 1370, another delegation led by Zhao Zhi was dispatched to Japan's Southern Court. They convinced Prince Kaneyoshi to adjust his line of thought and view the Hongwu emperor's overture in a friendlier light.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, Ying Zai and Wu Wenhua were released from prison, a move that implies that the prince and his Southern Court had been willing to respect the fact that the maritime tributary system centred the Ming government as the dominating power. However, Kaneyoshi's changed attitude towards the Ming had very much to do with the tension between Japan's Southern and Northern courts that had caused relations to deteriorate. The latter had even waged a war against the former. In 1372, Kaneyoshi lost power when Imagawa Ryoshun (1326–1420), the leader of the Northern Court, captured his military base.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the seemingly harmonious diplomatic relations between Japan, represented by the Southern Court, and the Ming regime were short-lived, having lasted for less than two years.

From the perspective of the Ming court, the domestic turmoil in Japan had been full of uncertainties and, consequently, the Hongwu emperor would have had difficulties predicting the Southern Court's position. In fact, Nanjing, the capital of the Ming dynasty at the time, had gathered sketchy intelligence and information pertaining to the entanglements between the Northern and Southern courts. To maintain the Ming's dominating position in the East Asian Sea as a way to consolidate the tributary system, the Hongwu emperor decided to pay more attention to Ryukyu in the hope of using its strategic position to observe if not to counterbalance the Japanese. The emperor's decision was very much based on a proposal submitted by Yang Zai, the envoy who had been imprisoned in Japan for three months.<sup>17</sup> Although some officials in court might have questioned the value of this seemingly barren land beyond the sea, Yang could speak with authority because, unlike other advisers to the emperor in Nanjing, he had travelled to Ryukyu and observed local conditions with his own eyes. After he was released by Prince Kaneyoshi, in 1369, Yang made a quick stop in Ryukyu before returning to China.<sup>18</sup> His desire to travel to Ryukyu

15. *Ming Taizu shilu*, juan 50, p. 987.

16. Kawazoe Shoji, "Japan and East Asia," p. 427.

17. Gao Dai, *Hongyou lu* (collected in *Siku wuanshu cunmu congshu shibu*, vol. 19), juan 6, 16.

18. Jiangyong Liu; Xiaohua Tong (trans.), *The Diaoyu Islands: Facts and Legality* (Singapore: Springer, 2019), p. 78.

was probably sparked by his unpleasant experience in Japan. Instead of reporting to the emperor that his mission had failed to achieve any fruitful results, it would have been useful to pursue potential diplomatic relations with another country prior to returning home. Before Yang Zai set sail for the Ryukyu Islands, few Chinese officials or intellectuals had travelled beyond China's coastal fringe to explore this uncharted terrain in the sea. Chinese historical and geographical records show that there had been a dearth of information about these islands.

Upon his arrival in Ryukyu, Yang arranged to see King Satto (1321–1395), the then leader of the Chuzan kingdom. The Chuzan kingdom was also the strongest compared with its two counterparts in terms of its military capability and economic development.<sup>19</sup> This encounter between Yang Zai and King Satto proved to be constructive since, on the one hand, the former was able to apprise the latter of the Ming court's wealth and strength as well as its willingness to maintain proper order in Asian sea water. On the other hand, King Satto was also given an opportunity to establish a bond with Ming China, no substantial diplomatic linkage having hitherto been established.<sup>20</sup> As a result, when Ying Zai visited the Chuzan kingdom again in 1372, his mission was to formally extend an invitation to Chuzan to integrate into the tributary system. King Satto responded favourably to the Hongwu emperor's edict.<sup>21</sup> He immediately dispatched Lord Taiki, one of his close associates, to Nanjing to convey to the Ming court his willingness to have the Ryukyu Islands become part of the tributary system.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Lord Taiki headed off to Nanjing, together with Yang Zai, where they presented themselves to the Hongwu emperor in a ceremonial reception.

In hindsight, Yang Zai was probably the first Chinese to have brought the Chuzan kingdom, which became the unified Ryukyu Kingdom in 1429, closer to the Sino-centric order in maritime Asia. Yang's personal knowledge of the island would have enabled him to speak from personal experience on this 'hermit kingdom' situated in the sea. The emperor was sufficiently persuaded by Yang's expertise on the islands and their strategic importance. Yang's memorial eventually had been successful and the year 1372 became,

19. Michael S. Molasky and Steve Rabson (eds.), *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), p. 13.

20. Mamoru Akamine, *The Ryukyu Kingdom*, p. 23.

21. Mao Yuanyi; Patrick McCarthy (trans.), *Bubishi: The Bible of Karate* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1995), p. 46.

22. George H. Kerr, *Ryukyu Kingdom and Province before 1945*, pp. 27–28.

by and large, a watershed in late imperial Chinese and Ryukyu histories as King Satto and his successors were formally recognised as part of the Sino/Manchu-centric tributary system. From this point onwards, when a king of Ryukyu ascended the throne, Chinese envoys were obligated to travel from the capital to Fuzhou and then to cross the East China Sea to Shuri, a district of the port city of Naha in Ryukyu, aboard a type of vessel known as an investiture ship (*cefeng zhou*).<sup>23</sup> They were then to extend congratulatory messages to the new monarchs and, above all, to acknowledge their legitimacies on behalf of the Chinese or Manchu emperors. In the words of Yu Jideng (1544–1600), as recorded in the *Mingshi*,

Over several reigns, enfeoffment of Ryukyu has been carried out, involving the felling of trees and construction of ships, a process spanning several years. The envoys brave the dangers of winds and waves, while the small nation undergoes the burdensome task of providing tribute. It is advisable to continue as previously proposed.<sup>24</sup>

Without these official recognitions from either the Ming or the Qing authorities, the Ryukyu kings would not have been able to rightfully (*zhengtong*) rule over their territory. In other words, if the emperors of China were meant to be bestowed sacred mandates from the heavens to become the legitimate rulers of the tributary during the Ming and Qing dynasties, prior to assuming their roles as rightful sovereigns of the islands, the kings of Ryukyu had to rely on these Chinese emperors' proclamations granting them rule over the islands.

### Envoys as Agents

Chinese envoys played a role in linking China and the Ryukyu kingdoms on multiple levels. First, they were the only agents to have carried out missions that recognised a respective country's validity. Second, they also helped consolidate a maritime order, in East Asia, in which China was respected and centred. Finally, these agents were the ones who managed

23. Gregory Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), p. 45.

24. Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 323, *liezhuan* 211, *waiguo* 4.

not only to spot the shoreline of the Ryukyu Islands on the horizon, but also to personally touch ground there. They were able to witness and record what occurred in Ryukyu harbours, checkpoints, marketplaces, offices, and palaces and to provide the emperors with the latest updates and information on this island kingdom to the east. All of these first-hand accounts were considered essential and practical as the connections between China and Ryukyu were bound even more closely from the late fifteenth century due to the fact that sea trade between Ming–Qing China and Japan was frequently restricted.<sup>25</sup> It is therefore sensible to see that Ryukyu continued to play a crucial role in the ongoing exchanges between these three political entities across the Yellow and East China seas, given its geographical, strategic, and diplomatic positions.

When reporting to the emperor, on completion of their missions, every official envoy dispatched to Nara was required to submit a summary of what they had seen and experienced on their journey. In addition to these official memorials, some of these records were transcribed into policy communications and official annals, such as the *Ming shilu*, while the result and findings of some of these missions, especially those conducted during the Qing dynasty, were even portrayed in paintings that were included in commemorative albums (*jinian huace*). For instance, the Ryukyu mission headed by Wang Ji (1636–1699) and Lin Linchang, in 1683,<sup>26</sup> was recorded on a series of pages in an album for the imperial court. These visual and illustrative materials were produced at a time when ‘court paintings’ had become a common and requisite feature of imperial representations whose purpose was to demonstrate and glorify Qing statecraft.<sup>27</sup> According to Stephen Whiteman, cultural production in multiple media through painting, printing, and literature had various agendas in the High Qing in terms of projecting a kind of imperial identity in the form of propagandist expression.<sup>28</sup> The pictorial depiction featuring Wang and Lin’s journey was certainly part of such formation.

25. Gang Zhao, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2013), pp. 46, 52, 190.

26. Xie, Bizhen, *Ming Qing Zhong Liu jiaowang zhong de Zhongguo chuantong shewai zhidu yanjiu* (Taipei: Wanjuanlou tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 2020), p. 19.

27. Michael G. Chang, “Envisioning the Spectacle of Emperor Qianlong’s Tours of Southern China: An Exercise in Historical Imagination,” in James A. Cook et al. (eds.), *Visualising Modern China: Image, History, and Memory, 1750–Present* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 27.

28. Stephen H. Whiteman, *Where Dragon Veins Meet: The Kangxi Emperor and His Estate at Rehe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), pp. 152–153.

Other than this propagandist evidence, there is another type of historical account worthy of our attention: the ‘envoys’ records (*shilu*). The first appeared in 1534 and was titled *Shi liuqiu lu*, written by Chen Kan and Gao Cheng. These specific writings were compiled to commemorate the Ryukyu investiture, carefully recording these official journeys in as much detail as possible. Chen Kan had this to say, for instance:

During the reign of Emperor Jiajing of the Ming Dynasty, when virtue and benevolence flourished, the realm was under the embrace of heaven, and the teachings spread far and wide. In the distant lands of Ryukyu, situated beyond the seas, they faithfully upheld the rightful succession. With each change of imperial reign, they would present memorials and petitions for investiture, and the court would send trusted envoys to handle the matters. In the year of Jiajing Renchen, when the crown prince was to assume the throne, he humbly requested recognition. The compassionate Emperor graciously granted his approval, adhering to established traditions. At that time, I was appointed as the chief envoy, and the official Gao Cheng was appointed as my deputy.

Because of my daily interactions and exchanges, I have come to understand the realities of the roads, landscapes, customs, and individuals of the Ryukyu Kingdom. I have learned the minutiae of daily life, including habits, dietary preferences, and local practices, all from what I have personally witnessed and heard. In this way, I have become aware of existing historical records. By summarizing their essence and distinguishing their differences, I have felt compelled to compile this account.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, unlike the official memorials, where the information was meant only for the emperors, these *shilu* were published for general distribution, targeting central and provincial officers as well as the wider scholarly community. As argued by Richard A. Pegg, the emergence of these envoys’ records was one of the outcomes of the publishing boom in the second half of the Ming dynasty, a period that ‘produced books on travel and coastal defence, as well as historical records of the late Ming dynasty, which evolved in the Qing dynasty to include books on the minutia of

29. Chen Kan, “Shi Liuqiu lu xu,” *Shi Liuqiu lu (Jiajing jiawu nian* version, preserved in Beijing University Library), 1a.

gazetteers and encyclopaedias. Over time the overall lengths and types of information provided in the envoys' publications matched popular trends as they emerged in the Ming and Qing.<sup>30</sup>

### *Pax Manchuica* and the Ryukyu Kingdom

We are about to deal with the place of this type of 'envoy's publication'. Here, we feature a publication written by Zhou Huang, whom the Qianlong emperor dispatched to the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1756, more than three-and-a-half centuries after Yang Zai conducted his first mission, during the Ming. As a matter of fact, between 1372 and 1866, Ming and Qing emperors arranged for a total of 23 such missions to the Ryukyu Islands. In most cases, between 300 and 800 people were involved in these official trips, including diplomats, soldiers, sailors, and interpreters.<sup>31</sup> Zhou's journey was one of these recorded tours intended to ensure the Ryukyu Kingdom, remotely located 'in the sea', was established and maintained within the maritime order that had been marshalled and sustained by the Chinese authority. The letter Zhou carried had been written by the Qianlong emperor and was as follows:

I, with the gracious blessings of heaven, hold dominion of all directions; the teachings of virtue are disseminated far and wide, and people from distant lands follow with reverence. For instance, the land of Guangdong is embraced by my benevolent kindness, and the continuation of our imperial lineage has been met with abundant favour. With utmost care and benevolence, I extend my favour to the successive generations, and in accordance with the ancestral rites, I have bestowed further grace.

As for your realm, the Kingdom of Ryukyu, situated in a remote corner amidst the ocean's expanse, it has held the status of a vassal for generations, receiving the imperial edicts time and again. You have diligently fulfilled your tributary duties and remained obedient and respectful. Now, as the heir to the throne, Prince Shangmu, prepares

30. Richard A. Pegg, "For the Record: Chinese Investiture Mission to Ryukyu, 1404–1866," *Crossroads*, vol. 20 (2021), p. 3.

31. For details, see Chen Jiexian, *Ming Qing Zhongliu guanxi lunji* (Taipei: Sanmin shuju gufen youxian gongsi, 2019).

to succeed, a proposal has been submitted to grant him the title of successor. Recognizing that the perpetuation of a royal lineage is a constant principle for a nation, and that bestowal of titles is a significant act of the imperial court, I have specially dispatched the chief envoy, Quan Kui (1725–1791), a scholar of the Hanlin Academy, as well as the deputy envoy, Zhou Huang, a compiler in the Hanlin Academy. They bear my imperial decree to confer the title of ‘Prince of Zhongshan’ upon Ryukyu, henceforth known as the Kingdom of Ryukyu.

May the officials and scholars of your kingdom, as well as your people, strive to uphold virtue and administer benevolent governance, further demonstrating their sincerity and commitment. This proclamation is meant to remind you that your maritime nation is in good hands, and it is my will that this decree be universally known and understood.<sup>32</sup>

Zhou Huang was responsible for conveying a message to the Ryukyu authority that stated that China had long been treating this island kingdom as an obedient tributary state in the sea within the tributary system. The Qing court followed suit. As a result, the maritime belt connecting these two places no doubt became an integral part of the formation of a maritime China throughout the early modern era. Official envoys like Yang Zai and Zhou Huang, in turn, played a crucial role in the production of geographic, political, economic, societal, cultural, and even geological knowledge about this significant segment in the Ming–Qing geopolitical framework. Their writings, as expressed in those envoys’ records, are useful in that they demonstrate that far from being a small or remote kingdom beyond the sea (*haiwai*), inhabited by only a small population, the Ryukyu Islands were endowed with land worth cultivating and harbours capable of facilitating sea trade in the western Pacific, and were populated by both natives and Chinese and Japanese migrants deserving of inclusion as subjects who might have had long-established ancestral or economic connections with the mainland and, therefore, should not be marginalised.

Additionally, Zhou Huang’s ‘envoy’s account’, titled *History and Customs of Ryukyu* (*Liuqiuguo zhilüe*), should be examined not only as a reinforcement of Ryukyu’s place in imperial maritime geography but also as a reconceptualisation of the Qing’s attempt to manage the domain in

32. Zhou Huang, “Qianlong ershiyi nian fengwang Shangmu zhao,” *Liuqiuguo zhilüe* (Qianlong ershiyi nian version, preserved in Beijing University Library), *shou juan*, 9a–9b.

relation to its frontier policies. In his pioneering study *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China*, Matthew Mosca eloquently argues that the Qing empire in the long eighteenth century shifted from a 'localized frontier policy' primarily concerned with border defence and stability to a more 'expansive foreign policy outlook' that sought to establish regional dominance and influence.<sup>33</sup> His analysis contributes substantially to our understanding of the Qing's engagement with the wider world as it highlights the complex interactions between domestic concerns, border regions, and external geopolitical dynamics that existed on the Indian subcontinent and in Central Asia.

Following up on Mosca's examination, I am keen to add that such a shift in the Qing's frontier policy approach was also perceptible in the East Asian Sea. Although the Ryukyu Kingdom was merely one of the Qing empire's many tributary states, it was one of the very few tributaries that was not bounded by natural terrestrial features, such as rivers, deserts, and mountains, that had for centuries maintained continuous, sustained, and close associations with Chinese empires, namely the Ming and Qing dynasties. By focusing on such dynamics between these two political entities, we should be able to obtain a unique spatial image of a Qing empire that was not merely land-based but had transgressed its continental boundaries as shown in these envoys' first-handwritten accounts.

By the time Zhou compiled his record, the Qing empire had doubled in size by annexing Taiwan and conquering the Mongols, eastern Turkestan, and Tibet. Under the Qianlong regime, the Manchu extended their influence into Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Burma, and Nepal. Zhou's work, as a result, should also be considered a record that was produced at the height of so-called Qing expansionism, an imperial manoeuvre that some historians treat as an example of early modern imperialism.<sup>34</sup> This is an era during which the central government commissioned a variety of projects to depict and justify their control over an expanded imperial domain. As we discussed in Chapter Four (The Cartographers), these officially led projects were not only textual but also visual and illustrative. Among them were the Kangxi Atlas, compiled in 1717, the *Comprehensive Gazetteer of the Great*

33. Matthew Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

34. Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 26.

*Qing Realm* (*Da Qing yitong zhi*), published in 1746, and *The Qing Imperial Tribute Illustrations* (*Huang Qing zhigong tu*), completed in 1769. These grand surveys and the compendium of geographical information about the Manchu empire were of utmost importance in promoting the image of a new and competent China that was considerably different from the Ming.

Zhou Huang's account was borne out of a political environment where the feats accomplished by the Qing emperors were cherished and valued, even though the scale of Zhou's record was much smaller than the above impressive, nation-wide endeavours. In fact, Zhou's work should be examined alongside some other 'frontier travel writings' that emerged during the eighteenth century and had a recognisable correlation with those imperialistic projects that were channelled and conducted by the state. In the words of Emma Teng, those travel writings were symbolic in the history of late imperial China, as 'Chinese literati, military men, and merchants [began] to travel to the frontiers in unprecedented numbers' as the Qing empire expanded across the Asian continent. Frontier travellers not only composed written accounts of their journeys but also a good number of them were keen to visualise what they had encountered, in the form of 'maps, ethnographic images, drawings of flora and fauna, architectural renderings, and illustrations commemorating battles and other events on the frontier'.<sup>35</sup> In representing the distant regions as well as the diverse cultural habits and traditions therein, these frontier records tended to refashion those unfamiliar places and transform them into a crucial sector of the Celestial Empire, according to a Confucian cultural yardstick, through the production of a revised imperial narrative or discourse. Zhou Huang's writing very much echoed this specific turn in geographical and geopolitical studies during the High Qing.

Zhou's accounts differ from other frontier travel writings in that he differentiated the Ryukyu Kingdom from Xinjiang, Tibet, and those countries in southeast or central Asia that came under the suzerainty of the Qing in terms of their geographical and strategic locations. While those southeast and inner Asian countries were geographically attached to China, Ryukyu was distanced by at least 527 miles of salt water (around 1,700 *li*, as recorded in most Chinese sources). According to traditional historiography, there was no immediate threat or danger coming from the Ryukyuan people thanks to this maritime buffer between China and the island kingdom; in

35. Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683–1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 5.

other words, the Qing court was not encouraged to integrate Ryukyu into their grand strategy out of a concern over any perceptible geopolitical threats, such as those of the expanding Russian empire to the northern and northwestern frontiers or those European powers to its southern boundary bordered by countries such as Laos and Vietnam. The principal reason for including Ryukyu was its geostrategic position, which allowed Qing China to check on the Japanese and, by extension, to consolidate its centrality and ascendancy in the East Asian Sea. Zhou's record thereby suggests that the impact and legacy of Qing expansionism in the eighteenth century was not solely constrained within terrestrial boundaries. The appointment of these envoys, including Zhou Huang, as well as their assigned missions, was a significant step toward bringing the sea under a Qing imperial rubric that was shaped by the maritime world. In a nutshell, Zhou's work, as well as some other similar writings released earlier, serves to define the extent of the empire's influence 'beyond the sea' and to articulate its vision as a geographically expansive power that included both continental and maritime domains.

### Zhou Huang, the Man in Play

Zhou Huang was born and raised in Sichuan, a landlocked county in the southwest of China. This contrasts him with individuals discussed in the preceding chapters, including Chen Zuyi, Zheng Ruoceng, Shi Lang, and Lan Dingyuan, who came from coastal areas. Zhou was probably one of the few representative examples of a traditional land-bounded intellectual who had no previous engagements with marine matters but who was nevertheless shaped by the maritime world in a significant stage of his career. He made this pretty clear in the preface of his *Liuguoguo zhilüe*:

I, Zhou Huang, a minister serving in the Hanlin Academy, humbly present a brief record of Ryukyu. I seek the sagacious guidance of the Emperor in this matter. I, your servant, come from the remote western region of Shu (Sichuan) and have little knowledge [of the sea]. By the grace of passing the imperial examinations, I was appointed to the Imperial Archive, where I had the privilege of glimpsing certain confidential texts and studying the works of previous compilers. From the moment I embarked on this diplomatic mission, I personally received some constructive instructions from the Emperor. Considering

the existence of records by previous envoys and the desire to refine and verify hearsay and rumours, I have made efforts to collect information during my travels and my leisure time at the embassy. I have compiled rough drafts based on what I have seen and heard. After returning to the capital several months ago, I organized the materials by category and have now completed this account. I humbly believe that all previous doubts have been dispelled. Compared to the previous envoy records, my compilation provides a more thorough overview [of the Ryukyu Kingdom]. From the bottom of my heart, I respectfully submit this account for the Emperor's consideration. I also include two maps of the country [Ryukyu] and two volumes of poetic accounts of my mission, as additional offerings.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, Zhou Huang had only limited knowledge about Ryukyu and the maritime world before his journey. But after obtaining his *jinsshi* degree, he enjoyed success in a career that continued to progress rather free from interruption. He was also favoured by the Qianlong emperor, owing to his administrative abilities and competency. But apart from what he wrote in the above preface, we know relatively little about him. His fame and legacy were remembered largely because of the mission the emperor had sent him on to the Ryukyu Islands and, above all, the 'envoy record' he compiled after his journey. His work was considered one of the most detailed and vivid premodern accounts of the Ryukyu Kingdom during the time and it was widely circulated among local officials, policymakers, and literati who were interested in travel and frontier writings.

