Chinese Sea Merchants and Pirates

MATSUURA Akira

Key words: Chinese Sea, Sea Merchants, Pinates, Junks, East Asia

Introduction: the course of research in Chinese maritime history

Studies of global *maritime history* have frequently dealt with questions involving the Mediterranean and Atlantic, focusing on the history of Western Europe. However, there have been few studies dealing specifically with the waters surrounding East Asia. It would be fair to say that up until now historical studies looking at the seas lying within the area contained by the Chinese mainland, the Korean peninsula, the Japanese archipelago, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippine and Indonesian archipelagos, the Malay peninsula, and mainland Indochina, namely the Bohai, Yellow, East China and South China Seas, have been slow to appear. This is perhaps because existing studies of Chinese history have mostly taken a *continental view of history*, as Kawakatsu Heita points out in 'Launching Maritime History' (*Kaiyō shikan no funade*): 'postwar Japanese have not had a view of history that takes account of the sea.'

It has been said that Chinese history emerged from the Yellow River basin. Although the importance of the culture of the Yangtze River basin has recently been acknowledged, the cultural activity of the maritime regions, with their broad coastline, has been neglected and for a long time has received little attention. As archaeological surveys of the coastal regions have progressed, the history of the maritime life of Chinese people living in coastal areas has gradually come to be re-thought. Especially as China's policy of opening up to the outside world has progressed since the 1980s, the history of its coastal regions has been re-evaluated. With historical studies of the special economic zones (SEZs) being particularly prolific, research focused on the port cities of the coastal regions has received a lot of attention, and historical studies focused on the famous trading ports of Tianjin, Shanghai, Ningbo, Wenzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen and Guangzhou have begun to be published.

Research on port cities and their economic relations with the hinterland surrounding them is developing from the previous court-centered history into research on regional history. I would like to reflect this research into regional history in looking at what we can find out if we look at the previously land-focused Chinese history from a marine perspective, and especially looking at the Chinese sea merchants (*haishang*), who have played a central role in its maritime life.

'Chinese sea merchants' refers to the Chinese merchants who traded by sea, and among the important results of Japanese research into Chinese sea merchants, mention must be made of Kuwahara

Junks at Youngjian (甬江・寧波) estuary, 1981

Jitsuzō's[1] *The Exploits of Pu Shougeng* (*Ho Jukō no jiseki*). Kuwahara first reported on his research on Pu Shougeng[2] at the 1915 meeting of the Tokyo Historical Society, and published the results of his studies in five editions of *Shigaku zasshi* between October 1915 and October 1916. These were published in book form, with the addition of subsequent research, as *The Exploits of Pu Shougeng, State Agent Trade Supervisor from the West* (*Sō-matsu no teikyo shihaku seiikijin Ho Jukō no jiseki*) in 1923. This book does not appear from the title to be directly related to Chinese sea merchants, but it is one of the best and most indispensable Japanese studies on East Asian history, as it contains various research on the diverse activities of Chinese sea merchants. Other studies worthy of note include Kuwahara's *Essays on the History of East-West Communication* (*Tōzai kōtsūshi ronsō*), Fujita Toyohachi's[3] *Studies on the History of East-West Interaction: South Seas* (*Tōzai kōshōshi no kenkyū: nankai hen*), and Ishida Mikinosuke's[4]

1) **Kuwahara Jitsuzō** (1870-1931): Japanese scholar of East Asian history. Professor at the College of Letters of Kyoto Imperial University, he made a great contribution in the areas of the history of east-west communication, cultural history and the history of law, and established the basis of education in East Asian history. His work is collected in *The Complete Works of Kuwahara Jitsuzō* (*Kuwahara Jitsuzō zenshū*) published by Iwanami Shoten in five volumes plus appendix.

2) **Pu Shougeng** (dates unknown): a Muslim south seas trader of Arabian or Persian origin in China's Southern Song and early Yuan dynasties. He became a trade official in Quanzhou, Fujian province in the mid-thirteenth century.

3) **Fujita Toyohachi** (1869-1929): Japanese scholar of East Asia. After graduating from the Tokyo Imperial University College of Letters, he worked in education in Qing China, where he contributed to the development of Chinese academia, before becoming a professor at Waseda and Tokyo Imperial Universities. In 1928 he became director of the History Department at the newly established Taipei Imperial University, but died soon afterwards. His research is collected in *Studies on the History of East-West Interaction* (*Tōzai kōshōshi no kenkyū*, in two volumes: *Nankai hen* and *Seiiki hen*).

4) **Ishida Mikinosuke** (1891-1974): Japanese scholar of East Asia. After graduating from the Tokyo Imperial University College of Letters, he devoted his energies for many years to managing Tōyō Bunko (Komagome, Bunkyō-ku, Tokyo), which collected important books on East Asian studies. He seems to have published over 400 volumes of research, but apart from his generally know *Spring in Changan* (*Chōan no haru*, Kōdansha Gakujutsu Bunko), part

Chinese Historical Documents on the South Seas (*Nankai ni kansuru Shina shiryō*), and these earlier studies built up a repository of research focused on Chinese historical documents in the area of interaction between east and west. However, although these studies have been taken up in the history of the various nations and in regional history, they have not been developed from the viewpoint of maritime history. In this book, I would like to pursue these historical documents with a focus on maritime history.

1 Problems concerning Chinese sea merchants

The business of Chinese sea merchants

There are few concrete examples to clarify the economic activity of Chinese sea merchants, but I would like to relate the following example, which is known in some detail.

It is a story of foreign trade, found in volume 12 of *Yue Jian* by Wang Zaijin from the latter half of the sixteenth century. In the Wanli era (1567-1619), a certain Lin Qing from Fuqing in Fujian province built a large ship with a ship owner, Wang Hou, and employed Zheng Song and Wang Yi as *baduo* (helmsmen), Zheng Qi, Lin Cheng and others as *shuishou* (lower ranking sailors), along with Jin Shishan and Huang Chenglin as silversmiths, Li Ming, who was familiar with navigation, as a guide, and Chen Hua, who spoke *woyu* (Japanese), as an interpreter. The ship set sail for Japan, loaded with *shaluo*,[5] pongee, silk, *bupi*,[6] white sugar, porcelain, fruit, scented fans and combs, sewing needles, and paper. They planned to trade these in Japan for Japanese silver, which the silversmiths would smelt onboard for them to bring back. This account gives a concrete example of what shipping operations in overseas trade were like at that time. This kind of practice followed from the immense profits that could be made from overseas trade.