What made Zhou's account symbolic is that the author was the first envoy to compile all of the preceding records and reports concerning official missions from the Chinese court to the Ryukyu Kingdom.<sup>37</sup> This comprehensive compilation encompassed the entirety of past investitures, starting from the reign of the first Ming emperor and extending until his own mission. From his records, we know the following:

The first envoy record [about Ryukyu] was completed by Chen Kan during the Ming Dynasty... we then had Zhang Xueli and Wang Ji, of our time, finishing the *Jilüe* and the *Zhongshan yangezhi*, both which covered the geography, customs, local commodities, religious practices,

36. Zhou Huang, "Gongjin Liuqiu zhilüe," *Liuqiu guozhilüe*, "zouzhe," 1a.

37. Richard A. Pegg, "For the Record," p. 22.

and so forth of the Ryukyu Kingdom. However, it was not until Xu Baoguang completed his *Zhongshan chuanxinlu* that the aforementioned topics were better explicated. But the chapters within the book were not properly organised, while the themes could have been sharpened, hence making Xu's work uneasy to navigate. As a result, I saw the need to revise and refine what had been recorded in the past and to compile an up-to-date study based on my personal experience and the many historical archives and writings I have consulted.<sup>38</sup>

From the above excerpt, we learn that Zhou Huang did not establish the model for the rhetoric that was used to detail the Ryukyu Islands, including its geography, culture, religious practices, and so forth, but the author emphasised the rhetoric more than the earlier compilers had done. Moreover, he aimed to set the standard for portraying all of those details in a more structured and deliberate manner. In a way, Zhou was trying to lay out the principles of compiling this type of genre (i.e. the envoy record) for later generations. What is also worth noting here is that he even subtly criticised Xu Baoguang's *Accounts of the Mission to Zhongshan* (*Zhongshan chuanxinlu*), which was supposed to be an authentic record and consisted of close to 300 pages divided into six chapters.<sup>39</sup> Although he had not been involved in any duties pertaining to coastal defence or maritime expeditions prior to having been assigned this mission to Ryukyu, Zhou was well aware of the previous publications on such topics, including the one written by Xu Baoguang, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. As a sagacious and careful reader of Qing–Ryukyu relations, Zhou Huang would have viewed his diplomatic mission as an opportunity to formulate a narrative rhetoric that could provide future Qing officials with a base of knowledge with which to make their observations of the Ryukyu Islands.

In fact, Chinese travellers, envoys, and those who had been part of the Ryukyu mission prior to Zhou Huang's arrival did not travel much on the island. They were therefore not too familiar with the extent of the actual happenings among the Ryukyuan people. Most of these previous records referred to the history and culture of Ryukyu in blanket terms,

38. Zhou Huang, "fanli," *Liuqiu guozhilüe*, 2a–2b.

39. Wang Qing, "Trade and Exchange Relations between China and Ryukyus during the Reign of Emperor Kangxi (1662–1722)," in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *Trading Networks in Early Modern East Asia* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), p. 179; Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Imagined Geographies*, p. 207.

such as ‘maritime country (*haiguo*)’ or an ‘isolated corner to the southeast (*pichu dongnan*)’. Even Xu Baoguang’s account, which is relatively more sophisticated and comprehensive, did not specify the features of Ryukyu and its uniqueness. It provides a general overview of this island kingdom, describing it as an ‘outer counterpart (*waibang*)’ as if there were not much to explore further inland. Zhou Huang, by contrast, was arguably the first envoy who became aware of the need to draw finer descriptions about the everyday lives of the Ryukyuan, some of whom appeared to be pretty similar to the Han-Chinese, which then implies that they shouldn’t be regarded merely as inferior or others.

The practice of differentiating between Han-Chinese and other groups of people was already evident in many travellers’ reports and gazetteers that had been compiled by Chinese writers since the Ming dynasty, if not earlier. These writers described frontier tribes as ‘savages’ and those tributary countries as ‘barbaric’; however, the notion of distinguishing between Han-Chinese and the barbarians became less obvious and explicit in the frontier writings published during the Qing era.<sup>40</sup> Instead of labelling those who resided beyond China, either in remote areas on land or on the sea, as barbarous, Qing authors applied some other terms such as ‘outer (*wai*)’, ‘inferior (*bian*)’, or ‘distant (*yuan*)’. Although these terms still contained a substantial degree of Chinese superiority and centrality, they appeared to have been less demeaning to the other tribes and tributaries. In Zhou Huang’s writing, for example, his responses to the people and the environment, as well as his opinions on Qing–Ryukyu relations, were fairly objective. These qualities might serve as examples that distinguish his work from the previous envoy records. As a result, it should not be an exaggeration to argue that Zhou’s detailed and impartial descriptions of the Ryukyu Kingdom made his *Liuqiuguo zhilüe* one of the most celebrated and widely copied accounts of the territory. It has been summarised or closely duplicated in reference materials compiled for officials and travellers on this ‘hermit kingdom’, including the *Shi Liuqiu ji*, written by Li Dingyuan (1750–1805) in 1802, the *Xu Liuqiuguo zhilüe*, by Qi Kun (1776–1820) and Fei Xizhang in 1808, and provincial gazetteers in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In his descriptions, Zhou Huang attempted to appreciate the history and culture of the Ryukyu Kingdom by understanding it not only as

40. Wang Hui; Michael Gibbs Hill (trans.), *China from Empire to Nation-State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 120.

a tributary state of the Qing empire but also as an island country that had developed from its distinctive societal and historical backgrounds. In the second chapter (*juan* 2) of his *Liuqiuguo zhilüe*, titled “lineage and tradition (*guotong*)”, for instance, in detailing its history and emphasising the importance of the inhabitants’ predecessors, Zhou made it clear that the Ryukyu people were sophisticated, similar to the Koreans:

Born of the people, establish their ruler. Since the times of Yao and Shun, the succession of the legitimate authority has been maintained and the continuity of such legitimacy is well-recorded. As for the remote and desolate regions, even the smallest territories each have their own rulers; yet in places where the teachings of civilization have not reached, they are but myths and legends, with time erasing their existence, and this is the natural order of things. In the records such as geographical atlases (*tujing*), just as in the local histories of mainland provinces, the most detailed is that of Korea, followed by Ryukyu.<sup>41</sup>

Elaborating on the above, while the Ryukyu Kingdom had maintained for centuries its status as one of the tributaries of the various Chinese empires, the Ryukyuan also appreciated their own imperial lineages, which they saw as crucial and long-lasting. The trope of symbolising the historical origins of foreign countries was one of the yardsticks used to evaluate the country’s development in Chinese historical writings. Ming and Qing literati clearly considered this trope to be an effective framework for understanding the cultural similarities and differences between China and its neighbouring powers. In the eighteenth century, most maritime writers employed similar tropes to describe countries located on the sea, namely Japan, Ryukyu, and Southeast Asian political entities. The accumulation of such genres, particularly when assembled in envoy records like the one compiled by Zhou Huang, had the effect of adding weight to the notion of the historicity of the Ryukyu Kingdom as one of the ancient cultures to have survived on the Asian Sea.

The chapters that encompass the political structure, religious practices, taxation, landmarks, raw materials, and various customs in Zhou’s account differ in both quantity and quality from the records and maritime writings of previous envoys, as these only briefly covered the above aspects. One significant example lies in Zhou’s vivid introduction to Ryukyu’s local

41. Zhou Huang, “*guotong*,” *Liuqiuguo zhilüe*, *juan* 2, 1a.

products in the chapter entitled “*wuchan*”. Significantly, this section was left out of many of the texts written by later Chinese writers; it continues to be overlooked by present-day scholars who align Zhou with Qing–Ryukyu relations:

With the unification of the nation, both domestically and internationally, all kinds of goods come together; there is nothing lacking in terms of rare treasures in China. By comparison, Ryukyu, an isolated and barren island, has been known for its scarcity. It was once exempted from giving horse tributes and later relieved from making annual offerings, most of these tributes were listed in our imperial catalogue.... However, there are many unusual and exotic items that are not part of the regular tribute. They are not known to most of us, not even the sage or saint, who is considered virtuous and respected for their knowledge and spiritual insight. Everything such as crossbows and arrows have their own origins, while leopards, mice, and fish have their value in nature.<sup>42</sup>

Apparently, Zhou was aware of the beauty of those local products that could be found in or manufactured on the Ryukyu Islands. Although most of them were not particularly marketable, compared to the tea, silk, and porcelain exported from China, they carried a certain value in that they could represent the culture of Ryukyu. For instance, Zhou paid considerable attention to the paper industry in the region, highlighting the durability, size, texture, and quality of its products:

There are several types of paper produced in Ryukyu, all made from the bark of grain trees. Among these various types, the ones known as cotton paper and clear paper are of good quality, while the best is called ‘protective longevity paper (*hushou zhi*)’. The most outstanding *hushouzhi* measures approximately four feet in width and about two feet in height; the average *hushouzhi* measures about two feet in width and one foot five inches in height; the lowest grade of *hushouzhi* is then slightly smaller than the average product by one or two inches in both width and height, and the quality of the paper is also far inferior. In addition, there is decorative paper, commonly called ‘flower paper (*huazhi*)’, originating from Gara. The ones with green patterns are

42. Zhou Huang, “*wuchan*,” *Liuqiuguo zhilüe*, *juan* 14, 1a–1b.

particularly exquisite. However, all of these papers have dimensions similar to the average *hushouzhi* and are not suitable for writing, but they are quite decent when displayed in window frames or on walls.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from Ryukyu's paper industry, Zhou also touched on the agricultural, artistic, craft-based, and natural-resources-based products that were highly valued within Ryukyuan society, including oil, wax, sugar, gold, silver, pearls, iron, knives, coral, and sulphur.<sup>44</sup> He explored how the production, consumption, and appreciation of these products shaped perceptions of local distinctiveness, while at the same time also pointing out that some of these products were intertwined with religious practices, traditional rituals, and the local identity therein. Some of his descriptions of the raw materials found in Ryukyu were precise and detailed. When recounting the different kinds of stones that were suitable for use as inkstones, for instance, Zhou had this to say:

Some of the stones found in Ryukyu were suitable for producing inkstones as they are relatively more 'tender and loose'. One of them is called *lishi* and comes from the area called Yebi Mountain. Another type is named *shizhi*, ranging in size from a basin to a small bowl and is abundantly found on sandy shores along the coast. These can be picked up when the tide is low. *Haisong* and *haibai* are the two other varieties that exist in red and white colours. The larger ones are sized around three to four feet, but since they are entwined in the seabed, this makes them fragile and prone to breakage when retrieved. Moreover, the colour of these two types of stones would change over time, making it difficult to ascertain their original appearance.<sup>45</sup>

Evidently, Zhou's examination of some of the raw materials was characterised by a remarkable level of sophistication and thoroughness. His astute remarks and observations not only reflected his keen intellect but also highlighted his ability to delve into topics in the finest detail. Unlike other envoys before him, Zhou's examination went beyond surface-level observations, showcasing his commitment to delivering a nuanced account of what he saw and heard on the island.

43. Ibid., 2b.

44. Ibid., 1b–10b.

45. Ibid., 3b–4a.

In addition to these local products, Zhou Huang also spared a few pages in his account to analyse Ryukyu's strategic geographic location, its connections to neighbouring regions, and the role it played in a transregional context.

The Ryukyu Kingdom is surrounded by the sea on all sides. To the west of the sea lies the Blackwater current (*heishuigou*), bordering the coast off Fujian province. From Fujian to Ryukyu, one must pass through two currents, namely *cangshui* and *heishui*. *Cangming*, an ancient name for the vast sea, encompasses the concept of the profound and mysterious. It is also referred to as *Dongming*. The geographical location of Ryukyu corresponds to its name, as it is situated in a south-eastern direction. To the east lies Satsuma Province of Japan (referred to as Yaosima in the book *Zhinan guangyi*), which is a frequent trading partner of the Ryukyuan. To the north, one can gaze upon Yegu, which leads directly to Goryeo. To the south, it borders Taiwan, Penghu, and the Liushan hills beyond Danshui, precisely where the Jishui river joins the Weilu river, nurturing fertile and prosperous lands.

The Ryukyu Islands comprise thirty-six islands in all. They are closely interlinked, akin to the interdependence of a person's lips and teeth. Sandbars occasionally appear, intermittently connecting the islands, resembling the faint lines of a grass snake or the faint traces of a horse's hoofprints. Thus, the kingdom's vital energy is interconnected and the land and the climate exhibit broad similarities, with minor variations.

The convenience of maritime navigation and the abundance of marine resources is more than sufficient to gather the people and foster their economic and societal growth in Ryukyu. Yet at the same time, we should not forget the rulers of China, who had extended their benevolence with utmost care to the Ryukyu Islands for thousands of years. Our Emperor (Qianlong) carries the same responsibility as his predecessors, who upheld the belief that China and Ryukyu are united as an entity. It is certain that our Empire has bestowed boundless blessings and benevolence to the Ryukyuan, as we cannot bear to overlook them as outsiders.<sup>46</sup>

46. Zhou Huang, "hai," *Liuqiu guozhilüe*, juan 5, 4a–5a.

The above is a long quotation but one that is symbolic enough as it provides a careful review of the geostrategic features and interconnectedness of the Ryukyu Kingdom in an Asian context. At first glance, Zhou did not simply look at Ryukyu from a China-centred perspective but a broader maritime one. He highlighted the significance of the sea as a vital element in shaping the region's development and its strategic location positioned between various neighbouring territories, including Japan and Taiwan. Having said that, however, towards the end of the passage, Zhou Huang went on to underline the enduring historical and diplomatic ties between China and the Ryukyu Kingdom. While not explicitly stating or elaborating on these topics, he expressed the desire for Chinese rulers, including the Qianlong emperor, to align themselves with the Ryukyu leaders, implying that the latter's prosperity and growth had to rely on their connections with China due to its historical role as a leading power in maritime Asia. In fact, the way Zhou preferred to use the word '*zhi*' in the title of his account was symbolic enough to reflect on his underlying motivation to foster a closer connection between the Qing empire and the Ryukyu Kingdom. In the Ming and Qing, most envoys would use '*lu*' or '*ji*' to name their envoy records. Zhou, on the contrary, argued that both '*lu*' and '*ji*' represented more of a personal adventure rather than treating the Ryukyu Kingdom as an inseparable part of the Qing empire, as implied in the term '*zhi*'. In his assessment, since Ryukyu had long been a faithful tributary state to China and had been under the strong, profound influence of Chinese culture, it should thus be treated as part of China, similar to a county or village that existed within the Qing's administration perimeter. Of course, Zhou did not mean or suggest that Ryukyu was part of the Qing but, apparently, he tended to integrate the former into the broader sphere dominated by the Qing empire. This was an attempt to project power and influence over the region while maintaining a semblance of autonomy for Ryukyu.

### The Inseparable Bonding

In the sections on 'ceremonies (*dianli*)', 'customs (*fengsu*)', and 'temples (*cimiao*)', for instance, Zhou Huang also put forward, more than once, that Ryukyu was 'similar to China (i.e. *lüefang Zhongguo*; *yu Zhongguo lüetong*; or *zhao Zhongguo shi*)'.<sup>47</sup> One of the remarkable connections

47. Zhou Huang, "Fengsu," *Liuqiuguo zhilüe*, *juan 4 xia*, 3a; 18a; 18b.

that linked the two realms together was the worship of *Tianhou* (*Mazu*), commonly referred to as the goddess of the sea and the protector of sailors and fishermen. *Tianhou* worship, also interpreted as the veneration of the Heavenly Empress, is a religious practice that originated in southeast China and is prevalent in East and Southeast Asia, particularly the Minnan region, even to the present day. Scholars have long focused on the various ritual ceremonies dedicated to *Mazu* in Taiwan, Fujian, and Guangdong. But not as much has been done on these rituals' impact on the Ryukyuan population, let alone considering this practice as a critical linkage tying China and Ryukyu across the maritime space. Zhou Huang noted that devotees in Ryukyu, similar to the Chinese who resided in the coastal region, also offered prayers and made offerings to seek protection and blessings from *Tianhou* when they were undertaking various forms of seafaring activities. As *Mazu* worship took root in the Ryukyu Islands, it became intertwined with local beliefs and customs, and developed into a form of religious expression that centred on the maritime world. Since most of the Ryukyuan population were skilled seafarers and relied heavily on marine resources, *Mazu* was then revered as a powerful deity who could ensure seafarers safe navigation, protect them against storms and disasters, and bless them with bountiful catches. Zhou Huang described how the Ryukyuan people recognised the importance of *Mazu*'s protection for their sailors and fishermen and how they had established temples dedicated to *Mazu* across the islands. These temples, known as Uganju, served as spiritual centres and community gathering sites, similar to those along coastal Fujian and Guangdong. The architecture of the Uganju temples in Ryukyu showcased a unique blend of local styles and influences from southeast China. They typically featured distinct red-painted exteriors, ornate decorations, and iconic wall paintings that honoured *Mazu* and recognised her importance in various aspects of daily life.

Zhou Huang also himself became a devotee of *Mazu* after the investiture mission where he navigated through perilous waters between Fujian and Ryukyu.<sup>48</sup> After all, it was no small feat to traverse the treacherous East China Sea, known for its unpredictable weather patterns and strong currents, in the age of sail. Envoys and their accompanying entourage would have faced numerous challenges that posed constant threats to their safety along the way. Although instruments for celestial navigation, along

48. Xu Ke, "Shang fougubiao zhe yi xinfo," in his *Qingbai leichao* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1917), vol. 12, "jifeng shang," p. 27.

with magnetic compasses and detailed sea charts (as discussed in Chapter Four), were available in the eighteenth century, skilled navigators held various superstitions and beliefs associated with *Mazu* that influenced their sailing behaviour. They even carried amulets or small statues of the goddess on their vessels, as talismans to ward off storms and calamities. In other words, navigating through these unforgiving waters in early modern China would have required both expertise in maritime navigation and a common faith in *Mazu's* guardianship.

While Zhou's personal adventures led him to elaborate on his *Mazu* connection, he also paid attention to the striking resemblance between the governance and administration of Ryukyu and China. At the core of both the Qing and Ryukyuan governance systems lay the principles of Confucianism. Here, Zhou expounded on the adoption of Confucian ideals in Ryukyu, such as filial piety, respect for authority, and adherence to moral virtues. He also described how the social hierarchy in Ryukyu closely mirrored that of China, with an emphasis on familial relationships and the importance of the ruler–subject dynamic. In Chapter 13 of his work, which features case studies of various individuals, such as Ma Shunde, Zheng Dong, Chang Tian, and He Shou, Zhou provides convincing examples of how Confucian principles were ingrained in the social fabric of Ryukyu. Ma Shunde, for instance, was a renowned Ryukyu official in the late sixteenth century. When Sho Gen, the monarch of Ryukyu, launched a campaign against his enemy in Naha, he soon became severely ill. Driven by an unwavering sense of loyalty and a desire to protect his ruler, Ma Shunde made an extraordinary decision. He approached the king and fervently prayed, offering his own life in exchange for the safety of the monarch. His selfless act, as described by Zhou Huang, demonstrated the depth of his loyalty and the extent to which he was willing to serve his sovereign.<sup>49</sup> This is an illustrative story representing the conception of '*zhongjie*', a combination of faithfulness and righteousness that is highly respected in Confucian classics.