It was not necessarily the case that those onboard ships were all of the same nationality. The crew of a shogunate ship that arrived in the Korean peninsula in 1604 included Japanese and Portuguese, as well as Chinese. Wen Jin, from Haicheng county in Zhangzhou, Fujian province, who was 35 at the time, had set off the previous February on a trading journey from Fujian to Giao Chi in Vietnam, but was attacked by a Japanese ship just before landing. Over one hundred were killed, with only twenty-eight survivors. Wen Jin and the other survivors went with the Japanese ship to Jianpuzhai, the present day Cambodia, where they bought leather goods, wax, pepper, *sumu*,[7] ivory, rhinoceros horn, *daimei*,[8] gold and silver before heading for Japan. The Portuguese onboard were involved in trade between Macau and Jianpuzhai, and had joined the ship to trade with Japan along with the Japanese crew. The Japanese had set out with Chinese living in Nagasaki and Satsuma, with the intention of trading with Cambodia.

The ship with these people onboard had encountered a storm on the way to Japan and been blown

---

of his research is collected in *A Library of East Asian Cultural History* (*Tōa bunkashi sōkō*, Tōyō Bunko) and the four-volume *Collected Works of Ishida Mikinosuke* (*Ishida Mikinosuke chosakushū*, Rokkō Shuppan).

5) ***shaluo*** (silk gauze): silk woven into a thin fabric, which was highly prized because of the complexity of its manufacture.

6) ***bupi***: generally a woven cotton cloth, in which China had the most advanced technology in the world at this time. From the eighteenth century onwards, cotton cloth exported to Europe was highly prized as 'Nankeen cotton.'

7) ***sumu***: sappan wood, an evergreen tree grown in the tropics, the bark of which is used for red dye.

8) ***daimei***: a turtle, which grows up to one meter in length. Its shell is boiled and used for tortoiseshell work.

off course to the Korean peninsula. This ship was one of the so-called *shuinsen*,[9] that had been granted licenses in the form of a red seal (*shuin*) to voyage overseas by Tokugawa Ieyasu. One of the Japanese on board had been provided with five hundred taels of silver in trading capital from Ieyasu, in addition to the license.

What kind of profit could be made from overseas trade at this time? For example, one hundred catties of Chinese-made Huzhou silk[10], which Chinese merchants took Luzon in the Philippines in the mid-seventeenth century could make one hundred taels of silver, but if it was exported abroad it could apparently fetch as much as three hundred taels. If one could overlook the danger and succeed in the venture, huge profits were guaranteed. Both in the East and in the West, in commerce that sought to exploit interregional price differences, the greater the danger the greater the riches it offered.

The shipping business that targeted instant riches of this sort saw the appearance in the Qing dynasty of ships specializing in ocean-going transport. Taking the example of Jiang Longshun's ship from Yuanhe county in Suzhou, Jiangnan (later Jiangsu) province, which was carried off course to the Ryukyu islands in January of 1786 (year 51 of the Qianlong era), it was hired with a crew of twenty in (intercalary) March of year 49 of the Qianlong era by a Mr. Huang of Zhenjiang to transport ginger to Tianjin. It was then hired in Tianjin by a Mr. He from the port of Niuzhuang in the northeast to transport rice from Niuzhuang to Tianjin. Then it was hired by a Mr. Shi of Shandong province to take spices from Tianjin to Huang county. Unable to find an employer in Huang county, it headed for its port in the northeast, where it was chartered by a Mr. Huo to take rice to Huang county again. It headed back to its northeast port again and was chartered by Mr. Huo to take rice to Lijin county in Shandong province. When that was finished, it went again to its northeast port, where it was chartered to transport rice to Tianjin. In Tianjin, it was chartered by You Huali, a merchant from Fujian, to go to Ningbo, and it was loaded with jujubes in Haifeng county in Shandong before setting sail, but it got into difficulty at sea on the way to Ningbo and was blown off course to the Kingdom of the Ryukyus. In this actual example, the ship was chartered seven times in the space of two years, earning transportation fees in the process.

As for the transportation fees for ships engaged in this shipping and transportation business, Xu Wansheng's ship from Ninghaizhou in Dengzhou, Shangdong province was chartered with a crew of twenty in July 1862 (the first year of the Tongzhi era) by timber merchant from Niuzhuang to transport 1,350 pieces of timber from Ninghaizhou, near the city of Yantai, to Niuzhuang, for which the charter fee was four hundred taels of silver. The same ship was chartered by a traveling merchant in Niuzhuang to transport twenty *lou* (bamboo crates) of oil and 630 piculs of soybeans to the Jiangnan area, for which the transportation fee was 535 taels of silver. The first of these journeys was from Ninghaizhou, the present day Muping county, to Niuzhuang, the second from Niuzhuang to, presumably, Shanghai, which is four times the distance by sea, but the charter fee was around 1.3 times. It is impossible to generalize, since it depends on the volume of cargo, but fees must have been decided by the distance traveled and

9) ***shuinsen***: ships which made trading voyages to south-east Asia, licensed with a permit to travel overseas, in the form of a *shuin* (red seal), from the Momoyama period to the early Tokugawa period. Those who traded using the licensed ships included the *daimyō* of western domains, such as Shimazu and Hosokawa, and merchants from Kyoto, Osaka, Sakai and Nagasaki. Exports included silver, copper and lacquer ware, while imports included raw silk, silk cloth, deerskins, sappan wood and sugar. Between 1604 and 1635, as many as 350 such licensed ships were sent to what are now Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines and Taiwan.

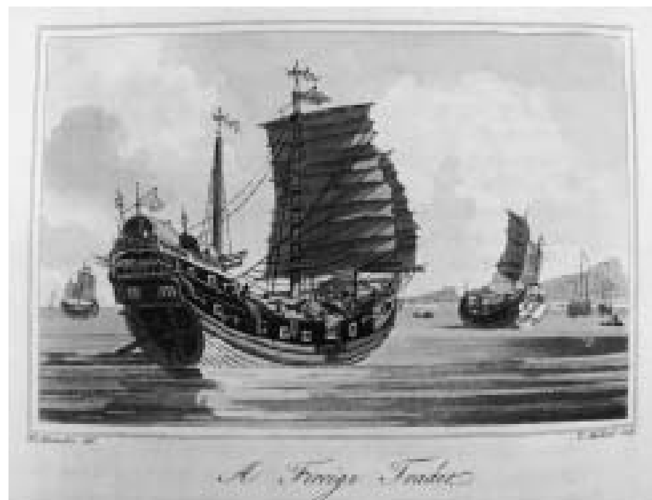
10) **Huzhou silk** (*husi*): raw silk from Huzhou, a famous centre for the production of raw silk, in Zhejiang province, south of Lake Tai. Rice and mulberry cultivation and sericulture progressed from the late Song dynasty onwards, and from late Ming and early Qing the manufacture and weaving of silk developed. 'Huzhou silk' in particular established itself as a brand name.

the volume carried.

In the case of coastal sand-junks in the reign of the Qing emperor Daoguang, if they were requisitioned by the government to carry loads of 70% designated rice and 30% other cargo for unloading in Tianjin, they were paid a fee of five *qian* per picul of rice. The fee for transporting a cargo of 3,000 piculs to Tianjin, with 2,100 piculs of rice, was therefore 1,050 taels, and for a cargo of 1,500 piculs, with 1,050 piculs of rice, it was 525 taels. Since money would also have been earned from trading the cargo, the transportation earnings from one sand-junk would seem to have been from seven or eight hundred taels up to over one thousand taels, and since it would likely have made over a thousand taels on the return journey as well, high earnings would seem to have been obtainable as long as the journey was accomplished safely. On the other hand, as far as the costs of building a ship are concerned, large seagoing ships of this sort, carrying 3,000 piculs, cost as much as 10,000 taels of silver. Medium-size ships cost several thousand taels, but, given the earnings that could be made from a single journey, the cost could be recovered within a few years if several safe journeys could be accomplished. The merchants who operated these Chinese ships had a wide range of activities in a variety of forms, making large profits in the process.

Cargo carried by Chinese ships

The cargo carried by these seagoing ships varied enormously between times and regions. Carried from the south seas to China were pepper and sappan wood, cloves[11] and other spices, while exports from China to other countries generally included woven silk, china and porcelain. China and porcelain in particular are found even today in the wrecks of sunken ships that are discovered from time to time. A well known wreck, a long-distance ocean-going sailing ship thought to be from the end of the Southern Song dynasty, which was discovered off Quanzhou in Fujian in 1974, was carrying a variety of objects, including spices, medicine, bronze coins, china and porcelain, bronze- and woodenware, textiles, and leather products. A wreck found off the coast of Mokpo, in southwest Korea, the ‘Xin’an ship,’ thought to be an ocean-going sailing ship from the Yuan dynasty, was found to have been carrying more than twenty thousand pieces of china and porcelain, including celadon and white porcelain, eight million bronze coins weighing as much as twenty-eight tons, and red sandalwood.



‘A Foreign Trader’,
Barrow, “*Travels in China*”, 1804

Up until the Song dynasty, low volume, high value products, which had a large interregional price difference, were common, but from the beginning of the Qing dynasty cargoes of coastal ships in particular are often large volumes of

11) **cloves**: the dried buds of *syzygium aromaticum*. Used as a spice or medicine. Cloves originate from the Moluccas, and are a scented shrub of the *Myrtaceae* family that grows in the tropics.

commodities. These would include rice, soybeans, and sugar. Fujian, which had constant shortages of rice, shipped it in from Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Taiwan. Soybeans, which were used as food and soil fertilizer in the Jiangnan region, were transported by ship from the coastal areas of Huabei and the Northeast to Shanghai and on to Zhejiang and Fujian.

The cargoes of a Chinese ship that sailed from Zhapu in Zhejiang to Nagasaki in Japan in January 1824 and another that sailed in the same month from Xiamen in Fujian to Singapore were very different. Whereas the Chinese trading ship that went to Nagasaki carried mostly silk textiles, sugar and a wide variety of medicine, the ship that went to Singapore carried mostly everyday items that seem to have been for Chinese living there, and which were of various kinds. There were 660,000 pieces of china and porcelain of thirty-two kinds, ten thousand tiles, twelve thousand paper umbrellas, and various items that one might find in a department store today: sweets, dried mushrooms, salted fish, shoes made from silk, cotton or straw, tobacco, combs, writing brushes, pickled vegetables, cotton cloth, yarn, and tea. It seems perfectly natural that two Chinese trading ships that left China at the same time for different destinations should have carried different cargoes, but there is little historical evidence to make this clear.

The construction of Chinese ships

Recent archaeological surveys have revealed the construction of Chinese junks, which could operate over a wide area as long as there was wind.

Sunken ships have been found and studied in archaeological surveys since the 1970s. The site of a Qin or Han dynasty shipyard, which was the subject of a dig in Guangzhou in late 1974, suggests that sailing ships of up to twenty meters in length and weighing twenty-five to thirty tons were built there. Previously, in August 1974, the hull of the wooden seafaring ship mentioned above, known as the ‘Quanzhou Bay Song dynasty ship,’ was discovered in the ground at the port of Houzhu, in the southeast of Quanzhou, Fujian province. The structure of this ship already had something like a keel, timber that functioned like a backbone, running along the bottom of the ship from the prow to the stern, called the *longgu*. If the ship got into difficulty at sea, this seems to have acted to limit flooding even if part of the hull was damaged, giving the vessel an excellent structure. Studies of the excavations suggest that this was a ship from around the end of the Southern Song in the second half of the fourteenth century, measuring around thirty-four meters in length and weighing around four hundred tons. Studies of the ‘Xin’an ship’ found off the coast of southwest Korea between 1976 and 1984 show that it was a seafaring three-masted sailing ship from the Yuan dynasty, thirty-four meters in length and weighing around two hundred tons.

The discovery of sunken Chinese ships has thus made up for the lack of written historical material on ships, and provides much more concrete information than excavated material.

Chinese junks were an environmentally friendly form of transport, requiring no oil like today’s cars. Of course, from the perspective of an age that stresses speed, they are slow. However, if we think of the history of Chinese seafaring ships, particularly junks, as the 2,000 years of the Western calendar, then we should remember that, dividing it at Fulton’s invention of the steamship at the start of the nineteenth century, the period when junks were in use, covers the not inconsiderable period of 1,800 years. This also suggests that the history of Chinese junks is of great significance.

Chinese piracy

The slowest area of maritime historical studies to develop has been the history of piracy, which is seen as anti-history. In the field of Japanese history, these began with Naganuma Kenkai's *Japanese Piracy* (*Nihon no kaizoku*) and *Studies in Japanese Maritime History* (*Nihon kaijishi kenkyū*) and have seen major developments recently in Amino Yoshihiko's *Ruffians and Pirates* (*Akutō to kaizoku*) and elsewhere, but in relation to specifically Chinese history, piracy has been largely ignored, with the exception of the *wokou* (Japanese pirate) problem in the Ming dynasty (see page 38) and the problems of piracy by Cai Qian (see page 80) and others.