Similar to their Chinese counterparts, Ryukyuan, as depicted by Zhou Huang, placed significant importance on rituals and adhering to proper etiquette. Most ceremonial practices, such as courtly ceremonies, official receptions, and ancestral worship, followed elaborate protocols and etiquette derived from Confucian principles. All of them were conducted to maintain the hierarchical structure of Ryukyuan society and its social harmony and

49. Zhou Huang, "Renwu," *Liuqinguo zhibi*, juan 13, 4b–5a.

to uphold cultural traditions. For example, when Zhou Huang arrived in Ryukyu as the Qing's honourable envoy, official receptions were held to receive and welcome him and the delegation. According to Zhou's account, these receptions were marked by meticulous protocols, such as the order of entrance, specific gestures, and the exchange of formal greetings. The etiquette observed during these receptions emphasised respect, hierarchy, and cultural diplomacy. In fact, extensive planning and coordination was involved in preparing for the arrival of the Qing's envoy and for the official receptions that followed. The Ryukyuan court had to assign specific officials to oversee various aspects of this event, ranging from organising the reception venue and designing the ceremonial decorations to preparing the necessary ceremonial objects and setting up the series of ritual formalities.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to these grand rituals, seven formal banquets (*yanli*), namely the 'investiture meal (*cefeng yan*)', 'completion meal (*shijun yan*)', 'mid-autumn meal (*Zhongqiu yan*)', 'doubleyang meal (*chongyang yan*)', 'farewell meal (*jianbie yan*)', 'exit meal (*baici yan*)', and 'abroad meal (*wangzhou yan*)', were organised to honour Zhou Huang and his team.<sup>51</sup> These banquets featured lavish feasts with a wide array of delicacies that showcased the culinary traditions and specialities of the Ryukyu. Performances, such as customary music, dance, and theatrical arts, were also arranged to entertain the guests and demonstrate the artistic talents of Ryukyuan performers. At the end of the official receptions, the Ryukyuan court would present the envoys carefully selected gifts of high cultural and artistic value. In the words of Zhou Huang, these gifts often symbolised the unique craftsmanship, natural resources, or cultural heritage of the Ryukyu Kingdom.<sup>52</sup> In retrospect, through the official reception for Zhou Huang as the Qing envoy, Ryukyu showcased its commitment to substantiate relations and cultural exchanges with China. The Ryukyuan's meticulous adherence to Chinese or Confucian protocols and their display of cultural richness not only demonstrated the importance placed on the Qing's diplomatic mission but also reinforced its perception of Ryukyu as an integral part of

50. Zhou Huang, "Dianli," *Liuqiuguo zhilüe*, juan 11, 1a–1b.

51. Ibid., 13a. It is worth noting that the seven formal banquets (*yanli*) prior to Xu Baoguang and Zhou Huang were titled differently, namely the 'welcome meal (*yingfeng yan*)', 'completion meal (*shijun yan*)', 'mid-autumn meal (*Zhongqiu yan*)', 'doubleyang meal (*chongyang yan*)', 'winter solstice meal (*dongzhi yan*)', 'farewell meal (*jianbie yan*)', and 'abroad meal (*dengzhou yan*)'.

52. Ibid., 14b–15a.

the broader Chinese cultural sphere. By showcasing the kingdom's cultural affinity with the Qing, Ryukyu also contributed to a shared cultural hub and fostered a sense of mutual understanding and respect. At the same time, through those practices Ryukyu was also able to project a sense of grandeur and sophistication that solidified its position as a respected country in the region.

In terms of its legal system, the Ryukyu Kingdom likewise reflected the influence of Chinese legal traditions. One prominent example, as suggested by Zhou Huang and some of his predecessors, such as Zhang Xueli, Wang Ji, and Xu Baoguang, is the use of legal codes and judicial measures that resembled those of the Ming and Qing. The kingdom's protocols for its trials and legal proceedings were very similar to the legal codes found in China, as these procedures also included the presentation of evidence, the examination of witnesses, and the deliberation of judges. The aim of both the Ryukyu and Qing authorities was to ensure a thorough and fair process in adjudicating cases, one that reflected the principle of impartiality and deterred potential offenders. Additionally, the punishments and penalties prescribed in the Ryukyuan law code exhibited parallels to the Great Qing Code. The use of fines, exile, and various forms of corporal sentences, Zhou Huang listed out, aligned with the practices seen in late imperial China. It is apparent that the Ryukyuan legal code had incorporated elements of Chinese legal philosophy and procedures that ensured equitable treatment according to the principles of justice.<sup>53</sup>

Although the Qing and Ryukyu shared some of those legal principles, it is worth noting that Zhou Huang contended that, most of the time, the Ryukyu government had no need of those legal codes. In his assessment, every single invader was aware of the fact that the kingdom was securely under the Qing empire's protection. As a result, the Ryukyuan people had almost nothing to worry about but to enjoy their prosperity (*qi jinchen yi suide yanran gaozhen, yu neidi chenmin fen leli zhi wanyi*). According to Zhou, a society where prosperity abounds and individuals thrive has little need for stringent laws and regulations as the very fabric of communal life is woven with contentment and harmony.<sup>54</sup> In the case of Ryukyu, the so-called 'absence of law' was therefore not an indication of chaos or lawlessness but rather a testament to the superior Qing state. In other words, the Qing's presence as a powerful external entity, not merely as a land power but also

53. Zhou Huang, "Bingxing," *Liuqiuguo zhilüe*, juan 12, 1a–5a.

54. Ibid., 1a–1b.

a naval giant in the East Asian Sea within the tributary system, provided a deterrent against external threats and aggression, which then allowed the Ryukyu Kingdom to focus on internal governance, cultural development, and economic prosperity. Instead of relying on a codified set of laws, the Ryukyuan society could place greater emphasis on cultivating a culture of ethics, moral values, and social norms. These principles, some of which I have outlined in previous paragraphs, established a framework for harmonious social relations, obviating the need for an intricate legal system to regulate everyday affairs. In short, in the view of Zhou, Ryukyu's connections with the Qing, coupled with the influence of Confucian values, contributed to a society where the need for an extensive law code was minimised. The protection and oversight provided by the Qing empire ensured Ryukyu's security and stability, while the moral and ethical values ingrained within Ryukyuan society guided individual behaviour and fostered social harmony.

Thus far, it seems that the dynamics of Qing–Ryukyu relations were coloured by a prevailing Sino/Manchu centrism and a perceived sense of Chinese superiority, as reflected in the descriptions and perspectives of Zhou Huang. However, it is crucial to approach this understanding with nuance and careful analysis. While Zhou Huang undeniably held the Qing empire in high regard, recognising its pivotal role as the centre of a meticulously constructed geopolitical system in Asia, it is important to note that he did not diminish the Ryukyu Kingdom or its people as being uncivilised or brutish creatures solely based on their status as one of the tributary states within the Qing-centric framework. Zhou Huang's envoy account provides ample evidence of his appreciation for the history and local rituals of the Ryukyuan people. Throughout his interactions and observations during his diplomatic mission, he expressed both admiration and respect for the cultural heritage and ceremonial practices of the Ryukyu Kingdom. Moreover, he acknowledged the kingdom's long-standing traditions, which were steeped in myth, legend, and a sense of ancestral reverence. His *Liuqiuguo zhilüe* was therefore not uniformly chauvinistic, while Zhou himself was also one of those literati who should be refashioned as having been a defender of other non-Chinese cultures. Diverging from the viewpoint in Beijing, which deemed the tributary states and frontier tribes as innately inferior to the inhabitants of mainland China, Zhou Huang, a Beijing official deeply entrenched in the traditions and perspectives of a land-based China, underwent a transformation of perspective following his voyage to the island kingdom. Such a perceptible shift in perspective serves as a captivating example of how being exposed to the maritime world in the

process of fulfilling his assigned duties could influence a Confucian scholar whose background was mainly land-based.

Zhou Huang's account of his experience and observations during his time as the Qing's envoy to the Ryukyu Kingdom shows us how familiar he had become with its history, culture, administration, and governance. His descriptions provide intricate details related to the official missions and to everyday life among the Ryukyuan people. Throughout his narratives, he demonstrated a dual vision of the history of Ryukyu as both a unique country and a constant, loyal tributary state. This duality, if not ambiguous, allowed him to use the trope that centred Ryukyu within the tributary system, for a variety of ends, mainly to justify the Qing-centric political order and to appreciate the cultural tradition preserved in Ryukyu. Some of these traditions were rooted in Chinese culture, and their preservation reveals a profound bond between China and the Ryukyu Islands that dates to the early Ming, if not earlier, that could lead to the peace and prosperity in the East Asian Sea. Moreover, we might also argue that Zhou Huang had projected the virtue of Confucian principles onto the maritime connection between China and Ryukyu in order to sustain the central role the Qing empire played at the time.

### Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have attempted a close reading of Zhou Huang's *History and Customs of Ryukyu*, which is informed by the broader geopolitical context of Zhou's personal experiences and those of his contemporaries. Against this backdrop, Zhou's account should not be reduced merely to being an example of an investiture record written by an envoy dispatched by the emperor. Rather, it offers an important and illuminating glimpse into how, at the site of an encounter with a tributary state like the Ryukyu Kingdom, the prevailing China-centric narrative can be refashioned rather than reinforced. Zhou's account of his observations and experiences in Ryukyu serves as a catalyst for re-evaluating preconceived ideas and recognising the complexity and diversity that existed within the tributary system. It emphasises that the tributary states were not mere passive recipients of Chinese influence but active participants in shaping their own paths of development. There were mutual traditions and exchanges, such as the worship of *Mazu*, that were not derived from the tributary framework but from the maritime world, and they also contributed to the variegated dynamics within Asia.

To Zhou Huang, the Ryukyu Kingdom was a principal constituency of its maritime geopolitical framework and representative of the Qing empire. While being acknowledged as a tributary state, symbolically it was not recognised as a cultural backwater or as being inherently inferior to China. On the contrary, an inseparable connection bridged these two countries together on various aspects. The reason the Ryukyans were able to maintain such a bond lies in a combination of political factors. From a geostrategic standpoint, the Ryukyu Islands occupied a pivotal position as a nexus that linked Japan, coastal China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. This archipelago could also serve as a buffer against potential coastal threats against China. Historically, the Ryukyans had never presented a substantial challenge to the Ming or Qing's control over the East Asian Sea. In contrast to the Japanese, they were never perceived as rivals vying for prominence within the region. Meanwhile, within the Ryukyu Kingdom, a substantial population of Chinese immigrants played a crucial role in its development. They brought with them not only their skills, knowledge, and entrepreneurial spirit, which enriched the local economy and stimulated commercial growth, but they also fostered a blend of traditions, customs, and practices with the Ryukyuan people. The Qing court therefore had every reason to cultivate a harmonious relationship with the Ryukyuan power and even to offer them a form of partnership with the empire.

The Qing–Ryukyu dynamic is also useful in complicating the Qing conception of the tributary system. The Ming's understanding of the tributary system was of a Han-centric concentration of power defined by both a natural geographic boundary and cultural differences between the advanced, civilised Chinese and the surrounding tribes that were considered less civilised. Yet as argued by historians such as Pamela Crossley, James Millward, Peter Perdue, and Emma Teng, the Qing empire established an imperial domain that surpassed those territorial boundaries and encompassed Han-Chinese and various frontier people.<sup>55</sup> The Qing's expansion was a gradual process that took place under the three High Qing emperors, namely Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong. Through various campaigns and conquests, Taiwan, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and a substantial part of

55. See, for instance, Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography*, p. 238; James Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 197–203; Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 270.

Central Asia were integrated into the empire. The annexation of Taiwan was particularly representative in a maritime context as this was the first time China secured a stronghold on the sea, even if the Kangxi emperor had once declared that it would be no loss to abandon the island. The geopolitical dynamic in maritime Asia could therefore be further remapped as the Qing was now capable of extending its ruling power further across the ocean. This differs from simply deploying its navy to patrol or police the coastal area and to project its power throughout its tributary system.

In place of the Ming version of the tributary system, the Qianlong emperor articulated a new vision of the system as being a more flexible and diverse paradigm.<sup>56</sup> According to this new imperial ideology, the tributary system was manifested not through the articulation of Confucian civilisation or a Han-Chinese centrality, as it had been in previous dynasties, but through a geopolitical context in actually maintaining connections with those tributary states.<sup>57</sup> Although 'Chinese culture' was still being regarded as virtuous and respectable, it was not considered the sole yardstick to differentiate the Qing and its neighbouring tributaries. That is, Han-Chinese only constituted one bloc alongside four other major cultural blocs, namely those of the Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim religions, cultures, and customs. As James Millward, James Hevia, and others have demonstrated, the worldview upheld by the Qing rulers was 'dramatized through their embodiment of cultural pluralism'.<sup>58</sup> For the Qianlong emperor, flexibility, practicality, and congruence were the means of bringing order to the tributary system and Asia's geopolitical order. Qing–Ryukyu relations in the eighteenth century should then be positioned and contextualised within this specific context; this might also explain why Zhou Huang's appreciation of local culture and his orientation towards cultural differences departed from those of his predecessors.

In retrospect, despite his status as an esteemed envoy tasked with a mission to represent the supposedly more civilised Qing empire, Zhou Huang had situated himself within a broader maritime context that embraced a nuanced perspective on the relative and fluid nature of differences across time and space. In this regard, Zhou's account offers us a compelling angle through which to examine and juxtapose the Han-centric hierarchies of a Chinese

56. Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography*, p. 238.

57. James Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, p. 197.

58. Ibid.; see also James Hevia, *Cherishing Man from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 30.

frontier governance primarily concentrated on land with maritime countries that were located in the vast Asian seas during the Ming and Qing eras. Further research is needed to explore Zhou's unique perspective within the broader global discourse surrounding themes of superiority, centrality, and domination among early modern empires. But in terms of accomplishing its objective, Zhou's account effectively portrayed the islanders as comparable to, rather than lagging behind, certain standards of civilisation. By doing so, his narrative serves as a poignant reminder that not all envoy records or frontier writings were created to emphasise a sense of Chinese superiority. These narratives were not always about notions of dominance and subordination. Zhou's assertions regarding the China–Ryukyu bonding were not simple affirmations of the former's inferiority but rather an invitation to contemplate the potential for a tributary state to develop and flourish while referencing the China model on their own terms.

Last but not least, Zhou Huang's illustrious career was to a substantial extent shaped by the intricate Qing–Ryukyu dynamics and his exposure to the maritime world. As an official tasked with a diplomatic mission representing the Qing empire, Zhou's encounters with the Ryukyu Kingdom opened his eyes to the vast possibilities and complexities of the maritime realm. Initially rooted in a Han-centric worldview, Zhou's interactions with the Ryukyuan people had at least refined his preconceived notions of cultural hierarchy. He came to recognise the Ryukyu Kingdom as more than a subordinate entity as he appreciated its unique cultural heritage and political agency within the broader Chinese framework. Meanwhile, this interplay also provided him with invaluable insights into the intricate interconnectedness of diverse cultures, expansive trade networks, and complex political systems spanning the vast seas. In addition, his spiritual encounter with *Tianhou*, during which Zhou Huang narrowly escaped a shipwreck, played a pivotal role in shaping his maritime identity. These visions catalysed a transformative shift within this traditional Confucian scholar, enabling him to transcend the limitations inherent in a land-centric perspective. With an enlightened understanding of the disparities between a territorially confined empire and the multifaceted geopolitical order prevailing in the maritime world, Zhou evolved into a scholar-official equipped to navigate the complexities of this dynamic realm. Arguably, he is also a fine example of how a Confucian scholar was shaped by the maritime world.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

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# The Traveller

### A Shipwreck

If Zhou Huang was best remembered by later generations because of his mission to the Ryukyu Kingdom in the eighteenth century, the protagonist of this chapter, Xie Qinggao, gained his recognition due to his exceptional ten-year journey to Europe. Born into a middle-gentry family in eastern Guangdong somewhere near present-day Meizhou, Xie possessed a remarkable breadth of knowledge and linguistic proficiency. Although he did not undertake the civil-service examination, Xie exhibited a command of various European languages alongside a familiarity with certain Southeast Asian ideographs. Recollections from his close friend Yang Bingnan attested to Xie's early brilliance, courage, and multilingualism: 'there is a person named Xie Qinggao in my hometown, who was outstanding and extraordinary... He embarked on a journey as a merchant and travelled to various countries across the sea, where he diligently learned their languages'.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Zhou Huang, Zheng Ruoceng (as discussed in Chapter Three), and Shi Lang (Chapter Five), Xie, despite his exceptional talents, harboured no interest in pursuing a political career. Instead, he devoted himself to maritime trade in Canton.

Nestled on the banks of the Pearl River, Canton thrived as a bustling coastal city in the late eighteenth century. As highlighted in the introduction of the book, this vibrant metropolis had a rich heritage of extensive trade interactions with foreign merchants, establishing itself as a prominent centre for conducting international business ventures. Remarkably, Canton, known as the 'pearl in the East', emerged as the exclusive gateway for Western traders

1. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu* (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938), "Yang Bingnan xu," p. 1.

due to the implementation of the Canton system, attracting a sizeable number of European traders to its shores.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Xie encountered abundant opportunities to interact and establish connections with individuals hailing from the Western world. In a way, the circumstances of his upbringing and personal experience made him a careful spectator, and one who valued and connected all kinds of observation and the various branches of knowledge in Canton. Having said that, Xie at this stage was an unlikely candidate to write one of the most well-known sources on the European world in the eighteenth century. It was not until a fateful incident, a shipwreck on his journey to Southeast Asia at the age of 18, that he experienced a significant turning point in the course of his life. According to Yang Bingnan,

On his way to [the] South, Xie'[s] vessel was overturned by a storm. He was rescued by a foreign ship and continued to travel with them for trade.... Fourteen years later, Xie returned to Guangdong. Since ancient times, there has never been anyone who has ventured into the open sea like this (*zigu fuhaizhe suoweiyou ye*).<sup>3</sup>

Although Yang did not provide specific information about the foreign vessel that rescued Xie Qinggao, it is known that he was saved by a captain of Portuguese origin who subsequently escorted him to Lisbon, Portugal. As suggested in the above record, Xie chose to remain in the West but not to return to China immediately. He did not go into detail about how this decision was made, and indeed it is not at all clear why he refused to return home at the time. What we are certain is that, in contrast to the majority of his contemporaries, Xie displayed a unique willingness to dedicate over a decade to traveling through Western Europe, embracing the opportunity to expand his horizons. However, this was not an easy decision to get underway, as it involved a series of practical and logistical necessities and difficulties. It also involved the help of a number of useful individuals to stay in Europe for such a long period of time. Xie and Yang Bingnan did not mention any specific individuals who provided support, leaving the possibility open that the Portuguese captain who rescued Xie from the shipwreck might have played a role behind the scenes. Yet as of now, no

2. See the classic authored by Paul van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).

3. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu*, “Yang Bingnan xu,” p. 1.

extant record can provide evidence to support this claim. In any case, this transformative journey, spanning the years 1782 to 1793, afforded Xie a first-hand exploration of the political, economic, and cultural disparities between China and the distant far end of the Eurasian continent.<sup>4</sup>

Upon returning to Macau in 1793, Xie gradually lost his sight, eventually succumbing to total blindness. It was at this juncture that his friend Bingnan, previously mentioned, assisted in documenting Xie's remarkable travel narrative as the *Hailu* (*Record of the Sea*):

After losing his sight, Xie was unable to engage in productive activities and resided in Macau, working as an interpreter to sustain himself. In the spring of the Gengchen year of the Jiaqing reign (1820), I met him during a visit to Macau with Mr. Li from Qiutian. We engaged in extensive discussions about the affairs of the southwestern seas (the Indian Ocean world and beyond). While my knowledge of foreign countries was previously based on hearsay, Xie's first-hand accounts served as evidence, although their accuracy may be subject to scrutiny. Considering the remote and inaccessible nature of overseas territories, verification is difficult, and relying on literary embellishments seems inappropriate to capture their allure. Xie's words, by contrast, were simple and unadorned, and I took it upon myself to record them, as they were a valuable source of personal experiences. In order to ensure their preservation for future generations, I compiled these notes and named them the *Sea Records*.<sup>5</sup>

As emphasised by Yang Bingnan, the *Hailu* was compiled and published in 1820 as a concise volume, with the intention of perpetuating Xie's knowledge and experiences. Through this *Hailu*, Xie not only revealed himself as a merchant but also unveiled his erudition and first-hand encounters with the 'New World', which was unknown and unfamiliar to many, and thus transcending the boundaries of his Chinese homeland. In hindsight, both Zhou Huang and Xie left behind written records that not

4. In 2002, An Jing made a significant discovery of an official document found in the Macau prefecture office. This document sheds light on the enduring disputes over leases and debts involving Xie Qinggao and the Portuguese merchants Antonio Rosa and Antonio Fonseca. This valuable piece of evidence reveals that Xie actually returned to China around 1793, which serves to correct the previous assertion that he settled in Macau in 1795. See An Jing, *Hailu Jiaoshi* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2002).

5. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu*, "Yang Bingnan xu," p. 1.

only preserved their legacies throughout the Qing dynasty but also provided valuable insights into their remarkable experiences bound to the maritime world. These two written accounts, namely the *Liuqinguo zhilüe* and *Hailu*, served as compelling testaments to their authors' adventurous spirits and intellectual pursuits, offering a window onto the broader historical context of the time, shedding light on the cultural exchanges, diplomatic relations, and transregional interactions that shaped the era.

Meanwhile, Zhou and Xie did not only document their personal journeys but also contributed to the broader understanding of the interconnectedness of nations and the diverse encounters that unfolded during the long eighteenth century. Essentially, both records were symbolic enough to demonstrate that the identities and legacies of Zhou and Xie were profoundly influenced by the maritime world. In this chapter, I will embark on a more comprehensive examination, delving into the intricate details and intricacies of Xie's associations with the vast maritime domain. By focusing on his *Hailu*, particularly the final section that features the European powers, I aim to shed further light on the multifaceted nature of Xie's engagement with the maritime world, unravelling the myriad threads that bind him to this realm of seafaring exploration and discovery. His exceptional maritime experiences as a traveller and writer can help us glean a richer understanding of the profound impact he has made on the study and interpretation of maritime, frontier history.

### The Historiography

In recent years, there has been some considerable scholarly attention given to the pivotal role of Xie Qinggao and his *Hailu*, which is evident through various distinguished scholarly contributions in the field of Chinese maritime history. For instance, in 2011, Hartmut Walravens undertook the task of translating the entire *Hailu* into German, opening up new avenues for international scholarship and facilitating cross-cultural engagement with Xie Qinggao's narrative.<sup>6</sup> Following in Walravens' footsteps, Rainer Schwarz further refined the German version of the *Hailu* in his *Aufzeichnungen über die Meere* in 2020.<sup>7</sup> These translations are essential in introducing Xie's

6. Hartmut Walravens, *Aufzeichnungen über die Meere* (Berlin: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, 2011).

7. Rainer Schwarz, *Aufzeichnungen über die Meere* (Gossenberg: Ostasien Verlag, 2020).

compelling accounts to a wider audience, transcending linguistic barriers, allowing for deeper exploration of his experiences, and even setting up a solid foundation for researchers in the German speaking world. Yet rather surprisingly, a complete English translation of the *Hailu* is still eagerly awaited, leaving readers longing for its availability.

Prior to the two German translations of the *Hailu*, however, maritime historians in both East and West such as Feng Chengjun (1887–1946), Zhong Shuhe, Kenneth Ch'en (Chen Guansheng), Chen Guotong, Roderich Ptak, and An Jing had already valued the record preserved by Xie Qinggao. Feng Chengjun was probably among the first batch of Chinese historians who recognised the exploratory spirit and maritime expertise displayed by Xie in his encounters with diverse cultures and regions. Not only did he annotate the *Hailu* in 1937 but he also made use of it to substantiate his argument that the Chinese were not unaware of the wider world in the early nineteenth century. In the words of Feng,

The original edition of Xie Qinggao's *Hailu* is quite rare, but there are existing editions such as the one collected in *Haishan Xianguan* and the *Xiaofang Hucai Yudi Congchao*. Many of these editions, in my view, have been abridged.... From a young age, Xie accompanied merchant ships and travelled to various maritime countries (*haiguo*), leaving no place unexplored. Everywhere he went, he paid careful attention, seeking first-hand knowledge and examining with his own eyes. Over the course of more than ten years, he compiled a volume of the *Hailu*, which I have taken and read. His account is well-organized and amidst the vast and tumultuous ocean, spanning thousands of miles, his descriptions are as clear as if seen in person. Moreover, when it comes to the coastal territories where the red-haired Dutch fiercely compete with small neighbouring states, Xie provides detailed accounts, grasping the essentials. However, as the compilation was hastily completed, it may lack meticulousness and there may be discrepancies between different parts. Therefore, I have decided to supplement and verify the text.<sup>8</sup>

Following the release of Feng's edition of the *Hailu*, Kenneth Ch'en, Chen Guotong, and Roderich Ptak, known for their pioneering research in Chinese maritime history, further explored Xie's voyages and their profound influence on regional exchanges. Drawing upon the *Hailu* as a valuable resource, they

8. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu*, "Xu," p. 1.

brought to the forefront the complex dynamics of maritime interactions and offered insights into the cultural significance of the encounters witnessed by Xie during his extensive travels. From Feng Chengjun in the 1930s to Ptak in the early 2000s, these historians have undeniably broadened our understanding of the connections between Xie and the external world; however, the majority of these studies have been limited to translations or relatively short pieces in a few pages. Apparently, there remains considerable untapped potential to explore and analyse the extraordinary history of Xie Qinggao and his work. Additionally, a compelling avenue of inquiry lies in drawing insightful comparisons between Xie and his contemporaries, as well as the individuals whose lives and identities were similarly influenced by the maritime realm examined in this book. Such comparative studies would yield valuable insights into the diverse experiences, aspirations, and contributions of these individuals, providing a more nuanced understanding of the blue, maritime China that has been the focus of our discussion.

In contrast to Zhou Huang's envoy account, which was widely regarded as a seminal work on the Ryukyu Kingdom in its own time, Xie Qinggao and his *Hailu* did not receive widespread recognition in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was only after the outbreak of the First Opium War that experiences and narratives of Chinese travel to distant places began to matter enough to be valued, collected, cited, and published. In his endorsement to the *Hailu* in 1832, Wang Liu had this to say:

In recent times, many erudite individuals have excelled in their writings, particularly in the field of geography. However, their works often focus extensively on China while providing only a cursory understanding of the foreign territories. Should we disregard these writings simply because they fall beyond our immediate purview? In the present era, as knowledge becomes increasingly valued and sought after, there are those who harbour concerns about the limited exploration of foreign countries and hold a deep desire to expand their understanding of the wider world. The historical records available to us, such as those published in the Ming Dynasty, may have provided brief glimpses, but they prove to be inadequate given the changing circumstances. It is only in the book of the *Hailu*, which is closer to our time, that we can find a timely and reliable resource for this purpose.<sup>9</sup>

9. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu*, "Wang Liu xu," p. 1.

Against this particular backdrop, Xie's observation was then able to find its way into two esteemed nineteenth-century texts, namely *The Illustrated Treatise on the Sea Kingdoms* (*Haiguo tuzhi*) by Wei Yuan (1794–1857) and *A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit* (*Yinghuan zhilüe*) by Xu Jiyu (1795–1873), published in 1843 and 1849, respectively. However, despite the acknowledgement of Xie Qinggao's contributions by Wang Liu and the references to his work, his recognition and reputation remained overshadowed by the established renown of Wei and Xu. The canonical volumes authored by Wei Yuan and Xu Jiyu undoubtedly occupy a prominent position as two important encyclopaedic and geographical studies in the latter half of the Qing dynasty, in which the authors conceptualise the histories, politics, and economic conditions of several European powers. Nevertheless, it is equally crucial to recognise the pioneering efforts of earlier maritime writers who ventured into the European sphere prior to the 1840s.

Intellectuals like Chen Lunjiong, Wang Dahai, and Xie Qinggao had already embarked on exploring the European realm in their maritime writings well before Wei and Xu. These astute writers recognised the intricate relationship between knowledge and power, broadening their geographical understanding and delving into the politico-cultural backdrop of Europe. According to Chen Lunjiong and Wang Dahai, Europe was no longer a barbaric and unknown territory, while China's perception of itself as being the most civilised nation shifted. However, it is worth noting that the writings of Chen and Wang, though providing a concise and relatively objective world geography before the mid-eighteenth century, offered only a limited overview of European culture, politics, and economies, presenting them in broad strokes.<sup>10</sup> In his *Hailu*, Xie bridged this gap by offering a comprehensive depiction of the eighteenth-century Western world, which then raised his work above previous accounts of the Far West. In so doing, he significantly changed a principally land-bounded, Confucian-centred Chinese worldview through his conceptualisation of a broader maritime China. He not only outlined the customs, religions, and commercial practices of some of the 'maritime countries' (*haiguo*) of Western Europe, with a particular focus on Portugal, the Netherlands, and Great Britain, from 1783 to c.1793, but also commented upon the economic growth and political and military expansion of these sea powers in the Indian Ocean World. His visionary perspective had modified the traditional intellectual

10. See Ronald C. Po, *The Blue Frontier: Maritime Vision and Power in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 181–205.

boundaries that confined Chinese consciousness to the realm of the land, and instead embraced the expansiveness of the maritime domain. By recognising the rise and developments of those seafaring powers in Western Europe across the oceans, Xie somehow painted a vivid picture of a maritime China that extended far beyond its land borders, in which it could be viewed in parallel with the diverse cultures, languages, and traditions of the seafaring powers from afar.

All the same, the significance of Xie's *Hailu* surpassed mere descriptive depictions of individual European countries. In the process of studying the history, geography, and society of the Occident, Xie was weaving a more extensive, more detailed Chinese narrative of Europe, surpassing any previous accounts. Although Xie did not employ the term 'Europe' in his text, opting instead for descriptors such as the *xiyang* (the 'Western Ocean') and *wa daxiyang* (the 'Large Outer Western Ocean'), his narrative reveals a deep awareness of the interconnectedness among the diverse regions discussed. By delineating the Western Ocean with meticulous attention to regional differences and similarities, Xie departed from rough and traditional Chinese perceptions of the Western world. Meanwhile, rather than emphasising inferiority and barbarity – as highlighted in the conception of the tributary system – Xie's portrayal invited readers to perceive the Western Ocean as a modernised and civilised region. He integrated the Western Ocean as a seemingly unified entity within the cultural and geo-historical framework of China, forging connections between China and the wider world through the seas. As a mediator between the familiar and the unfamiliar, Xie emerged as a pioneering figure who charted a new course for comprehending the Western Ocean, presenting his analyses to Chinese readers before the onset of the First Opium War. Although some of his observations were admittedly not very precise in historical terms, Xie was probably one of the first maritime writers who, in the late eighteenth century, self-consciously and from a Chinese perspective recorded and commented upon the expansion of Western Europe, thereby laying the groundwork for subsequent developments in Chinese perceptions of the wider world.

### All Under Heaven

The *Hailu* and Zhou Huang's envoy record share common ground within the framework of geographical studies in eighteenth-century China. However,

it is crucial to examine Xie's account through the lens of its portrayal of the Western Ocean within the broader *tianxia* worldview. By exploring the distinctive portrayal of the Western Ocean, we can acquire significant insights into Xie's perspective on comprehending and interpreting the intricate aspects of Europe, transcending the geographical boundaries of the sea and extending beyond the Chinese worldview, including its tributary system. As elucidated in the preceding chapters, the concept of civilisation in China before the long eighteenth century was deeply intertwined with the overarching *tianxia* worldview. This worldview, encompassing the notion of 'all under heaven', carried profound cultural and philosophical implications that extended beyond a mere geographic understanding. Instead, it encapsulated a comprehensive framework of values and historical cultural conceptions, shaping the understanding and interpretation of civilisation among the educated elite in Chinese society, thereby formulating and consolidating the foundations of the tributary system.<sup>11</sup> Richard J. Smith has astutely noted that this sense of 'cultural superiority' played a pivotal role in facilitating the establishment of connections between the Chinese and neighbouring tribes and civilisations.<sup>12</sup> The geographical and historical studies dating to before the Ming–Qing transition (c.1619–1683) were arguably part of this long-established tradition.

On the eve of the great discoveries of the sixteenth century, the Chinese Empire was in a singular position. Although access to the ocean offered China a way into the wider world, its geographers and literati, as described by the aforementioned Yang Bingnan and Wang Liu, were nevertheless almost unaware of the Mediterranean and Atlantic regions. Guided by the *tianxia* conception, Chinese literati generally adhered to traditional sources of information about the world beyond China that confirmed their traditional ideas about themselves and their Far West neighbours. This is not surprising in itself. Drawing a parallel example, one would not expect navigators or learned scholars from late-medieval Genoa to possess intimate familiarity with Baltic geographical sources. Naturally, the Baltic lands had their own intellectual traditions and distinct practical concerns.

11. Stephan Feuchtwang, "Between Civilizations: One Side of a Dialogue," *Social Identities*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2006), pp. 79–94.

12. Richard J. Smith, *Mapping China and Managing the World: Culture, Cartography and Cosmology in Late Imperial Times* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), pp. 70–75; Richard J. Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World: The Yijing (I-ching, or Classic of Changes) and Its Evolution in China* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), p. 29.

While individual pilgrims, merchants, or missionaries from across Europe may have travelled between these regions, this does not imply that they all shared the same comprehensive knowledge about the world. Similarly, the Chinese lacked extensive knowledge about the geography and history of distant sea spaces, such as the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and the Eastern Pacific, resulting in these regions remaining *terra incognita* within their conceptualisation of geography before the Ming–Qing transition.

A notable shift occurred during the late seventeenth century, marking the dawn of the renowned Age of Exploration and giving rise to a novel and dynamic worldview among the educated elite of imperial China. This transformative shift was primarily influenced by the works of remarkable geo-historians such as Gu Yanwu (1613–1682) and Gu Zuyu (1631–1692). Their objective was to infuse practical value into historical studies (known as *jingshi shixue* in Chinese), with a focus on documenting and interpreting the geographical and economic conditions of the Qing empire's inland frontier regions. In pursuit of this objective, these historians departed from the traditional 'civilized–barbaric matrix' that had long characterised the *tianxia* ideology, which was based on the hierarchical distinction between China and other regions. Instead, their studies embraced a more comprehensive and inclusive approach that not only chronicled the history of frontier regions but also engendered a shift in ethnographic consciousness. Consequently, their work exerted a profound influence on the long-established *tianxia* worldview, heralding a new understanding of China's position in the world and its relationships with diverse regions.<sup>13</sup>

In particular, this emerging branch of geo-historical study offered Chinese intellectuals a platform to reimagine the sea space adjacent to the Chinese coast and to venture into unfamiliar territories. This new wave of geo-historical research instilled in Qing scholars a profound 'maritime consciousness', recognising the ocean as a navigable expanse that connected China with the wider world. While the Manchu were still prioritising inland expansion towards Inner Asia, some of the intellectuals, including Xie, whom I refer to as 'maritime writers' elsewhere, no longer viewed the ocean as a barrier or an obstacle to external interactions. On the contrary, they embraced it as a transnational contact zone that provided access to diverse destinations. Well before the beginning of the so-called 'century of humiliation', Xie grasped the instrumental role of the ocean

13. Ronald C. Po, "(Re)Conceptualizing the World in Eighteenth Century China," *World History Connected*, vol. 9, no. 1 (February 2012).

in facilitating China's expanding economic and cultural connections with regions spanning Southeast Asia to Western Europe. Recognising the potential of the ocean in bridging rather than dividing peoples, bodies, markets, ideas, and mindsets, Xie had an underlying goal that China would need to adapt to the new realities of maritime trade and national security. As part of this revised worldview, Xie reimagined the Western Ocean and attempted to revisit the traditional *tianxia* paradigm.

### The Book

Divided into three sections (referred to as *juan* in Chinese), the *Hailu* encompasses an extensive exploration of geographical landscapes, political dynamics, and trading conditions across Southeast Asia and the vast expanse of the Western Ocean. The first two sections (*juan shang* and *juan zhong*), delved into the realms of Borneo, Java, Sumatra, and the southern region of the Malay Peninsula. Drawing from his own immersive travels throughout Southeast Asia, Xie Qinggao documented the evolving political landscapes and evolving trade dynamics in the Malacca Straits, as well as the growing influence of European powers in the Southern Ocean, known as *nanyang* in Chinese. For instance, Xie highlighted the trading importance of Malacca, noting its rapid transformations under both Chinese and Western influence:

Malacca is located to the northwest of the old state of Johor, with its north-eastern part adjacent to the mountains of Pahang. It is accessible by land routes. The prevailing southeast winds facilitate travel by water from the old state of Johor, allowing passage through the Qinsan Path within half a day, reaching this place within a day's journey. The indigenous people there are diverse in their origins and number, occupying a territory spanning several hundred miles. The region is characterized by towering mountains, dense forests, and a populace known for their fierceness and peculiar customs. It is under the jurisdiction of the Dutch and was once a prosperous area frequented by various Western ships conducting trade with China. These ships would anchor here to engage in trade and purchase goods, making it a thriving trading hub. However, since the establishment of the British colonial administration in Singapore, the area has experienced a decline. The local products include tin, gold, mica, rattan, pepper, sago, betel nuts, bird's nests, rhinoceros' horns, deer, turtle shells,

jade, camphorwood, and various aromatic woods. A sizable number of merchants from Fujian and Guangdong come here to mine tin and engage in trade, contributing to a significant population presence.<sup>14</sup>

Significantly, Xie's attention to the Malacca Straits reflects the enduring Chinese interest in the region as a pivotal entrepôt for Asian interactions and exchanges, a fascination rooted in historical ties dating back to the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>15</sup> Within this section, Xie's observations are marked by a discerning appreciation, positioning his study as an early and sophisticated account of the Chinese perception of Southeast Asia, shaped by encounters with Western Europeans. Here is another example: his description of Pulo Penang.

The New Town (Pulo Penang), an island in the sea, is also known as Bulu binglang or Binglangshi. It was established by the British during the reign of the Qianlong emperor. The island is located in the northwest of the Malacca Strait, surrounded by a circumference of about a hundred *li*. It takes approximately three days to reach it from the Strait of Malacca by sailing northwest with the southeast monsoon winds. The southwest winds [are] also feasible for travel. The local indigenous population is scarce and there were originally no settlements. The British attracted merchants and traders, gradually making the area prosperous. The clothing, food, housing, and transportation of the inhabitants are all highly luxurious, with the extensive use of horse-drawn carriages. There are around two to three hundred British stationed here as soldiers, as well as over a thousand Indian sepoys. Tens of thousands of people from Fujian and Guangdong come here to trade in pepper. Every year, there are significant revenues from the production and sale of alcohol, opium, and gambling, amounting to over ten thousand taels of tax revenue. However, the region lacks other natural resources, which may pose challenges to its long-term sustainability.<sup>16</sup>

14. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu, juan shang*, pp. 15–16.

15. Arun das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia, 1500–1800," in Paul Kratoska (ed.), *South East Asia: Colonial History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), vol. 1, p. 110; F. H. van Naerssen, *The Economic and Administrative History of Early Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), p. 102.

16. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu, juan shang*, p. 18.

In the above passage, Xie Qinggao highlighted the development and prosperity of Penang brought by British influence, with a growing population of merchants and traders from Fujian and Guangdong. His vivid portrayal reveals the transformation of this 'island in the sea' from a sparsely populated area to a thriving trading hub thronged by British settlers. The mention of luxurious lifestyles, the presence of British guards, and the significant tax revenue generated from various activities depict the impact of such seafaring power on the socio-economic landscape of the region, from which the Chinese were also benefiting. Although he was sceptical about the long-term sustainability of Pulo Penang due to its lack of natural resources, Xie recognised its strategic location as a vibrant port city, while also identifying the significance of sea trade that propelled the British Empire into a position of prominence and dominance.

Further west in relation to Southeast Asia, Xie was also aware of the growing influence of the British in the Indian Ocean World. He recounted the following observations of Mandala:

Mandala is located in the southern part of Myanmar, accessible by land along the coastal route from Geyzhi Li, which takes approximately twenty days. By water, it can be reached in about five to six days with favourable easterly winds. Mandala is under British jurisdiction and serves as a separate metropolis with fortifications. It is inhabited by tens of thousands of British residents and garrisoned by around twenty to thirty thousand soldiers. Many merchants in this region are from the Arakanese ethnic group, recognizable by their triangular hats commonly worn in eastern Guangdong. The native[s] there are known as Xuenali, with customs and traditions similar to those of Myanmar. Mandala boasts various natural resources, including coral, pearls, diamonds, silver, copper, cotton, cardamom, frankincense, myrrh, opium, shark fins, and various types of animal skins, including those resembling small foreign dogs. There is also highly prized gold-bordered European cloth, valued at eighty silver coins per piece.<sup>17</sup>

The passage above provides a description of Mandala, succinctly highlighting its geographical location, accessibility, governance, demographics, cultural exchanges, and available resources. By emphasising the fortifications and the substantial British presence in terms of residents and military personnel,

17. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Xie's observations shed light on the tactical importance of Mandala within the broader context of regional interactions and trade networks. The presence of fortifications suggests the role of the city as a defensive stronghold and a hub for British operations and control in the area bordering the Indian Ocean. The British population in Mandala signifies the establishment of colonial governance, playing a crucial role in shaping the socio-political dynamics of the region. Xie's awareness of the pivotal role played by British Mandala underscores its importance in facilitating economic exchanges, cultural interactions, and the establishment of political influence in the city, serving as a critical nexus connecting various actors and facilitating the flow of goods, ideas, and power across the wide and open sea.

In the final section (*juan xia*) of the *Hailu*, Xie moved on to recount the Western cultures he encountered on European soil. By virtue of his exploration of various countries within what we now recognise as 'Europe', an intriguing question arises: did Xie Qinggao perceive these countries collectively as a united 'Europe' or as distinct parts within the larger European bloc? While Xie did not employ a specific term to unify all the Western regions he encountered, he loosely applied umbrella terms such as *xiyang* (Western Ocean), *daxiyang* (Large Outer Western Ocean), *wai daxiyang*, and *xinanyang* (Southwestern Ocean). Notably, he did not utilise the word *Oulouba*, the Chinese equivalent for denoting Europe as a cohesive entity, which later became more prevalent among scholar-officials in the late nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Despite the absence of a consistent term or phrase to signify Europe as a unified whole, Xie possessed an awareness of the interconnectedness among the countries he described, albeit vaguely. This sense of connectedness resembled the traditional relationships perceived between China, Korea, and Japan in East Asia. Xie's utilisation of 'oceanic categories' (such as *daxiyang* or *xinanyang*) to classify the selected Western European polities in the third chapter of his *Hailu* further attests to his recognition of this connectedness via the sea.

While expressing this notion of such (maritime) connectedness, Xie demonstrated sensitivity to the regional diversity among the maritime kingdoms of the Far West. He observed that while the Dutch, Portuguese,

18. Wei Yuan had already applied the term *Oulouba* in his *Haiguo tuzhi* – see his "Daxiyang Ouluobazhou geguo zongxu" – but this expression was widely used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For instance, Liang Qichao frequently referred to Europe as *Oulouba* in his *Li Hongzhang chuan*. Other scholars such as Sun Baoxuan, Cai E, and Zhu Guangqian did the same.

French, and Prussians shared certain customs, each maintained their distinctive cultural characteristics. In other words, although Xie did not employ a specific standardised term to encompass the vast expanse of what we now refer to as 'Europe', he perceived that the regions he grouped under the label 'Western' were not merely a randomly diversified collection of territories. Instead, they could be considered, to some extent, as a unified region situated in the Far West in a transregional, maritime context.