Research into Chinese piracy has been almost ignored up until now. From the perspective of orthodox history, it has been seen as anti-history, but there were some pirates who surrendered to the government and were given positions something like that of the navy by the government, in order to put down pirates, as was seen in the late Song and Yuan dynasties and again in the late Ming dynasty. The question cannot therefore be understood just in neat terms of positive and negative.

As the development of Chinese society gradually spread from the hinterland of the Yellow River delta to the coastal regions, Chinese piracy began to appear over a wide area, but the region where it left most of a record was the coast of southern China. The reason it occurred frequently in southern China is probably because pirates, always used to the sea, made their bases in the islands, where it was easier to evade capture by the authorities after their depredations, and in the complicated geography of the coastal areas.

In this chapter, I would also like to discuss these records of piracy and look at the role of piracy in maritime history through the ages.

2 Sea merchants and pirates in the Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties

The origins of Chinese overseas trade

The term '*haishang*' (sea merchant) seems to have come into general use from the Tang dynasty onwards, but mentions of maritime trade can be found in official histories before that.

China's trade with countries to the west was at first carried out overland. One person who thought of sending an envoy to the country of Da Qin'Da Qin in the west, thought to be the Roman Empire was the Later Han Protector General of the Western Regions (*xiyu dufu*[12]) Ban Chao. Ban Chao tried to send his subordinate, Gan Ying, to Da Qin in 97 AD. Gan Ying passed through the Western Regions to reach the country of Tiao Zhi'Tiao Zhi (thought to be Syria), where he reached the 'great sea.' Planning to cross the great sea, he was told by a sailor from the country of An Xi 'An Zi (thought to be Parthia) that the voyage would take three months even with a favorable wind, and that, considering the prevailing winds, he should prepare at least two years' and up to three years' provisions for the sea crossing. He therefore gave up on sailing to Da Qin. However, around seventy years later, an envoy was sent by sea from Da

12) ***Xiyu dufu***: A *dufu* (Protector General) was appointed for the first fifty-nine years of the Former Han dynasty to suppress the Western Regions, managing the colonies and protecting communications and trade. After the Protector General was killed at the end of the Former Han, in the Xin era of Wang Mang, no appointment was made. Subsequently in 74 AD in the Later Han the post was revived but soon abolished, and in 91 AD Ban Chao was appointed. It was abolished in 107 AD.

Qin. In 166 AD an envoy of An Dun, king of Da Qin, thought to be the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, arrived from Nhat Nam in central Vietnam, initiating relations with China with an offering of ivory, rhinoceros horn and tortoiseshell. Consequently, it seems people traveled from Da Qin to Funan, and people from Nhat Nam, Giao Chi and elsewhere traveled to Da Qin.

In 226, under Sun Quan of Wu in the Three Kingdoms era, Qin Lun, a merchant from Da Qin, arrived in Giao Chi, and met Sun Quan with the support of Wu Mo, prefect of Giao Chi. Sun Quan asked Qin Lun about the manners and customs of Da Qin and was given a substantial report. It is recorded in the *Zhong tian zhu guo* chapter in volume 54 of the *Liang Shu* that Wu Mo, prefect of Giao Chi, later tried to take Qin Lun to China proper, but Qin Lun decided to return to his country when Wu Mo died on the way.

Thus it seems that communication with countries overseas became active from around the Later Han, and sea merchants began to arrive in China. Later, as overseas relations became more active, mentions of Chinese sea merchants become more frequent in official histories as well.

Birth of the maritime trade supervisor

Officials responsible for work relating to overseas trade in the Tang dynasty were known as *shiboshi*[13)] (maritime trade supervisors). The first appearance of the title *shiboshi* is around the time of Emperor Xuanzong. In 714 You Wei, appointed *shiboshi* of Annan, and Commander Zhou Qingli reported to the court that Persian priests could make intricate works of art. The next record is found in 763, when the eunuch and *shiboshi* Lü Taiyi expelled the governor (*jiedushi*) of Guangnan, Zhang Xiu, and instigated a revolt in Guangzhou. It is recorded in the *Jiu Tangshu* that, when the rebel forces of Huang Chao, from Shandong, joined the rebellion of Wang Xianzhi[14)] and threatened Guangzhou, the centre of overseas trade, in 879, there were great fears that the profit from maritime trade and gems including the south sea pearls brought in every year, would be stolen by the rebels and that the exchequer would be bankrupted. The *Tangguo shibu*, which records the history of the Kaiyuan era (713-741) to the Changqing era (821-824), records that overseas trade was carried on actively from the eighth century, mainly in Guangzhou, and that for this purpose the post of *shiboshi* was established to take charge of trade affairs.

The *Xin Tangshu* says that it was a rule in the past that, if a sea merchant sank, his property would be disposed of by the government, and if the merchant's wife did not report to the authorities within three months, the whole of it would be appropriated. As this makes clear, the activities of sea merchants were not entirely free, but were subject to certain forms of government restriction.

Cases of Chinese sea merchants who ventured overseas in the Tang dynasty are also frequently mentioned in Japanese sources. From around the time when Japan stopped sending envoys to China in

13) ***shiboshi*** (or *shibosi*): The first appointment of an official to supervise overseas trade in China was that of the *shiboshi* in Guangzhou in the second year of Kaiyuan (714) in the Tang dynasty. Under the Tang, only the title *shiboshi* is known, but in the Song dynasty we find '*shibosi*' established as a title. The Song *shibosi* dealt with all affairs relating to the business of trade, including inspecting the cargo of trading ships entering port and imposing import taxes. The Yuan dynasty largely carried on the Song system of *shibosi*. However, in the Ming dynasty, as a policy of isolation was pursued, the *shibosi* became mainly a post for dealing with tribute ships. In the Qing dynasty, there was no *shibosi* as under previous dynasties, but the same work of dealing with the arrival and departure of trading ships was handled by customs (*haiguan*).

14) **Rebellion of Wang Xianzhi**: Wang Xianzhi (?-872), a salt trader at the end of the Tang dynasty, led a revolt of three thousand landless peasants around 875 to 878 from the mid and lower reaches of the Yellow River to the mid-Yangtze.

894, a large number of sea merchants started coming to Japan from the Chinese mainland. It is easy to find cases of people visiting China on these Chinese merchants' ships in the records of Japanese monks.