In his exploration of maritime Europe, it is worth noticing that Xie had integrated some foreign concepts through translated terms, albeit often in a basic form. These concepts touched upon various aspects of Western European society, including religion, governance, and socio-economic development, providing a glimpse into their cultures. By delving into these Western features, Xie presented his readers with a more precise and nuanced representation of the Far West, surpassing the conventional way of recording the world beyond the *tianxia* conception. In order to illustrate his innovative approach, it is worthwhile to delve further into his depiction of Portugal, the Dutch Republic, and Great Britain in the *Hailu*. Only through his analysis of these specific countries are we able to obtain the unique insights offered by Xie the traveller into the distinct characteristics of those seafaring nations, thereby enriching our understanding of the Far West and its multifaceted interactions with China.

### The Seafaring Powers

Just as Western travellers like Francesco Balducci Pegolotti (1310–1347) were amazed by the remarkable civilisation they found in China,<sup>19</sup> Xie, too, felt that he had encountered a whole new world of civilisation during his extensive journey through the Far West. The profound experiences gained during his travels made Xie realise that Chinese literati needed a fresh perspective, a revised worldview that could more accurately encompass and represent the complexities of the other side of the Eurasian continent. The encounters with Western cultures and societies therefore had a transformative impact on Xie, compelling him to advocate for a broader understanding of the world beyond China's borders. However, unlike the Western explorers who were lured by promises of loot, tales of El Dorado, or

19. Evelyn Edson, *The World Map, 1300–1492: The Persistence of Tradition and Transformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 101.

dreams of discovering seven cities of gold,<sup>20</sup> Xie's motivations were distinct. Driven by alternative geopolitical interests and inspired by the growing prominence of geo-historical studies in China, he embarked on a quest for factual knowledge that could aid the Chinese in gaining a more profound understanding of the Western world. His pursuits were rooted in a desire to bridge the cultural divide and facilitate a more informed exchange between China and the West.

As discussed earlier, the prevailing knowledge of the Western world in Chinese literature was largely confined to a narrow range of stereotypical representations that perpetuated the notion of Europe's inferiority in comparison to China. The Far West was predominantly associated with fantastical tales, myths, and preconceived Chinese notions. In the most extreme cases, Europeans were portrayed as peculiar oddities, fearsome bugaboos, and malevolent hobgoblins. For example, historical Ming records depicted the Portuguese as vile and barbaric, the Dutch as insidious and cunning, and the French as uncanny and grotesque.<sup>21</sup> However, within his *Hailu*, Xie Qinggao emerged as a voice advocating for a more timely, reliable, realistic, and intricately detailed account of the developments unfolding in the Western Ocean. His approach to conceptualising 'the Western Ocean' showcased his alignment with the school of geo-historical research that flourished during the mid-Qing era, as outlined above. By urging a departure from the prevalent stereotypes and a deeper understanding of the Western world, Xie's work aimed to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective that would resonate with a changing intellectual landscape, if not seascape, in China during that time. What he sought to do is to bridge the gap between East and West, fostering a more insightful and culturally sensitive view of the unfamiliar or unknown.

Within his comprehensive study of the Western Ocean, Xie dedicated considerable attention to three significant maritime kingdoms – Portugal, the Dutch Republic, and Great Britain – which he regarded as the towering figures (*daguo*) in the Far West. For each of these nations, the author provided detailed and extensive discussions on their histories, customs, cultures, and economies. Designating Portugal as the *dashiyang guo* or

20. Fred W. Drake, *China Charts the World: Hsu Chi-yü and His Geography of 1848* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 52.

21. Li Guoxiang (ed.), *Ming shilu leizuan: Shewai shiliao juan* (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 1991), pp. 1093, 1094, 1097.

*bulogishi*, Xie opened his description of the European continent with this maritime country:

The *Dashiyang guo* (the Great Western Ocean country), also known as Buluji Shi, has a climate colder than that of Min and Yue provinces in China. Heading north from Sandieli, it takes about two weeks to reach its borders. There are two southern-facing forts at the mouth of the sea, known as Jiaoya Forts, with about four to five hundred large bronze cannons and two thousand soldiers guarding them. Whenever a ship returns to the country or foreign vessels arrive, people are sent to check for any individuals with smallpox. If there are any, they are not allowed to enter, and they must wait until the smallpox is healed before they can enter the port. There are seven towns inside, resembling the seven prefectures of China. Moving from Jiaoya Forts towards the port, you travel for dozens of miles and reach Yujiwoya, which is a large town. The king has established the capital here, with forts but no city walls. Further on from here is Jinbala, another town. Many of the native people here serve as Qintianjian (Chinese astronomers) or large monks in Macau. Then comes Woda, followed by Widiu, and the rest are Leilu, Alaka, and Zhabi, all of them significant towns. The population is dense, with abundant boats and carriages, each with heavy military defenses stationed there.<sup>22</sup>

Upon arriving in Portugal, Xie immediately noticed a stark contrast in weather compared to the warmth of southern China – the climate was notably chilly. Moving forward, he proceeded to expound on the geographical location of Portugal, revealing that it would take approximately two weeks to reach the coast of Portugal from St. Helena Island (Sandieli). It is noteworthy that Xie found St. Helena to be an essential reference point in his geographical context, an island that was also utilised as a starting point in the exploration of some Mediterranean countries, such as Portugal, Spain, and France, as seen in works like the *Haiguo wenjian lu* by Chen Lunjiong and the *Bihai jiyou* by Yu Yonghe (b. 1645). According to what he recounted, there were two large military stations guarded by cannons and soldiers on the southern coast of Portugal. All ships approaching the harbour underwent meticulous inspections to ensure they were free from any pathogens. For Xie, the rigorous efforts to prevent

22. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu, juan xia*, p. 63.

smallpox served as a compelling reason behind the presence of soldiers stationed day and night at the outpost. Simultaneously, this exemplified the remarkable discipline and organisation of Portugal's border system. The Portuguese authorities took no chances when it came to safeguarding their territory against potential disease outbreaks, showcasing how seriously they upheld their responsibilities in controlling maritime interactions and protecting the nation's interests.

In contrast to the maritime writings of the later nineteenth century, which primarily focused on the navigational aspects of the Portuguese, Xie's curiosity was more drawn to delving into their social customs and cultural practices. During his sojourn in the capital city, Xie made keen observations about the Portuguese way of life. He noted that cleanliness and simplicity were highly valued traits among the Portuguese (*sibai houjie*), evident in their uncluttered homes painted predominantly in white or ash-grey hues. Fascinatingly, Xie discovered that the Portuguese had a particular fixation on whiteness, to the extent that they judged a woman's beauty based on the fairness of her skin – adhering to the notion 'the whiter, the prettier (*yi sibaizhe weigui*)'.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, he conducted a comparative analysis of the dressing cultures of Portugal and China, and found himself amazed by the striking differences. Xie elucidated how most gentlemen in the streets wore short coats and remarkably tight trousers, while they would dress in coattails and headpieces for certain celebratory events. Regarding women, Xie observed that their

tops were also short and narrow, with no trousers worn underneath; instead, they wore multiple layers of skirts, sometimes reaching up to eight or nine layers. The poor used cloth, while the wealthy adorned themselves with silk, both preferring lightweight and delicate fabrics. Younger women would reveal their chests, whereas older women would cover them up. Whenever they went out, they would drape wide and long scarves around their heads, which cascaded down to their knees. The affluent would further veil their faces with fine black veils, so delicate and elegant that from afar they appeared priceless, each valued at as much as twenty gold coins. They often adorned their hands with bead necklaces, while the wealthy would opt for pearls or diamonds. Both men and women wore leather shoes.<sup>24</sup>

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

Detailing the women's costumes, Xie's amazement at the differences between Portuguese dressing and that of China reflects his appreciation for cultural diversity and his non-judgemental approach to foreign customs. Rather than viewing the foreignness as weird or uncivilised, he displayed an open-mindedness and willingness to appreciate and understand the cultural nuances he observed. This attitude showcases Xie as a perceptive and culturally sensitive traveller. Moreover, the excerpt above provides valuable insights into the societal stratification in Portugal. The distinction between the rich and the poor is evident in the choice of clothing materials. While the wealthy adorned themselves with silk and fine black veils made of delicate fabric, the less affluent resorted to using cloth.<sup>25</sup> This distinction indicates the presence of luxury and opulence in the upper classes and sheds light on the material and social disparities prevalent in Portuguese society.

In addition to their distinctive dressing culture, Xie deemed it essential to document the marriage customs and traditions he observed in Portugal:

In this country, both the king and commoners are allowed to have only one spouse at a time. If a wife passes away, a man may remarry, and if a husband dies, a woman may remarry as well. When choosing a son-in-law, the male family must first consider the dowry and fulfill all their desires before granting approval. Parents feel ashamed if their daughter remains unmarried and are willing to exhaust all their resources to find her a suitable match. However, whether a man already has a wife or not is not a factor in the consideration.

Marriages within the same surname are not prohibited except for close relatives like brothers and sisters. Widows who wish to remarry can be matched with even their uncles or nephews. In cases of close relatives marrying, they must seek permission from the religious leader known as the *jiaozhu* for approval before proceeding with the wedding. The locals follow the teachings of the Christian religion, with many temples established throughout the region. Every seven days, women visit the temples to offer prayers.

During weddings, both men and women gather at the temple to listen to the teachings of the religious leader before returning home together. In cases of betrothals, both the bride and groom's parents must first

25. Ibid.

inform the religious leader. The religious leader then issues a public announcement to inform the community. Before making marriage plans, the bride and groom must have a private agreement, and if anyone reveals this agreement, they must abide by its terms, even if their parents object. For women who commit adultery or other crimes and wish to repent, they can seek confession in the temple. The woman kneels before a monk sitting in a small alcove with an open window, and there she confesses her sins.<sup>26</sup>

Xie recounted the above like an insider of Portuguese society. What he described was largely unknown to many in eighteenth-century China. His meticulous observation in describing all these norms and habits contributed to a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics in Portugal, making his travelogue more than a personal record but a valuable historical source capturing new perceptions of the time. In fact, within the pages of Xie's description, some resemblances between Portuguese and Chinese customs begin to surface. One noteworthy parallel lies in the significance of marriage ceremonies, where Portuguese traditions involved seeking the authorisation of priests in churches, akin to the revered role of matchmakers in traditional Chinese culture. This convergence highlights the importance both societies placed on the solemnity and legitimacy of marital unions, albeit manifested through distinct rituals and practices. Meanwhile, Xie's keen observations also shed light on an intriguing contrast between Portugal and China regarding marriage regulations. When it came to marriages involving individuals sharing the same surname, Xie observed a remarkable contrast between Portugal and China. In Portugal, couples with identical surnames were permitted to marry, diverging from the firmly entrenched Chinese tradition where such unions were vehemently prohibited due to the profound reverence for ancestors and concerns regarding lineage preservation.

After examining Portugal, Xie shifted his focus to the Dutch Republic (*Helan guo*). Situated in the northeastern part of France, known as *Fulangji*, the Dutch Republic captured Xie's interest despite its relatively modest size within the vast expanse of the European continent:

The territory, people, and clothing of the Dutch Republic are all similar to those of the Western regions. However, when a wealthy

26. Ibid., pp. 64–65.

person is on the verge of death and needs to decide who will inherit their property, they must first present their intentions to the officials. After their passing, the distribution of assets is carried out according to the presented arrangements, even if they involve relatives and friends. Failure to make prior arrangements results in the confiscation of assets, and even their descendants are not allowed to inherit. Originally adhering to the Catholic faith, the Dutch Republic later turned away from it due to conflicts with priests. Nevertheless, they still establish churches and perform religious rituals every seven days. The deceased are buried in cemeteries.<sup>27</sup>

As per Xie's observations, the majority of customs and cultures in the Dutch Republic were similar to those of its neighbouring countries (i.e. Portugal, France, Prussia, and England), with the exception of the practice concerning the allocation of assets after one's demise and their vagueness towards Catholicism. Although not discussed in the above passage, Xie brought up the topic of the Dutch engagement with the sea and maritime trade within the context of their presence in Southeast Asia. He also recognised that the Dutch Republic stood out as one of Europe's pioneering seafaring powers, having successfully established a vibrant and flourishing overseas business. In addition, Xie held considerable admiration for the Dutch government, as he was impressed by their unique system of governance, which involved being ruled by four ministers instead of a single monarch:

The king's line of succession has been cut off, and now the courtiers support the king's daughter as the ruler, passing the throne to the next generation through female descendants. However, now the line has been broken again, and there is no longer a king in the country. Instead, the governance is handled by four major ministers, and they appoint successors as needed when there is a vacancy. It is similar to China, where officials are appointed based on their qualifications, not through hereditary succession. Even though the subordinate towns are thousands of miles away, they all follow the orders and dare not disobey. This demonstrates the strength of their loyalty and discipline, and the clarity of their laws and regulations.<sup>28</sup>

27. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

In a way, Xie's observations of Dutch governance reveal both admiration and curiosity. The Dutch system was obviously different from the traditional monarchical system found in other European countries and in China. With the Dutch monarchy having ceased due to a lack of direct heirs, what strikes Xie was that the country's governance would then be entrusted to four prominent ministers instead of a single monarch. This arrangement somehow intrigued him, as it represented a unique succession practice compared with many other societies. There were some parallels between the Dutch and the Chinese, though, where Xie emphasised that the former adopted a system of appointing successors based on qualifications rather than following a hereditary line of succession. The meritocratic approach employed in the Dutch government bore similarities to China's method of selecting competent officials through civil service examinations. Moreover, Xie marvelled at the efficiency and unity of the Dutch government, despite the vast distances between the various towns under its rule. The ministers' authority was enforced uniformly, and there was a strict adherence to their decrees without any defiance.

In questioning whether it was the display of loyalty and dedication among the Dutch people that maintained such order, or if it was the meticulous nature of their laws and regulations, Xie exhibited a keen interest in probing the underlying principles that shaped Dutch society. All in all, his admiration for the Dutch government's organisational prowess and non-traditional succession system reveals his appreciation for diverse approaches to governance. As a perceptive observer, he understood the value of studying these variations and how they impact the stability and prosperity of a competent power. His observations, therefore, not only provide historical insights into the Dutch Republic but also exemplify his broader endeavour to document the cultural nuances and administrative structures of the places he traversed.

Following the discussions of Portugal and the Dutch Republic, Xie dedicated another substantial section to deal with the situation in England (*Yingjili guo*). This country, perceived as being governed by the 'red hairs' (*hongmao*), stood out as one of the most powerful states globally, despite its relatively small size and location (according to Xie) southwest of the French coast. As usual, Xie used the island of St Helena as a curious point of reference for his exploration of the West, claiming that it took nearly two months to reach the British coast from there. Upon reaching the southern coast of England, Xie observed sparsely populated areas with luxuriously decorated buildings, which he interpreted as a display of wealth and power:

England stands alone in the sea, encompassing several thousand miles. Despite the sparse population, there is a significant concentration of wealthy individuals, and the houses are adorned with heavy towers and pavilions. Eager for rapid achievements and profits, they make a living through maritime trade and commerce. In the prosperous maritime regions, everyone yearns to grasp opportunities. Traders are found throughout the sea, with Bengal, Mandala, and Mumbai serving as foreign outposts. Citizens over fifteen years of age are obliged to serve the king, and such obligations cease only after reaching the age of sixty. Additionally, they employ foreigners as soldiers, resulting in a force of over ten thousand, making many foreign countries fear this small yet powerful nation.<sup>29</sup>

According to Xie, the British were relentless in seizing opportunities to expand their overseas business, with their trading vessels bringing back riches from various corners of the world to boost the Empire's prosperity. Xie saw England as one of the most powerful expanding powers compared to other Western countries like Portugal and the Dutch Republic. For instance, his thorough description of British control over Bengal, India, served as just one example of the far-reaching influence of British colonial endeavours overseas:

Mingyala (Bengal), a territory under the jurisdiction of England, extends for thousands of miles, serving as a major metropolis in the southwest region of various foreign lands. It is located on the western coast of the Chedigang Sea. By crossing the Chedigang Sea, one can reach it in approximately two days and nights, following the favourable southeast winds. As for overland travel, it begins by heading north along the coastal area, then turning west at the cape and proceeding south until reaching the destination. Due to the relatively late sunrise, most travel to and from this region is conducted via sea routes. The port is known as Gezhi Li, which extends for over a thousand miles along the coast. The sea is murky and the depth unpredictable. Foreign ships arriving here cannot approach directly and must first signal with cannons, prompting the local indigenous people to request guidance from England. Skilled navigators in small boats are then sent from England to guide them through the waters.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

There are fortifications at the port. Upon entering the inner harbour, it takes about two days to reach the Jiaoya beacon. After another three to four days, one arrives at the Guligada. The English officials and military stationed in Bengal govern this region. There is a small city where only the military resides, while the merchants and civilians live around the outskirts of the city. The English officials, wealthy merchants, and their families all live in Zhanglangju. Zhanglangju is the name of the area outside the city. The buildings and pavilions are numerous, and the gardens and pavilions are beautifully adorned. In total, there are over ten thousand English residents in this area. Additionally, there are around fifty to sixty thousand local indigenous soldiers, who are known as the aborigines of Bengal.<sup>30</sup>

Based on the excerpt above, Xie's account sheds light on the strategic importance of Bengal, the region governed by the British in the Indian Ocean World. This specific region served as a vital centre for trade and military activities, boasting fortifications and a bustling harbour. In the region known as Zhanglangju, the coexistence of English officials, affluent merchants, and their families points to the formation of a well-defined English community within this foreign territory. Moreover, the opulent buildings, elegant pavilions, and meticulously crafted gardens bear witness to the profound influence of British culture on the local architecture and way of life. Additionally, Xie pointed to a significant military presence in the region, with approximately fifty to sixty thousand local indigenous soldiers, known as the *Mingyali* (Mingyalas) people. The presence of such a substantial army likely played a crucial role in the British colonial administration's efforts to uphold order and assert their authority in the area. Lastly, the excerpt also shed light on the navigational hurdles encountered by foreign vessels as they approached the port of Mingyalas. The unclear and shallow waters surrounding the port required careful guidance from local experts to ensure safe passage, thereby underscoring the significance of indigenous knowledge and expertise in facilitating international trade and navigation therein.

In addition to detailing the British expansion in the Indian Ocean, Xie devoted his attention to the vibrant capital city of London, known as *Lanlun*:

30. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu, juan shang*, pp. 22–23.

The port at the mouth of the river is named *Lanlun* (London), and it takes about a hundred miles of boat travel from the mouth to reach there, a large market town in the country. The city showcases a mesmerizing skyline adorned with towering structures, surrounded by abundant greenery. The populace flourishes in prosperity, cultivating an ambiance reminiscent of a vibrant capital city. It is presided over by high-ranking officials. The water is extremely clear and sweet, and the river has three bridges called Three Flower Bridges. Each bridge has a waterwheel that propels the water upwards, and large lead pipes are used to connect and supply water, hidden alongside the streets and lanes. People's homes use the water without the need for laborious fetching; each has a small copper pipe connected to the lead pipe alongside the road, hidden within the walls. They use small waterwheels separately to propel the water into their containers.<sup>31</sup>

Apparently, to Xie, London appeared to be one of the largest cities in Europe, renowned for its meticulously built harbour along the River Thames, drawing traders from far-flung corners of the globe. Unlike the southern coastal region, this British capital was densely packed with stores and apartments. Particularly impressive to Xie was the water system engineered by the London mayor. Amazed by the intricate urban planning, he was captivated by the extensive concealed network of small pipes that ran discreetly behind the walls (*cangyu changjiang*) of buildings in London, effectively guaranteeing a continuous and uninterrupted water supply to its fortunate residents. The ingenious network of these small pipes interconnected directly with the Thames, enabling the citizens to conveniently access usable water from their water taps.

Similar to the Portuguese, the British had a preference for white attire, and their soldiers' uniforms featured the colour red (*wuguan ju quan hong*). Women donned long skirts and often accentuated their waistlines with slim belts to create a more slender appearance. As observed by Xie, the people of England were fond of dancing and singing. Girls from affluent families were introduced to music and dance from a young age. Despite its bustling nature as a trading seaport, London exuded an air of a highly developed and cultured city:

Both men and women wear white clothes, and black is used for mourning attire. Military officers uniformly wear red. Women's clothing is long,

31. Xie Qinggao, Yang Bingnan (ed.), Feng Chengjun (annotated), *Hailu, juan xia*, p. 73.

trailing on the ground, narrow at the top and wide at the bottom. They cinch their waists tightly with belts to achieve a slender look. The belt buckle is made of gold and called *bogulusi*. Silk ribbons are used to form intricate patterns on both shoulders, sewn onto the clothes. On auspicious occasions or when hosting guests for feasting and drinking, young and beautiful women are dressed in elaborate costumes to perform dances and sing with musical accompaniment. The dances are graceful and agile. Girls from wealthy and noble families are trained in these dances from a young age, as it is a popular pastime among the people.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond delving into English culture and city life, Xie's exploration extended to the abundant natural resources found in England. Alongside the well-known gold and silver, he noted the significance of iron, tin, and lead as valuable commodities that British ships transported to Chinese ports. Despite the fertility of the land and the abundance of crops, England's domestic production fell short of meeting the needs of its population, necessitating the importation of goods from other regions. As a result, the British actively expanded their reach beyond Europe, occupying territories in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. Xie observed that these colonial holdings were of great importance to the British, serving as crucial points in upholding a vast maritime business network.

### A Symbolic Representation

Xie's record of Western Europe, as outlined above, illustrates how the 'Large Western Ocean' – and in particular Portugal, the Dutch Republic, and England – was represented from a Chinese perspective before the First Opium War. To Xie, these maritime kingdoms were exotic in the sense that, compared to China, each of them had its own distinctive culture and traditions. Due to their keen navigational and cartographical techniques, Westerners extended their influence into different parts of the world. With each state aiming at specific political and power-orientated goals, the people strongly identified with the state and fought with a patriotic zeal that made even small states (such as the Dutch Republic and Great Britain) extremely

32. Ibid., p. 74.

powerful. All of these features bespoke a civilisation technologically superior even to the Qing empire.

Xie's representation of the Western Ocean is also noteworthy because it signalled a rupture with the 'civilised versus barbaric' yardstick and thus with a powerful paradigm in Chinese thought about the West. In stark contrast to the traditional *tianxia* axiom, geographical distance became less important in the interpretation of cultural differences between China and other parts of the world. For Xie, the mere fact that the Western Ocean is far away from the Chinese cultural sphere no longer implies that it is culturally inferior. On the contrary: in some respects, the Large Western Ocean could at least be equated with China, especially in terms of its history and cultural development. In this way, Xie's representation of Europe offers an alternative – and in some respects radically new – geo-historical understanding of the world outside China. If we shift our perspective from a purely Sino-centric view and examine his account, Xie's *Hailu* situates him in what Mary Louise Pratt terms the 'contact zone', a social space where diverse cultures converge, clash, and engage with each other.<sup>33</sup> In this realm, cultural differences and encounters are prevalent. Xie's description indicates that his detachment from Han-Chinese culture also yielded advantages, offering him insights into new customs, ways of thinking, and various foreign languages. Consequently, the *Hailu* implies that his journey granted him the flexibility to speak with considerable adaptability and authority about the unfamiliar in the Far West.

In conjunction with this, Xie did not exaggerate the position of China, even though we would perhaps suspect that Xie would remain sensitive to his Han-Chinese identity when he produced his *Hailu*. In his narrative he rarely stressed the cultural and ideological distance or difference between himself and the people he came across. Moreover, he omitted from his travel reports most of the traditional harsh language and negative stereotyping about Europeans. In order to offer China an alternative, and perhaps more accurate, picture of its cultural position on the globe, the relationship between China and Western Europe became less of the traditional binary opposition of civilisation versus barbarism. By thus detailing the parameters and mapping a more sensible cultural geography of the world, Xie narrowed the distance between China and the 'others', while reinforcing his adaptability and open-mindedness in navigating through diverse cultural landscapes.

33. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 8.

Based on the examples extracted from the *Hailu*, Xie offered a social and cultural interpretation of the customs and mores he had witnessed in the Far West. In this regard, his work somehow symbolised a significant step toward a new and more refined view of the Western world which contributed to the decline of *tianxia* cosmography. Nevertheless, Xie's endeavour to rediscover Western Europe at first failed to evoke a favourable response from the literati. In contrast to certain Western travellers and explorers, like David Livingstone, who received an enthusiastic welcome upon his return to England in 1856 after spending 16 years in South Africa,<sup>34</sup> Xie Qinggao's homecoming was met with relative silence. Ultraconservatives believed that Chinese culture would be contaminated unless contact with Westerners was strictly regulated. To them, Xie's direct vision of the Western world could not compete with the Confucian classics and canons at all. With only limited circulation in Guangdong province, the *Hailu* was not widely read in China. As mentioned earlier, it was not until the outbreak of the First Opium War that the *Hailu* regained its significance and importance – almost 20 years after the book had first been published. Xie's message that Qing China had to face and deal with the Far West struck a responsive chord with reforming statesmen, especially in the 1860s. As a new generation of Qing officials such as Wei Yuan, Lin Zexu (1785–1850), and Xu Jiyu tried to better understand the West, Xie's *Hailu* became a crucial reference work. From the late 1840s, his account even came to be regarded as a useful and concise manual of the non-Chinese world. Lin Zexu, for instance, declared to Emperor Daoguang that the *Hailu* was a valuable account bringing to light new insights on the Western world:

Published in the year twenty-five of the Jiaqing era [1820] in Guangdong, the *Hailu* recorded the western world in detail. It was informative and accurately written. It should be recommended reading for those who are interested in knowing more about the western sphere.<sup>35</sup>

34. Adrian S. Wisnicki, "Interstitial Cartographer: David Livingstone and the Invention of South Central Africa," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2009), pp. 255–271. It is important to note the distinct contexts of Xie Qinggao's and Livingstone's explorations. While Livingstone received backing from missionary organisations and geographical societies, Xie did not benefit from comparable support. Furthermore, Livingstone's writings and the British fascination with Africa, often dubbed 'the unknown continent', generated significant public interest and following. In contrast, although Xie's focus on Europe attracted attention from a segment of scholar-officials and intellectuals, it did not spark widespread public enthusiasm to explore and understand Europe in its entirety.

35. Lin Zexu, *Lin Zexu ji* (Beijing: Zhounghua shuju, 1962–1963), vol. zhong, p. 680.

This is not to say, however, that Xie's *Hailu* was entirely without blemishes or bias. Even though Xie tried hard not to carry any cultural prejudices into the text, some of his observations were clearly incorrect or even biased. For instance, he wrongly located England southwest instead of northwest of France. Since he was not a professional translator, Xie was moreover unable to translate in a precise and accurate fashion all information from one cultural context to another. Most of the Western terms Xie introduced to his text were translated according to Cantonese pronunciation, which could lead to misunderstanding outside the region of Guangdong. As a matter of fact, Yang Bingnan, working out Xie's memoirs, knew no foreign languages, which obviously also hampered the translation process. Consequently, some original data (e.g. names of places) became subtly distorted as they were modified by the medium of Chinese syntax and characters. Arthur F. Wright suggested that, as a vehicle for non-Chinese information, the Chinese language maintained a high index of refraction, since the original image was altered by the lens of Chinese.<sup>36</sup> As such, even though the information recorded by Xie was usually clear, some of his ideas fell into the 'language trap' that could not accurately convey new meaning without adding considerable explanation and new terms. Xie and Yang themselves probably did not realise the extent of this problem, and I suspect that they would evaluate translations of Western terms chiefly on the basis of whether it made sense within the Chinese cultural context or not. Although it was impossible to find accurate translations of terms such as 'windmill', 'pipe management', 'university', and 'Christianity', much of this information was understandable to readers in terms of what was already known in China. For this reason, the effectiveness of maritime writing such as this *Hailu* as a tool and instrument for importing accurate new information and ideas depended on the author's ability to reveal the context of new terms.

Even if Xie recorded the remarkable growth of European sea powers and at the same time realised that China was no longer at the centre of a moral order as it had been within the *tianxia* framework, he did not analyse the implications of the new world order in which he found himself and in which morality or virtue mattered less than industrial and military strength. Although he did mention the Western advance into Southeast Asia, he did not spell out in greater depth what these expansions meant to those Southeast Asian tributary states in general and to China in particular.

36. Arthur F. Wright, "The Chinese Language and Foreign Ideas," in his *Studies in Chinese Thought* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953), pp. 286–303.

In other words, while Xie had realised early on the institutional and military superiority of the seafaring powers in the West, he did not design a strategy for the potential political, economic, and cultural menace posed by these maritime powers – an issue also relevant to the wider context of the Chinese intelligentsia during the Qing dynasty before the First Opium War. In other words, Xie was able to see the potential to be reaped from the maritime world, but he did not propose that the Qing court engage directly in a wide range of transregional shipping activities that he observed. Instead, his focus remained on documenting and comprehending the cultural, social, and political aspects of the Western societies he encountered. His life and vision were shaped by the maritime world, but Xie did not fully harness his potential to a practical extent by capitalising on the opportunities presented.

### Concluding Remarks

Xie Qinggao, unlike the learned Confucian scholars such as Lan Dingyuan and Zhou Huang, did not possess an extensive education or training. As a merchant in late imperial China, he had to rely on ambition and patronage to gain recognition in society. However, Xie and the other individuals highlighted in this book share a common bond in their journeys, adventures, writings, visions, and mindsets, all of which were shaped by the maritime world. Despite lacking formal training as a writer, it is precisely his straightforward and unpretentious writing style that provides a fresh perspective on how a traveller like Xie was not shaped by the Confucian paradigm of thought. It is through this unassuming approach that his work opens a new avenue for our understanding of the multifaceted impact of the maritime realm on individuals beyond the confines of traditional scholarly pursuits.

The *Hailu* was not the earliest written work that explored the Europeans in China or delved into the history and culture of the European continent from a Chinese standpoint. During the Ming period, scholars such as Yan Congjian (1559–1575) and Li Wenfeng (1500–?) had already observed and made comments on the Portuguese business practices in Macau in their writings *Shuyu zhousilu* and *Yueshan congtao*. Additionally, in the *Guangdong Gazetteer*, the Spaniards and Portuguese were depicted as the ‘red hairs’, characterised by their attire of red clothes and distinct physical features, including red eyebrows and facial hair. The *Gazetteer* also mentioned their remarkable height, with heels and toes measuring two feet long, making them twice the average stature of the locals. Chen Lunjiong,

the Qing writer, then identified Europe as somewhere distant from China but had maintained its distinctive culture. These accounts, however, only served as brief introductions to the Western world and its inhabitants, particularly given the fact that the above writers had never visited that part of the world. By contrast, Xie's record is clearly more complex, direct, and nuanced, reflecting closer familiarity with the area and the people. Undoubtedly, it is a travel writing that deserves high recognition and esteem in the field of Sino-foreign relations and travel literature.

Viewing the *Hailu* as part of the plethora of travel writings from the early modern era compels us to grapple with the question of the inherent value of such works. Historians and anthropologists such as Adam Galamaga, Helmut Puff, and Christopher Wild have questioned the notion that these early observers and voyagers could offer anything but deeply flawed narratives, shaped by their preconceptions and, in certain instances, tainted by the ambition to assert dominance over cultures they perceived as inherently inferior.<sup>37</sup> These critiques have provided essential checks on the interpretation of travel narratives, prompting researchers to exercise greater caution in evaluating both the observers or narrators and the content within the texts. Nevertheless, the proposition to entirely dismiss travel narratives for anything beyond studying individual mentalities seems excessive. By conducting careful examinations of the individuals who produced travel descriptions and the historical contexts in which they emerged, it is still feasible to discern accounts of high quality, displaying greater depth and complexity than others. While we may encounter biased or shallow records, the essence of historical practice lies in constructing plausible arguments grounded in the available sources. In other words, early modern travellers, like Xie Qinggao, were not merely crafting elaborate fictions due to the challenges of comprehending unfamiliar cultures. Instead, they endeavoured to present genuine reflections of their encounters, capturing aspects of the diverse and intricate world they had experienced. By acknowledging the limitations and favouritisms inherent in these travel narratives, historians can extract valuable insights while being cautious in their interpretations. In doing so, we embrace a nuanced approach that acknowledges both the

37. Adam Galamaga, *Representations of Islam in Travel Literature in Early Modern England* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2011); Helmut Puff, "The City as Model: Three-Dimensional Representations of Urban Space in Early Modern Europe," in Arthur Groos, Hans-Jochen Schiewer, and Markus Stock (eds.), *Topographies of the Early Modern City* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), pp. 193–217.

potentials and the pitfalls of these accounts, enriching our understanding of the past and the interactions between different societal groups, communities, and cultures.

In conclusion, then, the *Hailu* was significant because it outlined the contours of a geography that connected China with both an extensive sea space (geographically) and numerous maritime activities (socially and economically). It also reflects the author's own polymathic interests, as well as coverage of those topics that he would have known to be important to his audience in China. To Xie the traveller and the writer, the wider ocean became a platform to chart the Occident, with notable implications for conservative Chinese perceptions of the Western Ocean. In contradistinction to some governmental papers and previous geographical accounts, Xie did not regard the sea simply as a barrier or a castle-like protection but saw it as a gateway to real and explorable regions. His *Hailu*, therefore, tended to frame the sea as a starting point to re-examine the Large Western Ocean. These Western *haiguo*, previously seen as a collection of distant and inconsequential barbarian states, now emerged as important participants in a globally connected scenario. The countries of the Far West were qualitatively different from those tributary states that paid homage to China within the *tianxia* paradigm because the former were successful political units that had established themselves without the 'blessing' (*enze*) of the Chinese emperors. These European powers possessed a long history and appeared as potent competitors in the global arena. This significant increase of knowledge introduced by Xie planted the seeds for a greater intellectual vision, enabling the geo-historians of later periods to conceptualise Europe and the wider world from a fresh and promising angle. Xie invited both his contemporaries and later generations, particularly Wei Yuan, Lin Zexu, and Xu Jiyu, to better understand the Far West and at the same time to reposition the role of China in a more challenging, global context. None of them have had the luxury or patience for ten years of residence in Europe nor had cultivated the sensitivity that Xie prescribed for and envisioned in his readers.

## Conclusion

The passing of Xie Qinggao in 1821, shortly after the publication of his *Hailu*, marked the end of the cycle we have been considering. It had been 414 years since Chen Zuyi, the pirate king, confronted the treasure fleet led by Zheng He in Southeast Asian waters. Over the span of more than four centuries, the individuals featured in this book, apart from Zheng He and, to some extent, Shi Lang, had remained relatively obscure both in the Western world and even among the Chinese themselves. These figures have largely been overlooked by later generations, while their tales about and insights into the sea have been overshadowed by more well-known historical narratives. Such oversight might stem from the prevailing belief that China, being primarily an agrarian economy and continental power, had minimal involvement with the maritime world after the Ming court chose to distance itself from overseas navigation and seaborne commerce in the early fifteenth century. The majority of China's population adhered to a Confucian mindset, and the sea was only seen as relevant when the country faced tangible threats from the ocean, such as potential invasions from foreign fleets or pirate attacks. The perception of the blue realm as a distant and occasionally perilous domain, rather than a space of opportunity and exploration, played a role in shaping a somewhat ambivalent relationship between China and the maritime world at certain points in its history.

Meanwhile, authorities during the Ming and Qing categorised native boat people and some other coastal merchants as 'crafty villains' or 'mean people' (*jianmin*), often excluded from participating in the broader Confucian world order. However, the state was well aware of the potential advantages stemming from the coastal population and their maritime pursuits. Simultaneously, in the long run, it could not afford to neglect the strategic importance of its maritime frontier. This dynamic then presented a complex situation where, on the one hand, the 'mean people' were barred from direct participation in a world order that was dominated by Confucian

principles, such as participating in the civil service examination. On the other hand, a central government that was not derived from a seaborne culture was both anxious and determined to reap the potential offered by the ocean. As a result, the Ming and Qing empires, when viewed from the point of view of the *longue durée*, appeared to maintain an indecisive approach towards the sea, an enigmatic situation that I would boldly refer to as ‘capriciousness’. This irresolute status reflected a complex and evolving attitude towards maritime matters, oscillating between moments of caution and moments of engagement.

Now China has emerged as a burgeoning sea power on the global stage. Over the past few decades, she has tirelessly and substantially expanded her maritime capabilities and influence, ranging from substantial investments in modern naval technologies to the establishment of strategic maritime partnerships with numerous countries in the Global South. Her dramatic rise is also accompanied by the construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea, which has led to increased territorial claims and tensions within the region. Taking all these manoeuvres into consideration, no viewers could any longer comment on China’s attitude towards the ocean as being capricious. Arguably, she stands as one of the most proactive and potent powers in the Asia Pacific region, placing significant value on both the open sea and the resources beneath its surface. In fact, the seafloor has become a new, enticing frontier for resource exploitation, drawing considerable attention and creating a rush to extract valuable minerals, such as copper, cobalt, nickel, and manganese, found on the seabed. As technology advances, these untapped sources of capital have sparked an unprecedented wave of exploration and potential economic benefits for the Chinese government and entrepreneurs. According to certain historians, political scientists, and columnists, China has undergone a transformation from being predominantly a land power to becoming a prominent power above and below the sea in the new century.<sup>1</sup> Such observations bear resemblance to the underlying postulation and ideology

1. See, for instance, Michael A. McDevitt, *China as a Twenty-First Century Naval Power: Theory, Practice, and Implications* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020); Hu Bo; Zhang Yanpei (trans.), *Chinese Maritime Power in the 21st Century: Strategic Planning, Policy and Predictions* (New York: Routledge, 2020); James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21st Century: The Turn to Mahan* (London: Routledge, 2008); Bernard D. Cole, *China’s Quest for Great Power: Ships, Oil, and Foreign Policy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016).

embedded in the documentary *River Elegy*, as discussed in this book's introduction.

China's engagement with the maritime world, nevertheless, extends far beyond recent developments. It is vital to recognise the historical ties between China and the sea, rather than simply portraying the nation's transformation into a sea power as an abrupt shift. It is timely and essential to understand how China, as a continental power, interacted with the maritime world on its own terms in the early modern era. Starting from the fifteenth century, if not earlier, the Chinese, especially those living along the coast, have maintained a profound connection with the maritime realm, and its influence has left an indelible mark on various aspects of their lives. In fact, the early modern period saw a flourishing growth in maritime trade along the coastal fringe of China. Scholars such as John E. Wills Jr., Wang Gungwu, Paul van Dyke, Leonard Blussé, Eric Tagliacozzo, Gang Zhou, David Igler, John Wong, Huang Guosheng, Ng Chin-keong, Angela Schottenhammer, Xing Hang, and numerous others have emphasised how Chinese coastal merchants played a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of goods within China and beyond its borders.<sup>2</sup> Some of these enterprising traders even established diasporic communities in Southeast Asia, which ultimately contributed to what Leonard Blussé regarded as the 'Chinese century'.<sup>3</sup> This significant era facilitated the

2. See, for instance, John E. Wills Jr. (ed.), *China and Maritime Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Wang Gungwu and Ng Chin-keong (eds.), *Maritime China in Transition, 1750–1850* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004); Paul van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005); Leonard Blussé, *Visible Cities: Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia and the Coming of the Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Eric Tagliacozzo, *In Asian Waters: Oceanic Worlds from Yemen to Yokohama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022); Gang Zhou, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013); David Igler, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); John Wong, *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century: The House of Houqua and the Canton System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Ng Chin-keong, *Boundaries and Beyond: China's Maritime Southeast in Late Imperial Times* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017); Angela Schottenhammer, *The East Asian Mediterranean Maritime Crossroads of Culture, Commerce and Human Migration* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008); Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

3. Leonard Blussé, "Chinese Century: The Eighteenth Century in the China Sea Region,"

circulation of diverse goods, advanced technologies, and innovative ideas. Although summarising the captivating research above in one paragraph proves challenging, it is important to bring up and connect these studies to affirm that China actively participated in an early modern global market that was shaped by seaborne shipping. In the analyses put forth by Gang Zhou, the Qing empire emerged as one of the principal driving forces in the process of early globalisation.<sup>4</sup>

Building upon previous scholarly contributions, the trend among academics to position early modern China within the global maritime context has never ended. For instance, in her latest monograph, *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier*, published in 2021, Melissa Macauley explores how the Chaozhouese from a poor and ungovernable corner of Guangdong became prominent players in commerce and commodity production, standing shoulder to shoulder with the Fujianese and Cantonese.<sup>5</sup> Her deeply researched exploration extends beyond China's southeastern coast, encompassing various territories along the South China Sea where Chinese influence was keenly felt. What makes her study even more appealing is that the author not only sees the Chaozhouese traders and sojourners as typical businessmen moving unidirectionally from China to Southeast Asia but she also skilfully reveals the fascinating narrative of the approximately six million labourers who embarked from the port of Swatow, a pivotal city in Chaozhou, and engaged in a bidirectional, reactive, and dynamic circulation between Southeast Asia and their hometown. These intrepid individuals ventured across the vast expanse of the 'Southern Ocean (*Nanyang*)', driven not only by the pursuit of opportunities in Southeast Asia but also by a profound desire to support their families in China. To maintain these strong bonds, they contributed a steady flow of remittances, sparking transformative effects in the local economy. Additionally, a complex web of familial brotherhood and commercial ties extended to Siam, Malaya, Borneo, French Indochina, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, drawing them into the sphere of a 'maritime Chaozhou'. As the nineteenth century unfolded, these leading merchants

*Fait partie d'un numéro thématique: L'horizon nousantarien. Mélanges en hommage à Denys Lombard*, volume III (Année, 1999), pp. 107–129.

4. Gang Zhou, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757*, p. 14.

5. Melissa Macauley, *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

and brotherhoods engaged in both competition and cooperation with colonial actors across Southeast Asia, asserting their influence on their own terms.