Names of Chinese sea merchants are also found in Ennin's *Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*, made famous by Reischauer's[15] *Ennin's*[16] *Travels in T'ang China*. The entry for 8 January of the sixth year of Shōwa (839) in Volume 1 of Ennin's diary records that in 819 the Chinese merchant Zhang Jueji set sail with a cargo of various items for trade, but encountered adverse winds and was adrift for three months before blowing ashore in the province of Dewa. The entry for 5 July in the fifth year of Huichang (Shōwa 12, or 845) states that the Japanese priest Egaku made a pilgrimage to Wutaishan in the second year of Huichang (842) and that when he returned to Japan he went on the ship of Li Linde, presumably a Chinese sea merchant.

These examples also show that the overseas activity of Chinese sea merchants increased from around the first half of the eighth century.

These Chinese sea merchants faced not only shipwreck from the forces of nature, but also frequent man-made disasters, in the form of piracy. Jianzhen[17] (Ganjin), who founded Tōshōdaiji in the western part of Nara after reaching Japan on his sixth attempt, was plagued by the fear of piracy, as well as natural disasters at sea. The entry in the *Tōdaiwajō tōseiden* for his first attempt to reach Japan, in the second year of Tianbao (743), states that his voyage to Japan was prevented because pirates were very active and the coasts of Taizhou, Wenzhou and Mingzhou (known as Ningbo since the Ming dynasty) had suffered at their hands. Since the *Zizhi tongjian* reports that pirates including Wu Lingguang attacked Taizhou and Mingzhou in February of 744, the third year of Tianbao under the Emperor Xuanzong, the pirate who prevented Jianzhen from reaching Japan at this time was presumably the same Wu Lingguang. The leader of Hainan, Feng Ruofang, who rescued Jianzhen when he was blown off course there, was in fact a pirate who had grown rich by attacking a Persian ship that was on its way to China along the coast of Hainan.

The Tang capital of Changan is described as the start of the Silk Road, but that is clearly a perception that focuses on overland communication. However, if we take a different perspective and look at communication between China and other countries by sea, it is clear that an increasing number of countries were visiting China by sea as the Tang court internationalized. The starting point for this communication by sea was Guangzhou, which was visited by merchants not only from southeast Asia, but from far-off Arabia as well. The *Tales of China and India*, written in Arabic in the second half of the ninth century, makes clear that Guangzhou gathered goods brought by Arabs and Chinese.

15) **Reischauer**: Edwin O. Reischauer (1910-90), born in Tokyo to Presbyterian missionaries who had come to Japan, after graduating from high school, he obtained his degree from Harvard, after which he became a professor at Harvard, and the US ambassador to Japan.

16) **Ennin** (794-864): a priest of the Tendai school in the early Heian period. He went to Tang China in 838, and spent ten years in China, including Tiantaishan in Zhejiang province. His diary from the period is *Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*. After his return to Japan, he became chief priest of the Tendai school and was given the posthumous name of Enkaku Daishi.

17) **Jianzhen** (689-763): born in Yangzhou in present-day Zhejiang, he became a monk at the age of fourteen and subsequently trained and became a priest in Changan. He taught in Yangzhou, but resolved to go to Japan in response to the request for monks, and reached Japan in 753 after five unsuccessful voyages. He later established Tōshōdaiji and is known as the founder of the Ritsu school in Japan.

Expansion of overseas trade

Song China established a *shibosi* in Guangzhou in 971, soon after the founding of the dynasty, to oversee ships from overseas and the movement of Chinese merchant ships, and subsequently established them in Hangzhou and Mingzhou as well. Consequently, Arabian merchants and others began visiting for trade from overseas countries such as Da Shi (Arabia), Zhan Cheng (Champa) and Sanfoqi (Srivijaya), carrying foreign products such as spices, ivory, rhinoceros horn, and sappan wood, and seeking Chinese-made silk textiles and porcelain. In response to this, in 989, sea merchants heading overseas from China for the purposes of trade were required to have papers issued by the authorities at the Liangzhe *shibosi*. Sea merchants not in possession of official papers were punished and had the goods they were carrying seized by the authorities. The official papers that sea merchants were required to have when venturing abroad named their cargo, the destination of their voyage, and a guarantor, and were only issued once they had confirmed that they were not carrying arms, articles for the manufacture of arms, or contraband.

One example of Song dynasty sea merchants is found in the *Record of a Pilgrimage to Mt Tiantai and Mt Wutai* by Jōjin[18], who went to China during the Song dynasty and visited Mt Tiantai in Zhejiang and Mt Wutai in Shanxi. According to Volume 1 of his *Record*, he crossed to China from Matsuura in Hizen on one of three Chinese ships in March of the fourth year of Enkyū (fifth year of Xining, under the Northern Song, 1071). The captain of the first of these three Chinese ships was Zeng Ju, called Zeng Sanlang, from Nanxiongzhou, the captain of the second ship was Wu Zhu, called Wu Shilang, from Fuzhou, and the captain of the third was Zheng Qing, called Zheng Sanlang, from Quanzhou. The captains' homes were in present day Nanxiong in Guangdong, and Fuzhou and Quanzhou in Fujian, so they were presumably sea merchants from Guangdong and Fujian. There were many such Chinese sea merchants who visited Japan.

The entry in the *Chōya gunsai*[19] for 20 August in the second year of Chōji (fourth year of Songning under the Northern Song, 1105) records that a trading ship arrived in Shigashima at Hakata, in Kyushu. The *gangshou*, or owner, of this ship was Li Chong, from Quanzhou in Fujian. He was in possession of a *gongping*, in other words a certificate of passage, issued by the Director of the Liangzhe Shibosi in Mingzhou (Ningbo). The certificate reads: 'This ship is the property of Li Chong, who has recruited its crew of sailors to go to Japan to trade, and has already paid taxes at the *shibosi* in Mingzhou and received a permit to sail.' It also lists the names of Li Chong and his crew of sixty-nine, and mentions the cargo, including forty rolls of inlaid work, ten rolls of raw silk, and twenty rolls of figured silk.

Japanese records are not the only historical documents revealing the activities of sea merchants in the Song dynasty. The names of many Chinese traders are also found in the *Koryo sa*, which is the record of the Koryo dynasty that came to power in the Korean peninsula. In the *Koryo sa*, the names of

18) **Jōjin** (1011-81): A priest of the Tendai school in the late Heian period. He became a monk at the age of seven, and went to Song China in 1072 at the age of 62, where he visited Mt Tiantai in Zhejiang and Mt Wutai in Shanxi, and was highly revered by both the government and people in the Song capital, Bianliang (the present day Kaifeng, in Henan). *Record of a Pilgrimage to Mt Tiantai and Mt Wutai*, which is a diary of his voyage to and sojourn in China, was entrusted to a traveler returning to Japan, who brought it back. Jōji himself died of illness in China, without returning to Japan.