The findings presented in *Distant Shores* are highly compelling, as they shed light on the Chaozhouese community as a cohesive and unified group of players who crafted their own informal empire and established a remarkable form of commercial supremacy that proved resilient and sustainable. These findings also serve as a poignant reminder that there are always new avenues in which to contextualise the history of early modern China within a maritime framework and to employ the ocean as a methodological lens. What I have done in this book is also to utilise the ocean, in a theoretical perspective, to link together some selected individuals, albeit spanning over four centuries and coming from various cultural, social, and geographical backgrounds. I concur with Macauley that a coherent identity can indeed be formulated among certain groups of traders who shared similar goals or objectives. However, the reality is that even among individuals who were closely connected through familial or regional ties, it could be tricky to establish a collective identity. Each person's connection to the maritime world and their experiences shaped by the sea may have varied significantly, thereby leading to distinct individual journeys. The previous chapters, hopefully, show how that experience of the ocean could have informed individual interpretations and how such individual interpretations influenced one's lived experiences. Needless to say, I am not suggesting that the figures featured in this book were not bound to any particular community or intellectual or social circle. Quite the contrary: the majority of the individuals we have encountered so far, except for Zhou Huang, originated from the coastal provinces of China, especially Jiangsu (Zheng Ruoceng), Fujian (Shi Lang and Lan Dingyuan), and Guangdong (Chen Zuyi and Xie Qinggao). Their geographic origins played a significant role in shaping their narratives and contributions within the maritime context.<sup>6</sup> However, we have to understand that the sea is also 'a space of multiples', as expounded by the renowned geographer and historian Philip Steinberg.

6. It is often assumed that Chinese maritime history is predominantly shaped by people from the southern regions, particularly below the port city of Shanghai. However, this does not imply that northeast China lacked significance in the maritime world. In my current work on another book project, I aim to reintegrate the Yellow and Bohai Sea regions, along with the coastal communities along northeast China's coastline, into our broader discussion.

According to him, ‘whether experienced tactilely (like from the perspective of someone on an island in the sea), visually (by cruise ship passengers), or virtually (by readers of a sea poem), the sea is a space where singular stories are told about a multiplicitous environment’.<sup>7</sup>

Diverging from the conventional focus on sea traders and sojourners in mainstream studies, I have revealed that the significance of the sea extends beyond these two groups of people. It also encompasses the experiences of intellectuals, scholars, envoys, admirals, pirates, mapmakers, and various other individuals. While narratives of people’s encounters with the sea abound in maritime Europe, portraying tales of discovery, escape from mundane routines, or competitive endeavours, a comparable abundance is not often found in imperial China. Therefore, the individuals and their writings showcased in this study deserve considerable attention and recognition. Although their approaches to writing about the sea might have differed, they all perceived the ocean as a tangible space. Meanwhile, these historical actors not only engaged with the sea intellectually, through their writings and thoughts, but also physically as they lived and experienced life upon it. As a result, the sea appeared to be transformative in shaping their identities and perspectives. The might of a sea storm, the soothing cadence of waves, and the captivating horizon would have had a profound effect that would have altered their understanding of customs, visions, beliefs, and even their entire worldview. In essence, the ocean became a journey of experiences for these individuals who were filled with fragmented and partial knowledge and realisations.

The impact of the sea extended beyond the lives of ordinary people or the shaping of identities among scholar-officials and Confucian intellectuals. It also permeated the imperial bureaucracy and the tributary system from a broader context, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, intricately interwoven with its projection of power across China’s blue frontier and beyond. To be more specific, the vastness of the ocean and the interconnectedness it offered played a critical role in the country’s political, geostrategic, and cultural development, its trade networks, and its diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries. This rich maritime tradition continues to resonate with China’s modern identity, as the nation embraces its role as a sea power ‘rising peacefully’ in the contemporary era. The present engagement with the maritime world, as a result, is not a sudden departure from the

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7. Philip Steinberg, “Foreword,” in Mike Brown and Barbara Humberstone (eds.), *Seascapes: Shaped by the Sea* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. xii.

past but rather an extension of a long-standing relationship with seas that have influenced China throughout its history. If the People's Republic of China were to assume a prominent role on the global stage, particularly in the Pacific and Indian Ocean worlds, its maritime legacy, such as the story featuring Shi Lang, would then remain a crucial factor in shaping its current ambitions and future pursuits. Acknowledging this continuity brings to light the importance of the sea in shaping China's national identity and emphasises the lasting relevance of its maritime connections in this new age of global rivalry.

This study, however, does not seek to uphold or validate China's current influence in the maritime domain through its historical connection with the ocean. Instead, my intention is to illuminate the fact that the Ming and Qing empires can also be understood and analysed collectively within a maritime context. There has been a recurring tendency to segregate the Ming and Qing dynasties concerning their maritime significance in existing historiography. The Ming dynasty is often characterised as a former naval power, while the Qing dynasty is labelled as a weak maritime force. However, by exploring the stories of the individuals featured in this study, I strive to forge a connection between the two eras, emphasising a maritime continuity that should not be easily overlooked or dismissed. Despite instances where the two dynasties restricted maritime activities for various reasons, it is imperative to acknowledge that individuals and communities along and beyond China's coast were similarly influenced by a wide range of maritime affairs. The sea held significance not only for these two dynasties but also for provincial governments and the central authority, affecting layered aspects of people's lives and their interactions with the broader maritime world. These dynamics linked men as disparate as the Ming's adviser Zheng Ruoceng and those eighteenth-century cartographers, the admiral Shi Lang and the prolific writer Lan Dingyuan, as well as the imperial envoy Zhou Huang and the traveller Xie Qinggao. Although these individuals came from diverse backgrounds, possessed varying expertise, and spanned over four centuries in time, reviewing their collective experiences unveils a curious and intriguing continuity. Each of them, in their distinctive ways, laid bare their inner selves and reflected the cultural milieu they hailed from; yet, in doing so, they showcased a maritime China in motion and transition. To a substantial extent, their stories continue to resonate with us today, expressing a shared intensity that accentuates the inseparable bonding between China and the sea. In other words, my intention is to demonstrate to my readers that the

connections between China and the maritime world have been variegated and multifaceted, and could be analysed through a variety of perspectives, ranging from societal, cultural, religious, to intellectual. The sea is not always about naval accomplishments, battles, and transregional shipping. It also fosters a kind of maritime consciousness among individual figures.

If we were to explore the concept of a maritime consciousness, this would require a clear understanding of its definition. As outlined by the International Maritime Organization, maritime consciousness is synonymous with maritime domain awareness (MDA).<sup>8</sup> In simple terms, MDA represents a country's comprehensive comprehension of the wide-ranging factors associated with its maritime domain, affecting aspects such as its 'security, safety, economy, or the environment'.<sup>9</sup> The maritime domain encompasses all areas and elements connected or proximal to seas, oceans, or navigable waterways, including various activities, infrastructures, individuals, cargo, vessels, and conveyances.<sup>10</sup> While alternative terms like 'sea worthiness' or 'maritime cognizance' are occasionally employed, they essentially convey the same idea as MDA.<sup>11</sup> In the context of China, the translation of maritime consciousness is *haiyang yishi*, a concept emphasised by top leaders and politicians, since the 1980s, to increase public awareness of the maritime domain and to integrate it into state development plans. However, despite its significance, the Chinese government and mainland scholars have not yet provided a standardised definition for maritime consciousness. In some instances, it has been associated with military superiority, denoting the Chinese government's efforts to extend jurisdiction over the seas for security and sovereignty.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, it occasionally

8. For details, see Christian Bueger, "What is Maritime Security?" *Marine Policy*, no. 53 (March 2015), pp. 1–11.

9. "Amendments to the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual," published by the International Maritime Organization ([http://www.imo.org/blast/blastDataHelper.asp?data\\_id=29093&filename=1367.pdf](http://www.imo.org/blast/blastDataHelper.asp?data_id=29093&filename=1367.pdf)).

10. Ibid.

11. For instance, M. L. Hendrikse, N. H. Margetson, and N. J. Margetson use 'seaworthiness' in their edited volume *Aspects of Maritime Law: Claims under Bills of Lading* (Austin: Wolters Kluwer, 2008), p. 71; Robert Force, A. N. Yiannopoulos, and Martin Davies apply the term 'maritime cognizance' in their *Admiralty and Maritime Law* (Washington, D.C.: Beard Books, 2006), p. 67.

12. For example, see Luo Xianlin, "Haiyang yishi: Yige buneng huibi de huati (Sea Consciousness: A subject that cannot be avoided)," *Dangdai haijun*, no. 5 (1994), p. 14; Liang Feng, "Lun ershiyi shiji Zhonghua minzu Haiyang yishi de shenke neihan yu

alludes to the contested region within the South China Sea, particularly the Spratly Islands, where the navy of the People's Liberation Army seeks to exert influence and control over this archipelago's indigenous population and marine resources.

Maritime consciousness encompasses more than just a nation's display of military prowess at sea; it extends to a deeper, localised, and individual level, revealing how the seascapes, including the oceans, deltas, waves, islands, inlets, floods, and bays, have moulded a character or a community. It involves understanding how individuals are shaped by their interactions with the maritime world and how the sea holds personal significance for them. One illustrative example of maritime consciousness can be seen in the lives of fishermen and sailors. For generations, coastal communities such as the Dan in Fujian and Guangdong have relied on the sea for their livelihoods, forming a deep connection with the maritime environment and coastal geography, covering the shoreline, waves, winds, storms, and the character of the water.<sup>13</sup> Their daily interactions with the sea, the challenges they face, and the bonds they forge with fellow seafarers create a specific, regional maritime consciousness and identity that influences their traditions, customs, and values. Moreover, their maritime consciousness is evident in cultural practices and rituals that pay homage to the sea's bountiful resources. As we can see from the chapters on Zheng Ruoceng, Lan Dingyuan, and Zhou Huang, coastal festivals, ceremonies, and the worship of *Tianhou* among those coastal communities, either in China or elsewhere, often revolve around fishing and navigation, highlighting the significant role of the maritime world in shaping cultural heritage.

Trade and commerce, as showcased in this book, are likewise instrumental in nurturing maritime consciousness. Thriving port cities, such as Fuzhou, Canton, and Macau, together with a number of feeder ports dotted along the coastal belt of China, have functioned as vibrant micro and macro centres of exchange and interactions, drawing seafarers, traders, travellers, missionaries, and more from diverse backgrounds. These bustling

diwei zuoyong (Ocean Consciousness of Chinese Nationality in the 21st Century: Deep Connotation)," *Forum of World Economics and Politics*, no. 1 (2009), pp. 71–79.

13. I also made similar observations about maritime consciousness elsewhere – see Ronald C. Po, "China and the Sea in Literature and (Mis)Perception, 1644–1839," in Ryan Tucker Jones and Matt K. Matsuda (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), vol. I, pp. 558–563. Some of the ideas and arguments here are drawn from that book chapter.

entrepôts or trade nodes have facilitated cross-cultural encounters and global connections, leaving a lasting impression on the identities and aspirations of those involved in various activities within these port cities. From conducting trade and commerce to engaging in diplomacy, cultural exchanges, and migration, individuals were enriched by the dynamic environments and fabrics of these maritime hubs, which Nishat Zaidi and Diip M. Menon would call ‘space[s] of cosmopolitanism’ that regulate the movement of bodies, goods, capital, ideas, and aesthetics.<sup>14</sup> Such experiences instilled in those historical actors a deeper appreciation of the sea, contributing to the formation of a distinct maritime consciousness that transcended geographical boundaries and cultural backgrounds.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, the encounters and observations of explorers and adventurers also serve as examples of how the sea acts as a catalyst for personal journeys and aspirations, thus giving rise to a distinct maritime consciousness. Brave souls who embarked on maritime expeditions sought new horizons and discovered unfamiliar territories, leaving an enduring mark on history and enriching their own lives with novel experiences. One such figure is Xie Qinggao, whose mindset was profoundly shaped by the vast expanse of the Great Western Ocean, extending far beyond the traditional *tianxia* worldview. His encounters with distant cultures and societies during his maritime travels broadened his horizons and challenged the prevailing perspectives of his time. Likewise, Chen Zuyi’s journey to Southeast Asia exemplifies how the unsettled seascape shaped his trajectory and wielded influence over his ambitions. The experiences of these historical actors accentuated the transformative power of the maritime world, where personal quests for knowledge, wealth, power, opportunity, and influence converged. Their journeys illustrate how individuals are not only shaped by the sea but actively respond to its allure, forging a unique maritime consciousness that continues to resonate throughout history.

In all, from Chen Zuyi to Xie Qinggao, there are numerous tales of historical characters, both renowned and lesser-known, that are illuminative enough for us to weave a more thorough picture of maritime China during the early modern period, a critical epoch when Europeans had begun to actively traverse the global oceans.<sup>15</sup> For Zheng Ruoceng and Lan

14. Nishat Zaidi and Diip M. Menon (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Cultures and Oceanic Thought* (Oxford: Routledge, 2023), p. 10.

15. J. C. Sharman, *Empires of the Weak: The Real Story of European Expansion and the*

Dingyuan, the sea was a strategic frontier of their empire as it could guard against any potential intruders, while for some seaborne merchants, the sea was full of economic and trading opportunities that could make them a fortune. To some cartographers, the ocean was a symbolic geographical seascape that required proper charting and surveyance, while to some maritime writers, such as Xie Qinggao, the sea was a contact zone and an open corridor that connected China to the external world. All of these adventurers were constructing a maritime China on their own terms. Although their perspectives may have varied, the amalgamation of these diverse perceptions led to a compelling conclusion – those influenced by the maritime world in late imperial China significantly constituted an essential segment of the Ming and Qing empires, warranting deeper attention, consideration, and appreciation. The watery world, in a way, has been very much like a ‘constant penumbral presence’<sup>16</sup> throughout our long histories, binding the past and present anew.

*Creation of the New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 1–2.

16. Nishat Zaidi and Diip M. Menon (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Cultures and Oceanic Thought*, p. 11.



## Glossary

*Afeng shuyuan* 鰲峰書院

Bai Yingli 柏應理

*baici yan* 拜辭宴

Ban Zhao 班昭

*baojia* 保甲

*Bihai jiyou* 裨海紀游

*bimen dushu* 閉門讀書

*bingbu shangshu* 兵部尚書

*bingbu shilang* 兵部侍郎

Bo Yan 伯顏

Bulogishi 布路叭士

*bunying yang* 本洋營

*buyi junshixue jia* 布衣軍事家

Cai Shiyuan 蔡世遠

*Canglang ting* 滄浪亭

*cangming* 滄溟

*cangshui* 滄水

*cangyu changjiang* 藏於牆間

*caogong* 朝貢

*cefeng* 冊封

*cefeng yan* 冊封宴

*cefeng zhou* 冊封舟

Chang Po-tsai 張保仔

Chang Qing 常青

Chang Tian 長田

*Changshi shuishiyang neiwaiyang yu tu* 昌石水師營內外洋輿圖

*Chaozhou fengzu kao* 潮州風俗考

*Chaozhou fu Chenghai Chaoyang Huilai Nanaodao fangyutu* 潮州府澄海惠來南澳島方輿圖

Chen Kan 陳侃

Chen Lunjiong 陳倫炯

Chen Menglin 陳夢林

Chen Shiliang 陳士良

Chen Shuibian 陳水扁

Chen Zuyi 陳祖義

Cheng hu 澄湖

Chenghua 成化

Chiang Ching-kuo 蔣經國

*chongyang yan* 重陽宴

*Chouhai tubian* 籌海圖編

*Chouhai zhongbian* 籌海重編

*cimiao* 祠廟

*cohong* 公行

*cunban buxu xiahai* 寸板不許下海

*da hanghaijia* 大航海家

*Dalisi* 大理寺

*daluan* 大亂

*danhū* 蛋戶

*Daomingwang* 道明王

*daoren* 島人

*dapo zhi* 大破之

*DaQing wannian yitong dili quantu*  
大清萬年一統全圖

*Dashiyang guo* 大西洋國

*dengzhou yan* 登舟宴

*dianli* 典禮

*Dianshan hu* 澱山湖

*Diaoyudao* 釣魚島

*Dongming* 東溟

*dongzhi yan* 冬至宴

*enze* 恩澤

*erchen* 貳臣

*Fan Lai* 范涑

*Fang Bao* 方苞

*fei suyou liyi zhixi* 非素有禮儀之習

*Fei Xin* 費信

*Fei Xizhang* 費錫章

*fenbiao jiemeng* 焚表結盟

*Fenghua xian shuilu yingxun jiezhi*  
奉化縣水陸營汛界址圖

*fengsu* 風俗

*Fu Yiling* 傅衣凌

*Fudeye miao* 福德爺廟

*fumu guan* 父母官

*fuqiang* 富強

*Fushan yingxun zongtu* 福山營汛總圖

*Gao Cheng* 高澄

*Gong Xian* 龔賢

*gongbu shilang* 工部侍郎

*Gongchen Taiwan qiliu shu* 恭陳臺灣棄留疏

*Gu Yanwu* 顧炎武

*Gu Zuyu* 顧祖禹

*Guan Yu* 關羽

*guandu shangban* 官督商辦

*Guangdong wobian ji* 廣東倭變記

*guangjiao bushun* 獷狽不順

*Guangxu Shuntian fuzhi* 光緒順天府志

*Gui Youguang* 歸有光

*Gujin shijian* 古今識鑒

*gushu* 賈豎

*haibai* 海栢

*Haicheng* 海澄

*Haifang leikao* 海防類考

*Haifang zuanyao* 海防纂要

*haiguo* 海國

*Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志

*Haiguo wenjian lu* 海國聞見錄

*Haijiang yangjie xingshi tu* 海疆洋界形勢圖

*haijin* 海禁

*hailu lüanfang* 海陸聯防

*Haishan Xianguan* 海山仙館

*haishang yingxiong* 海上英雄

*haisong* 海松

*haitu* 海圖

*haiwai* 海外

*haiyang tese* 海洋特色

*haiyang yishi* 海洋意識

*haiyang zhishi* 海洋之事

*haizhong shan* 海中山

*hangjian* 漢奸

*Hangzhou Wan shuilu yingxuntu*

杭州灣水陸營汛圖

*hanlin bianxiu* 翰林編修

*He Shou* 鶴壽

*heishui* 黑水

*heishuigou* 黑水溝

*Helan guo* 荷蘭國

*heping jueqi* 和平掘起

*hongmao* 紅毛

*Hongxi* 洪熙

*Hu Song* 胡松

*Hu Zongxian* 胡宗憲

*Huang Ming zuxun* 皇明祖訓

*Huang Shujing* 黃叔璥

*huazhi* 花紙

*bushi* 互市

*bushou zhi* 護壽紙

*ji* 記

*Ji Liuqi* 計六奇

*Jiajing yilai wonu rukou zongbi-annian biao* 嘉靖以來倭奴入寇總編年表

*jianbie yan* 餞別宴

*Jiang Bao* 姜寶

*jiangjun qu* 將軍區

*Jiangnan jinglüe* 江南經略

*Jiangyin xian yanjiang gangxuntu* 江陰縣沿江港汛圖

*jianmin* 賤民

*jiezhi tu* 界址圖

*Jin Wuxiang* 金武祥

*Jinghai* 靖海

*jinghai hou* 靖海候

*jingshi* 進士

*jingshi shixue* 經世史學

*jinian huace* 紀念畫冊

*jinshi* 進士

*Jinzhilun yukouzhe, yize yue shibo dangkai, yize yue shibo budangkai.*

*Yu yiwei jie weiye* 今之論禦寇者，一則曰市舶當開，一則曰市舶不當開。愚以為皆未也

*juguan zhe dangyi junfu zhixin wei xin, yi baixing zhixin wei xin, buke yi yiji zhixin weixin* 居官者當以君父之心為心，以百姓之心為心，不可以一己之心為心

*juren* 舉人

*kaihai* 開海

*King Guojian* 句踐

*Kouzong fenhe shimo tupu* 寇踪分合  
始末圖譜

Kuilei hu 傀儡湖

Kunshan 昆山

Kwan Kiu Cheong 關喬昌

Lan Bin 藍斌

Lan Chun 藍純

Lan Dingguang 藍廷光

Lan Dingyuan 藍鼎元

Lan Jishan 藍繼善

Lan Rui 藍瑞

Lan Tangwen 藍唐文

Lan Wei 藍偉

*Lanlun* 懶倫

*Lansheng queran youshou, yiran  
youwei, jingshi zhi liangcai, wudao  
zhi yuyi ye* 藍生確然有守, 毅然有  
為, 經世之良材, 吾道之羽翼也

Lee Teng-hui 李登輝

*li* 利

*li* 里

Li Dingyuan 李鼎元

Li Hongzhang 李鴻章

Li Shiyao 李侍堯

Li Wenfeng 李文鳳

Li Yong 李勇

*lian bingding, xuansishi, jingqixie,  
shen jimi* 練兵丁、選死士、精器械、  
慎機密

Lian Heng 連橫

Liang Daoming 梁道明

*liang'an guanxi* 兩岸關係

*Liangjiang zhongdu* 兩江總督

Lin Linchang 林麟烱

*lishi* 礪石

*Liuqiuguo zhilüe* 琉球國志略

Liu Daxia 劉大夏

Liu Yizheng 柳詒徵

*lu* 錄

*lüefang Zhongguo* 略倣中國

Luo Bi 羅璧

Ma Shunde 馬順德

Ma Su 馬謖

Mao Kun 茅坤

*Mazu* 媽祖

*Mingji nanlue* 明季南略

*Mingshi* 明史

Mingyali 明呀哩

*Minhai jiyao* 閩海紀要

Minnan 閩南

*minzu dayi* 民族大義

*minzu zuiren* 民族罪人

*mu* 畝

*muyou* 幕友

*nanyang* 南洋

*nanyue* 南越

*neige xueshi* 內閣御史

*neihai* 內海

*neiwaiyang yu tu* 內外洋輿圖

*Nü xiaojing* 女孝經

*Nüxue* 女學

Oulouba 歐羅巴

*paotai* 砲台

*pichu dongnan* 僻處東南

*Pingyang Ying yan hai jie zhi tu* 平陽營沿海界址圖

Qi Jiguang 戚繼光

*qi jinchen yi suide yanran gaozhen, yu neidi chenmin fen leli zhi wanyi*  
其君臣亦遂得宴然高枕，與內地臣民分樂利之萬一