19) *Chōya gunsai*: Compiled by the mathematician Miyoshi Tameyasu, with an introduction from 1116, but with later additions. An important historical document containing Heian period official writings.

Table of Song dynasty sea merchants mentioned in the *Koryo sa* (only those with Chinese place names stated)

Year	Koryo reign year	Date	Song	Place of origin	'*Shang*' or '*dugang*'	Name	Number of crew
1017	Hyongjong 8	5 July	Song	Quanzhou		Lin Renfu	40
1018	Hyongjong 9	11 April*	Song	Jiangnan		Wang Xizi	100
1019	Hyongjong 10	14 July	Song	Quanzhou		Chen Wengui	100
1019	Hyongjong 10	17 July	Song	Fuzhou		Yu ?	100+
1020	Hyongjong 11	27 Feb	Song	Quanzhou		Huai Zhui	
1022	Hyongjong 13	17 Aug	Song	Fuzhou		Chen Xiangzhong	
1022	Hyongjong 13	28 Aug	Song	Guangnan		Chen Wensui	
1026	Hyongjong 17	9 Aug	Song	Guangnan		Li Wentong	3
1027	Hyongjong 18	20 Aug	Song	Jiangnan		Li Wentong	
1028	Hyongjong 19	5 Sep	Song	Quanzhou		Li Shanye	30+
1029	Hyongjong 20	13 Aug	Song	Guangnan		Jiang Wenbao	80
1030	Hyongjong 21	18 July	Song	Quanzhou		Lu Zun	
1031	Tokjong 1	19 June	Song	Taizhou	*Shangke*	Chen Weizhi	64
1033	Tokjong 2	1 Aug	Song	Quanzhou	*Shangdougang*	Lin Ai	55
1038	Chongjong 4	24 Aug	Song	Mingzhou	*Shang*	Chen Liang	147
				Taizhou		Chen Weiji	
1045	Chongjong 11	11 May	Song	Quanzhou	*Shang*	Lin Xi	
1049	Munjong 3	9 Aug	Song	Taizhou	*Shang*	Xu Zan	17
1049	Munjong 3	21 Aug	Song	Quanzhou	*Shang*	Wang Yicong	62
1059	Munjong 13	6 Aug	Song	Quanzhou	*Shang*	Xiao Zongming	
1059	Munjong 13	5 Aug	Song	Quanzhou	*Shang*		

* intercalary month

Chinese are frequently recorded as '*Song shang*' or '*Song dugang*.'[20] In either case, geography suggests that they had come to Koryo by ship, and they were surely Song dynasty sea merchants.

Looking at mentions of Chinese sea merchants in the *Koryo sa*, we find that many are listed just as Chinese merchants, without giving their place of origin. The table below lists only those where the place of origin is stated. Based on the few cases where the place of origin is stated, as the table shows, most of the sea merchants were from Quanzhou in Fujian, and Mingzhou (Ningbo) or Taizhou in Zhejiang, in other words from the present day provinces of Zhejiang and Fujian. It is also known that some Chinese sea merchants made regular trips between China and Koryo over several years. These various Song dynasty sea merchants sailed repeatedly to Koryo with goods for trade and took Koryo-made products back to China. The trade items taken from Song China to Koryo included new learning and culture, such as the Chinese *Taiping yulan*[21] and other publications.

---

20) *dugang*: Particularly interesting entries give the titles *dugang* and *gangshou*. The authority on the history Song dynasty commerce, Shiba Yoshinobu has written of *dugang* that 'the representatives of trading ships coming from China are frequently described in the *Koryo sa* as "*dugang* Such-and-such,"' interpreting *dugang* to be the representatives of ships, and that *gangshou* 'must have been the leaders of the crew,' or the captain. Saeki Tomi interprets it as follows in his *Gazoku kango yakkai* (*Understanding Classical and Colloquial Chinese*): '*Gangzhu:* owner. Cargo is referred to as *gang*. This refers to cargo tied up with rope.'

21) *Taiping yulan*: (*Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era*) 1,000 volumes in 55 sections in all. An encyclopedia of the

Sea merchants, pirates and trade supervisors under the Southern Song

When the Northern Song fell in 1126, as the Jin army advanced south, the Imperial family fled to Jiangnan and re-established the Southern Song dynasty with their provisional capital of Lin'an in Hangzhou. The Southern Song era saw development spread to the south of China, as the area under Song control was to the south of the Yangtze and as its capital was in Hangzhou, in the coastal part of Zhejiang. The maritime activities of sea merchants in the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong, on the coast south of Zhejiang, therefore increased.

In July of the fourth year of the Jianyan era (1130), the Southern Song government prohibited sea merchants from Fujian, Guangdong, Huai and Zhe from going to trade in Shandong and acting as guides for the Jin army. Sea merchants from the coast were actively engaged in maritime trade even in a time when the Jian and Southern Song were facing each other across the Huai River, as we know from the fact that powerful families in the Jiang, Zhe and Fujian regions were ordered to bolster their defenses by conscripting armies.

Quanzhou Yang Ke in *dingzhi* volume 6 of the *Yijianzhi*[22] contains the following anecdote. In over ten years as a sea merchant, Yang Ke built a fortune of two million taels. Whenever he got into difficulty at sea, he would pray to the gods to save him and would vow to build temples in various places, but when land came into view he would forget his promises and not give them another thought. When he was becalmed at sea in the tenth year of the Shaoxing era (1140), a god appeared to him in a dream and admonished him for his previous insincerity. Yang Ke told the god in his dream 'I am just on my way to Lin'an now' and it is recorded that he subsequently fulfilled his promises to the gods. This story suggests that there were sea merchants who had made huge profits from the maritime trade centered on Fujian and Zhejiang.

An inscription from the eighth year of Shaoxing (1138) in Putian in Fujian records that Zhu Fang, a *gangshou* from Quanzhou, offered incense to the Xiangying Temple to pray for a safe sea voyage to Srivijaya. This is clear evidence that merchants went as far as present day Indonesia for trade.

We know that the thirty years or so of the Shaoxing era (1131-62) saw the rise not only of sea merchants, but also of many pirates. According to the *Songshi* (*History of the Song*), the pirate Zhu Cong raided Guangzhou and then Quanzhou in the fifth year of Shaoxing (1135). In (intercalary) February, the pirate Chen Gan raided Leizhou. In March, the Southern Song court ordered the capture of Zhu Cong. In August, Zhu Cong surrendered to the authorities and was appointed a naval commander.