Qi Kun 齊鯤

*qianzong* 千總

*Qing shi gao* 清史稿

*qingge* 清革

Qinhuai River 秦淮河

*qinzhan haizei* 擒斬海賊

*qishe* 騎射

Qiu Jun 邱濬

Qiu Yancheng 丘彥誠

Qiu Ying 仇英

*Qiushi* 求事

Qiutian 秋田

*qu yizu chujing, yu Zhongguo youzhizhe zaigu xiongfeng*  
驅異族出境，語中國有志者再鼓雄風

Quan Kui 全魁

*quanlan tu* 全覽圖

*Riben daoyi rukou zhi tu* 日本島夷入寇之圖

*Riben guotu* 日本國圖

*Riben kaolüe* 日本考略

*Rushi Jin Yingyang yuzei zhanyu Mupoling si zhi* 儒士金應暘與賊戰於母婆嶺死之

Sanchahe 三叉河

Sanfoqi 三佛齊

*Sanfoqi wang* 三佛齊王

*seiseifu* 征西府

*shangchuan* 商船

*shanzhi dao yi songshi* 善治盜及訟師

Shen Fuzong 沈福宗

Shen Han 沈涵

*shengyuan* 生員

Shi Erjie 施二姐

Shi Jinqing 施進卿

Shi Kefa 史可法

Shi Lang 施琅

*Shi Lang da Jiangjun* 施琅大將軍

Shi Lang Jiangjun jinian guan 施琅將軍展覽館

*Shi Lang re* 施琅熱

*Shi Liuguji* 使琉球記

*Shi liuguji lu* 使琉球錄

Shi Shipiao

*shi* 石

*shi Zhongguo fuqiang* 示中國富強

*shidafu jia yiran er* 士大夫家亦然耳

*shijun yan* 事竣宴

Shilifoshi 室利佛逝

*shilu* 使錄

*shixi wangti* 世襲罔替

- shiyi* 事宜  
*shizhi* 石芝  
*Shuyu zhousilu* 殊域周咨錄  
*sibai houjie* 色白好潔  
*sihai* 四海  
 Sima Rangju 司馬穰苴  
 Sunqua 順呱  
 Suxiang suibi 粟香隨筆  
*Taiwan minzhuguo* 臺灣民主國  
*Taiwan tongshi* 臺灣通史  
 Taizhong Shixing zongqinhui 台中  
 施姓宗親會  
*Taizhoufu Taipingxian haiyang  
 quantu* 台州府太平縣海洋全圖  
 Tang Jingsong 唐景崧  
 Tang Shu 唐樞  
 Tang Shunzhi 唐順志  
 Taohuagang 桃花港  
*Tianhou* 天后  
*tianwei* 天威  
 Tu Zhonglü 屠仲律  
*tujing* 圖經  
*wai daxiyang* 外大西洋  
*waibang* 外邦  
*waihai* 外海  
 Wan Biao 萬表  
 Wang Dahai 王大海  
 Wang Daoxing 王道行  
 Wang Ji 汪楫  
 Wang Zhi 汪直  
*wangzhou yan* 望舟宴  
*Wanli Haifang* 萬里海防  
 Wei Xiao 魏校  
 Wei Yuan 魏源  
 Wei Zheng yishi 偽鄭遺事  
*weiyizhe bulao erfu* 為邑者不勞而富  
 Wen Tianxiang 文天祥  
 Wen Zhengming 文徵明  
*wokou* 倭寇  
 Wu Bingjian 伍秉鑑  
 Wu Wai 吳外  
 Wu Wenhua 吳文華  
*wuchan* 物產  
*wuguan ju quanhong* 武官俱穿紅  
*wuren zhi jing* 無人之境  
*wuzhang qizhi, wugua paidao* 勿張  
 旗幟，勿掛牌刀  
*xiyang* 西洋  
 Xia Lin 夏琳  
 Xiang Zhong 項忠  
*xianzhi* 縣志  
*Xiaofang Hucai Yudi Congchao* 小方  
 壺輿地叢鈔  
*xiaoluan* 小亂  
*xiaozi* 孝子  
 Xie Jie 謝杰  
 Xie Qinggao 謝清高  
*xin luxian* 新路線  
*xin Zhongguo* 新中國  
*Xingcha shenglan* 星槎勝覽

*xiucai* 秀才

*xiyang* 西洋

Xu Baoguang 徐葆光

Xu Guangqi 徐光啓

Xu Hailü 許海率

Xu Jiyu 徐繼畬

Xu Ke 徐珂

*Xu Liuqiuguo zhilüe* 續琉球國志畧

Xu Wei 徐渭

Xu Zi 徐熹

Xuande 宣德

*xuanwei si* 宣慰司

Xue Jun 薛俊

*xunkou tu* 汛口圖

*yamu wang* 鴨母王

Yan Congjian 嚴從簡

Yan Congzhou 嚴從周

Yan Song 閻嵩

Yang Zai 楊載

Yangcheng hu 陽澄湖

*Yanhai tuben* 沿海圖本

*yanli* 宴禮

Yanping junwang ci 延平郡王祠

Yaosima 要是麻

Yebi Mountain 葉壁山

Yegu 野古

*yeshi* 野史

*yi* 義

*yi dakai jinwang, tingmin maoyi, yi haiwai zhi youyu bu neidi zhi buzhu, ciqu ronghuan xuyu zai* 宜大開禁網，聽民貿易，以海外之有餘，補內地之不足，此豈容緩須臾哉

*yi sibaizhe weigui* 以色白者爲貴

*yingfeng yan* 迎風宴

*Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛環志略

*Yingjili guo* 噶咭利國

*yingxuntu* 營汛圖

*Yingya shenglan* 瀛涯勝覽

Yongle 永樂

*you xiucai feng wang, wei tianxia dushuren biekai shengmian* 由秀才封王，為天下讀書人別開生面

Yu Jideng 余繼登

Yu Yonghe 郁永河

*yu Zhongguo lüetong* 與中國略同

Yuan Zhongche 袁忠徹

*yuding* 漁丁

Yue Fei 岳飛

Yuegang 月港

*Yueshan congtao* 月山叢談

Zaoshan 灶山

*Zei fan Jiaying zhihui Cheng Lu sizhi* 賊犯嘉興指揮程祿死之

Zeng Guofan 曾國藩

Zhang Boxing 張伯行

Zhang Ruozhong 張若仲

Zhang Shiche 張時徹

*Zhang wenxianggong zouyi* 張文襄  
公奏議

Zhang Xuan 張瑄

Zhanglangju 漲浪居

Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽

Zhao Zhi 趙秩

*zhao Zhongguo shi* 照中國式

Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功

Zheng Chenggong yanjiu xuehui 鄭  
成功研究學會

Zheng Dingrui 鄭定瑞

Zheng Dong 鄭迥

Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應

Zheng Guofan 曾國藩

Zheng He 鄭和

Zheng Keshuang 鄭克塽

Zheng Ruoceng 鄭若曾

Zheng Wenkang 鄭文康

Zheng Xiao 鄭曉

Zheng Yi Sao 鄭一嫂

Zheng Zhilong 鄭芝龍

Zhengjiaba 鄭家壩

*zhengtong* 正統

*zhi* 志

*Zhihui Min Rong yishi Wu Desi Wu  
Deliu yu zei zhanyu Zhoushan sizhi*  
指揮閔鎔義士吳德四吳德六與賊戰  
於舟山死之

*Zhinan guangyi* 指南廣義

*zhongjie* 忠節

*Zhongqiu yan* 中秋宴

*Zhongshan chuanxinlu* 中山傳信錄

*zhongxing wang* 中興王

*zhongyang luxian* 中央論述

Zhou Huang 周煌

Zhu Qing 朱清

Zhu Shi 朱軾

Zhu Yigui 朱一貴

Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮

*zhuzhong baigong, fazhan gongshang*  
注重百工, 發展工商

*zigu fuhazhe suoweiyou ye* 自古浮海  
者所未有也

*ziwei cixing suode zheduo, ren  
moneng yuye* 自謂此行所得者多, 人  
莫能喻也

*ziyou you caizhi, fengqu weimao,  
bobian jimin, qiangong jinmi* 自幼  
有才智, 豐軀偉貌, 博辯機敏, 謙恭  
謹密

*zongdu haiyun dachen* 總督海運大臣

*zougou* 走狗

Zuo Zongtong 左宗棠

*zuodou yushi* 左都御史

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# Index

- Afeng Academy 162, 163, 200
- Bai Yingli 92
- Battle of Huaiyang, the 75–76
- Battle of Palembang, the 42–50
- Battle of Zhengjiaba 27
- burning of Zheng He's fleet and materials 53
- buyi junshi xuejia* (maritime theorist from the lower class) 61
- Cai Shiyuan 162
- Canglang ting* (Surging Wave Pavilion) 64
- Canton 237
- Canton system 9, 15
- Cantonese 16
- Cape Santiago 6
- capricious relationship/attitude 42, 50, 270
- capriciousness of governance 13–15
- cefeng zhou* (investiture ship) 211
- Changshi shuishiyong neiwaiyang yu tu* (Diagrams of the inner–outer seas of the naval base in Changshi) 97
- Chaozhou fu Chenghai Chaoyang Huilai Nanaodao fangyutu* (Diagram of Chenghai, Chaoyang, Huilai, and the Nanao island) 119
- Chen Kan 213
- Chen Kangqi 133
- Chen Lunjong 119, 243
- Chen Menglin 162
- Chiang Ching-kuo 141
- China–Ryukyu bonding 235
- China–Taiwan integration 146
- Chinese essence 1
- Chinnery, George 10
- Chola Empire, the 35
- Chou Ying 59
- chouhai* 69
- Chouhai tubian* 66, 89
- Chuzan 206
- civilized–barbaric matrix 246
- coastal China 3
- coastal fortification 58
- cohong merchants 9
- Columbus, Christopher 28
- Confucian 13, 31, 62, 87, 89, 165, 228, 266, 274
- crafty villains 33
- Cultural Revolution 141
- Da Qing yitong zhi* (*Comprehensive Gazetteer of the Great Qing Realm*) 216–217
- daguo* (towering nations) 252
- Daoguang emperor, the 264
- DaQing wannian yitong dili quantu* (Complete geographical map of the great Qing Dynasty) 96–97

- daxiayang* (Large outer western ocean) 250  
 Diaoyudao (the Senkaku Islands) 60  
 Dutch Republic, the 256–258  
 dwarf kingdom (woguo) 65  
 Dzungar 158  
  
 England 258–262  
  
 Fairbank, John King 107–108  
 Fang Bao 186  
 Fang Chaoying 60  
 Fang Guozhen 32  
 Fei Xin 48  
 Feng Zhang 86  
*Fenghua xian shuilu yingxun jiezhì tu*  
 (Diagram of land and maritime checkpoints of Fenghua) 99  
 First Opium War 3, 11–12, 244  
 foreign sea space 105  
 Formosa 184  
 four adjacent seas (*sihai*) 4  
 four customs offices 109  
 Fu Yiling 143, 150  
 Fujian 125, 133  
 Fujianese 16  
*fuqiang* (wealth and power) 192  
*Fushan yingxun zongtu* (Complete diagram of the harbours and checkpoints in Fushan) 119  
  
 Gao Cheng 213  
 Gao Jin 113  
 Gu Yanwu 246  
 Gu Zuyu 246  
  
*haiguo* (maritime countries) 243  
*Haiguo wenjian lu* (*The Record of Things Seen and Heard among the Maritime Kingdoms*) 119  
*Haijiang yangjie xingshi tu* (Map of maritime border and situation) 96  
  
*haijin* 29, 82, 166–167  
*Hailu* (*Record of the Sea*) 239, 240–242  
*haitu* (sea charts) 62  
*haiyang tese* 4  
*haiyang zhishi* (matters related to maritime affairs) 124, 200  
*haiyun* (sea transport) 193  
*Hangzhou Wan shuilu yingxuntu*  
 (Diagram of harbours and checkpoints of the Hangzhou Bay) 115  
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 1, 108  
*heping jueqi* (rising peacefully) 107  
 Hokuзан 206  
 Hongwu emperor, the 29, 33, 54, 87, 206–207  
 Hongxi emperor, the 54  
 Hu Song 65  
 Hu Zongxian 60  
*Huang Ming zuxun* 30  
*Huang Qing zhigong tu* (*The Qing Imperial Tribute Illustrations*) 217  
 Huang Shujing 134, 187  
 Hugh Gough 93  
  
 inner sea 105  
 Islanders 33  
  
 Jiajing emperor, the 87  
 Jiang Bao 57  
*Jiangnan jinglüe* 66  
*Jiangyin xian yanjiang gangxuntu*  
 (Diagram of sea and river checkpoints of the Jiangyin county) 101  
*jianmin* 33, 269  
 Jin Wunxiang 136  
*jinghai* (pacify the maritime frontier) 90  
*jingshi* (statecraft reformism) 161

- kaihai* (open the sea) 87  
 Kangxi Atlas, the 105  
 Kangxi emperor, the 6, 20, 109, 117, 127, 133, 136, 139, 143, 147, 153, 166, 167, 178, 179, 186, 234  
 King Daoming 38–39  
 King Parameswara of Singapura 36–37  
 Koxinga 5  
 Kublai Khan 26  
 Kunshan 63, 67  
 Kwan Kiu Cheong 10  
 Lam Qua 10  
 Lan Bin 160  
 Lan Jishan 160  
 Lan Tingzhen 182  
 land-based power 1  
 Lang Tangwen 161  
 Li Hongzhang 138, 176  
 Li Wenfeng 266  
 Li Xiaocong 92  
 Lian Heng 139–140  
 Liang Daoming 38, 41  
 Lin Linchang 212  
 Lin Zexu 264  
*Liuqinguo zhilüe* 218, 221, 222, 231, 240  
 Livingstone, David 264  
 London 260–261  
 Lucy Gough 93  
  
 Ma He 26–27  
 Ma Huan 36  
 Macartney Mission, the 9  
 Macartney, George 10  
 magnetic compass 4  
 Mahan, Alfred Thayer 21, 105  
 Malacca 247–248  
 Malay world, the 36  
 Manchu 16  
 Mandala 249  
 Mao Haijin 58  
 Mao Kun 60  
  
 Map of Inner and Outer Waters of the Changshishi Naval Garrison (*Changshi shuishiyang neiwaiyang yu tu*) 112  
 maritime consciousness 276–277  
 Maritime Experiential Museum in Singapore 51  
 maritime sub-systems 3  
 mean people 33  
 Meiji Japan 7  
 Meizhou 237  
 ‘Ming way’, the 114  
 Minhai jiyao 133  
 Muaro Jambi 34  
*muyou* (private advisor) 62, 66, 182  
  
 Nagasaki 7  
 Nanjing 25, 51  
*nanyue* 4  
 Nanzan 206  
 National Qing History Editorial Committee 145  
 naval-cum-commercial power 6  
 New Qing Maritime History 103–118  
*Nina*, the 28  
*nüxue* (women learning) 191  
  
 Omida 198  
 One Belt One Road initiative 15, 40  
 Orang Laut 37–38  
*Oulouba* 250  
  
 Palembang 34  
 paper industry in Ryukyu 223  
 Pearl River Delta, the 8–11  
 Pegolotti, Francesco Balducci 251  
 pictorial turn 121  
*Ping Tai ji* (*Record of the Pacification of Taiwan*) 183, 185  
*Pinta*, the 28  
 Portugal 252–256  
 Prince Kaneyoshi 208–210  
 Pulo Penang 248

- Qi Jiquang 89  
 Qianlong emperor, the 8, 18, 22,  
     113, 186, 201, 214, 219, 226,  
     234  
 Qiu Jun 55  
 Qiu Yancheng 47  
  
 Republic of Formosa 137  
*Riben daoyi rukou zhi tu* (Map of  
     Japanese pirate invasion) 70  
*Riben guotu* (The Map of Japan) 70  
*River Elegy* 3, 271  
 ruler of Srivijaya 38  
 Ryukyu ink stones 224  
 Ryukyu Kingdom/Islands 203, 206,  
     212, 215  
  
*Santa Maria*, the 28  
 Sanzan (three mountains) 206  
 Shen Fuzong 91–92  
 Shen Han 162  
 Shen's map 91–92  
 Shi Jingqing 43, 46, 47, 50  
 Shi Lang 7  
 Shi Lang fever 146  
*Shi Lang yanjiuhui* (research  
     association of Shi Lang)  
     146–147  
 Shi Shipiao 182, 185  
 Shi Weiqing 144  
 Shilifoshi 34  
 Skinner, William 149  
 sleeping dragon 1  
 Song dynasty 4  
 Southern Ocean (*Nanyang*) 272  
 space of multiples 273  
 Srivijaya 34  
 Straits of Malacca and Sunda 48  
 Sumatra 46  
 Sunqua 10  
  
 Taiwan 5–7  
 Taiwan Strait 7  
  
*Taizhoufu Taipingxian haiyang quantu*  
     (Complete maritime diagram  
     of the Taiping county of the  
     Taizhou prefecture) 99–100  
 Tan Shengshou 39  
 Tang dynasty 4  
 Tang Jingsong 137  
 Tang Shu 57  
 Tang Shunzhi 60  
*The Great General Shi Lang* 149  
 Thirteen Factories 9  
 Three Feudatories Revolt 127  
*Tianhou (Mazu)* 227, 232, 235  
 Tianshun emperor, the 63  
*tianwei* (the might and support of the  
     Heavens) 75  
*tianxia* (all under Heaven) 245, 246,  
     263  
 Toyotomi Hideyoshi 6  
 Treasure Fleet, the 45  
 Treaty of Shimonosaki, the 137  
 tributary system 45, 82  
  
 waegu 56  
*wai daxiyang* (the Large Outer Western  
     Ocean) 244  
*wai bang* (outer counterpart) 221  
 Wan Biao 81  
 Wang Dahai 243  
 Wang Daoxing 66  
 Wang Ji 212, 219, 230  
 Wang Liu 242  
 Wang Zhi 53  
 watertight bulkhead compartments 4  
 Wei Xian 64  
 Wei Xiao 64  
 Wei Yuan 243  
 Wen Zhengming 60  
 Western Sea, the 26  
 Wills, John E. 114  
*wokou* 20, 56, 58, 65, 66, 73, 75,  
     79–88, 207  
 Wu Bingjian 10

- Wu Wenhua 207–210  
 Xia Lin 133, 134  
 Xiamen 127  
 Xiang Zhong 54  
 Xie Jie 56  
*xinanyang* (Southwestern ocean) 250  
*xiyang* (Western Ocean) 243, 250  
 Xu Baoguang 230  
 Xu Guangqi 59  
 Xu Jiyu 243  
 Xu Ke 135–136  
 Xu Wei 60  
 Xu Zi 134  
 Xuande emperor, the 54  
 Yan Congjian 266  
 Yan Congzhou 54  
 Yan Song 65  
 Yang Bingnan 238  
 Yang Zai 207–210  
 Yangtze River Delta, the 101  
*Yanhai tuben* 65  
*yanli* (formal banquets) 229  
*Yanping junwang ci* (Zheng Chenggong temple) 154  
*yingxun tu* (diagrams of coastal garrisons) 93, 95–96, 111, 117, 122  
 Yongle emperor, the 25, 39, 51  
 Yongzheng emperor, the 8, 20, 158, 167, 178, 183, 186, 187, 188, 198  
 Yongzheng reform, the 158  
 Yu Yonghe 134–135, 253  
 Yuan-Ming transition 35  
 Yuegang 81  
 Zha Shenxing 133  
 Zhang Boxing 162, 163  
 Zhang Shiche 85  
 Zhang Shicheng 32  
 Zhang Xueli 230  
 Zhangpu 159–160  
 Zhao Erxun 139  
 Zheng Boke 39  
*Zheng Chenggong yanjiu xuehui* (The Association of Zheng Chenggong) 150  
 Zheng Chenggong 126, 152  
 Zheng Guanying 136  
 Zheng Guofan 138, 176  
 Zheng He 1, 3, 51, 54, 58  
 Zheng Keshuang 128  
 Zheng maritime apparatus 125  
 Zheng Zhilong 126  
 Zhengs of Kunshan, the 62–67  
*zhengtong* (rightful rule) 211  
*Zhongsan chuanxinlu* (*Accounts of the Mission to Zhongsan*) 220  
*zhongxing wang* (the king of revival) 182  
 Zhu Shi 186  
 Zhu Wan 82  
 Zhu Yigui 177–178, 180–182  
 Zhu Yigui rebellion 177  
 Zuo Zongtong 138