Han Yanzhi, eldest son of General Han Shizhong, who served with distinction in the founding of the Southern Song, was administrator of the Zhejiang region around 1174, and it is said that the seas became peaceful while he was regional administrator, as he captured alive the leader of pirates who had been engaged in pillaging there. There are frequent mentions of the appearance and subjugation of pirates later under the Southern Song. This presumably is partly due to the Southern Song court having its capital near the coast at Hangzhou and to its aggressive promotion of overseas trade.

Among those active in Quanzhou in Fujian at the end of the Southern Song and the start of the Yuan

Song court, completed around 982/983, thought to have been published in woodblock print in the reign of Emperor Renzong (1022-62). It was subsequently in demand throughout East Asia. A feature of the book is its almost 1,700 types of quotations, which quote books that have not survived into the present.

22) **Yijianzhi**: 180 volumes, 25 additional volumes and one further addition. Completed by Hong Mai (1132-1202) around 1198. It was compiled by Hong Mai as a collection of various unusual popular stories during his term of office as a regional official, and is an important historical source for matters not found in official compilations.

dynasty was Pu Shougeng, mentioned earlier. Pu Shougeng's ancestors had come to Guangzhou from somewhere towards Arabia, and had apparently moved from Guangzhou to Quanzhou in his father's generation. Pu Shougeng was appointed to the Southern Song court for his service, along with his brother, in suppressing pirates in the southern seas at the end of the Southern Song era, and was appointed Trade Supervisor (*tiju shibo*) in Quanzhou. As the office of trade supervisor dealt with the comings and goings of foreign ships, and consequently brought the privilege of receiving various gifts for his involvement in negotiations with foreign merchants, and as he also engaged in overseas trade himself, he would have accumulated considerable wealth. When the Southern Song court fell a short time later, he changed his allegiance to the Yuan court that succeeded it. As the Yuan court also treated Pu Shougeng well as regional administrator for Fujian, he also took steps to expand trade with invitations to the countries around the southern seas. Between the late Southern Song and the early Yuan dynasties, Pu Shougeng was active in the role of trade supervisor, overseeing foreign ships and foreign trade, for around thirty years.

The sea and the people of the plains

In 1277, before Khubilai Khan subjugated the Southern Song south of the Yangtze in 1279, the Yuan court established a *shibosi*, equivalent to a modern customs office, in Quanzhou. They subsequently established *shibosi* in Qingyuan (Ningbo), Shanghai and Ganpu (on the coast of eastern Zhejiang), and also had them in Wenzhou (Zhejiang), Guangdong (Guangzhou) and Hangzhou. The purpose of thus establishing *shibosi* was to promote trade with foreign countries and consequently increase tax receipts. The *shibosi* issued all ships leaving or entering the harbor with official documents detailing their destination and cargo, which were largely based on the Song dynasty system. The law code of the Yuan court, the *Yuan dian zhang*, required that sea merchants pay duty at the *shibosi* when returning to China from foreign countries or Hainan, and provided that, if there were any concealed goods that had not been declared, these should be seized by the authorities and a heavy penalty applied.

> Quanzhou in Fujian, where the Yuan government established its first *shibosi*, was an important port for overseas trade at the time. This is known from mentions in Marco Polo's[23] *Description of the World*.
> For every one ship that arrives in Alexandria and other ports to sell pepper to the lands of Christendom, a hundred ships arrive in Zaytun. Judging from the volume of trade, Zaytun is undoubtedly one of the two greatest seaports in the world.
> (*The Travels of Marco Polo volume 2*, translated by Atago Matsuo, Heibonsha, p.114)

As this quotation shows, Quanzhou, which Marco Polo calls Zaytun, was the largest port in the world in the thirteenth century, along with Alexandria in Egypt. Naturally, not only merchant ships from India and other countries to the west, but also many Chinese ships passed through it.

The Mongols who founded the Yuan dynasty were people of the plains, but they were more aggressive in advancing overseas than the successive dynasties of Han Chinese. Not only did they voyage to

23) **Marco Polo** (1254-1324): A Venetian merchant. He traveled with his father and uncle through central Asia to Yuan China, where he was favored by the Yuan Emperor Khubilai and served the Yuan court for around fifteen years. He left from Quanzhou by sea in 1290 and arrived back in Italy in 1295. The *Description of the World (The Travels of Marco Polo)* is thought to be a record of Marco Polo's account of his great journey. He is also well known for introducing Japan as 'Zipang.'

Java and Japan, but they also transported grain paid as tax from the Jiangnan region to their capital of Dadu (Beijing) by sea rather than rowing it up the Grand Canal.

South Sea trade in the Yuan dynasty

The *Zhenla feng tu ji*[24] by Zhou Daguan shows that many people traveled to south-east Asia in the Yuan period. It states that many Chinese went to Zhenla (Cambodia) because it was easy to trade there, as clothes were simple, rice was easy to come by, women were many, it was easy to build a house and there was an abundance of daily goods.

The *Dao yi zhi lüe*[25] by Wang Dayan is an important Yuan geographical work on the countries of the southern seas, and the entries for most countries mention their products and the (presumably Chinese) goods for which they traded them. It is not difficult to imagine that the blue-patterned and white porcelain that was popular everywhere at that time refers to Jingdezhen porcelain, which was produced in great quantities in the Yuan dynasty.

Another work that is of interest as an important historical source on the southern seas in the Yuan dynasty is the Yuan *Dade nanhai zhi*, remains of which are preserved in the Beijing Library and parts of which are quoted in the *Yongle dadian*.[26] It is said to have been originally written by Chen Dazhen in 1304, and books six to ten are known today. It is a regional gazette of present day Guangdong Province, and what is left of it includes entries on trade with countries of the southern seas. On 'cargo' (*bohuo*) 'sent to barbarian lands' it states at the beginning that 'goods are sent to *Shiziguo* (Sri Lanka)' and that Guangzhou is a focal point for foreign ships where many treasures are to be found, listing among the treasures imported from abroad: ivory, rhinoceros horn, *houding*,[27] pearls, coral, and tortoise shell; and mentioning among the 'barbarian lands' overseas: Giao Chi, Zhancheng (Champa), Zhenla, Xianguo (Siam), Danmalingguo (Tambralinga on the Malay peninsula), Sanfoqi (Srivijaya), and Shepo (Java). These were presumably places from which ships came and to which ships went from Guangzhou.

---

24) **Zhenla feng tu ji**: The Mongol Zhou Daguan accompanied an embassy from the Yuan court to Cambodia in 1296 and returned to China in 1297. This is an account of what he saw and heard during his stay in Cambodia. It was written in 1297.

25) ***Dao yi zhi lüe***: Completed in 1351, this relates the experiences of Wang Dayan, from Jiangxi, who spent several years visiting the countries of the southern seas. Its importance lies in the fact that it is said to have been composed from Wang Dayan's actual experiences in personally visiting these countries. It is invaluable for understanding Chinese people's knowledge of the countries of the southern seas in the Yuan dynasty. It mentions one or two hundred areas, and Ishida Michinosuke points out that the *Dao yi zhi lüe* already uses the terms 'East' and 'West' in the sense in which they were used from the Ming dynasty onwards.

26) **Yongle dadian**: Compiled on the orders of Emperor Yongle. It was ordered phonetically, based on the *Hong wu zheng yun*, from existing works in all fields. It included works of which the originals had already been lost and most of it was destroyed in the Second Opium War.

27) ***houding***: Thought to be the skull of a water bird the size of a peacock or a bird similar to a crane, used to make ornaments.

3 Sea merchants and pirates in the Ming dynasty

Maritime trade in the Ming dynasty

The Ming court imposed a maritime ban (*haijin*),[28] forbidding maritime trade to civilians, but permitted the visits of foreign tribute ships. It was only in the latter half of the Ming period that overseas trade by civilians became common.

It was in the sixteenth century, from the Jiajing era (1522-66) onwards, that the word *haijin* (maritime ban) came into use. The maritime ban, conventionally described by the phrase 'The Hongwu Emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang,[29] will not permit a single ship's timber to set sail,' was not established at a stroke. In 1371, when he discovered that Li Xing and Li Chun, who were in command of the Xinghua guards in Fujian, were secretly employing others to engage in overseas trade, the Emperor Hongwu ordered the *dadu dufu*[30] to ban all coastal troops from engaging in overseas trade. In 1381, he also banned the populace along the coast from trading with foreign countries. Then in 1394, Emperor Hongwu cut off travel with overseas countries on the grounds of frequent counterfeiting, and allowed tribute only from the Ryukyus, Zhenla (Cambodia) and Xianluo (Siam). He also strictly prohibited not only the coastal people's frequent journeys abroad to trade spices, but also their invitation of foreigners for immoral purposes.

Thus, the *Da Minglü* compiled in 1397 provided for laws forbidding secret trips abroad and illegal journeys overseas; in particular, the construction of illegally large ships, with two or more masts, journeys abroad to trade with cargos of goods prohibited from export, and conspiring with pirates were strictly forbidden.

While it prohibited the Chinese populace from traveling overseas, for the sake of envoys coming from abroad, it established a method to confirm the authenticity of envoys in 1383, by providing authentication documents for three countries that brought tribute to China: Xianluo, Zhancheng (Champa), and Zhenla. These countries were identified as countries that came to bring tribute out of devotion to the Chinese emperor. They were each enfiefed by the Emperor Hongwu as the kings of Xianluo, Zhancheng and Zhenla, and treated as the official envoys of their countries, and the imperial gifts bestowed in return for their tribute provided these countries with their only opportunity to obtain Chinese products.

However, Emperor Hongwu's limited relations with overseas countries were greatly changed by the later Emperor Yongle. Emperor Yongle dispatched the eunuch Zheng He[31] to countries overseas and welcomed tribute from many more countries. Japan was one of these countries, and in 1404, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu was enfiefed as the king of Japan, Yuan Dao Yi, and tribute trade with the Ming court began with his dispatch of tribute ships.

Countries were not free to send tribute ships whenever they chose; there were times for sending

28) **Maritime ban**: This was a policy of restricting or prohibiting voyages or activities at sea by ships in China, but these were often imposed to maintain order or prevent smuggling for political reasons, or to prevent disputes with foreign countries. The chief instances of this policy were the *haijin* policy imposed for almost the whole of the Ming dynasty, and the *qianjieling* ban announced by the Qing government to deal with Koxinga in Taiwan.

29) **Zhu Yuanzhang** (1328-98): The Emperor Hongwu, first emperor of the Ming dynasty. He made his capital in Nanjing, laying the foundation for 250 years of Ming rule.

30) **dadu dufu**: The highest military body established in the Ming dynasty, with the power to control the army.

31) **Zheng He**: A Muslim from Yunnan, who is said to have become a eunuch of the Emperor Yongle after King Yan when the Ming army subdued Yunnan around 1382. He made seven voyages to the southern seas after the Emperor Yongle succeeded to the throne in 1405.

tribute (*gongqi*) set by the Ming court. Different times were set for each country: once per year, once every two years, once in ten years, and so on. One tribute per year was possible, as in the case of Koryo/Korea. The Kingdom of the Ryūkyūs sent tribute once every two years. Japan was only allowed to send tribute once every ten years. There was also a tribute route, stipulating the place at which China could be entered when bringing tribute. For south-east Asian countries, this was Guangzhou, for the Ryūkyūs it was originally Quanzhou in Fujian, but this was later changed to Fuzhou, which it remained until the Qing period. For Japan it was Ningbo in Zhejiang. Countries that brought tribute overland also had a designated point of entry. In the case of Korea, after the capital was moved to Beijing, entry to China was near the mouth of the Yalu River, and the designated route ran through Liaoyang in present day Liaoning Province, along the coast of the Bohai Sea and to Beijing via Shanhaiguan. In charge of their first entry to China from overseas were the Ming *shibosi*, who judged the validity of the authentication documents provided in advance by China and brought by the tribute bearers of each country.

Items presented as tribute to the Ming emperors were *gongwu* (tribute), and these were designated for each country. From Japan, they included horses, armor, short swords and sulphur, while from the Ryūkyūs they included horses and sulphur and south-east Asian spices such as costus root, cloves and pepper. Siam's included ivory, rhinoceros horn and peacock feathers, and specialties of each country were designated as tribute. The gifts given by the Ming emperors in return for the offering of tribute were mainly high quality silk textiles, as well as products from among those offered by other countries, which were not available in the receiving country. Books were also important imperial gifts. In the Yongle era, apart from silk textiles, Japan received gold and silver, antiques, and pictures and books.

Pirates and *wokou* in the Ming dynasty

References to the *wokou* (Japanese pirates) who attacked coastal regions of Ming China can be found almost throughout the Ming period. Looking particularly at records of attacks by *wokou*, their main targets were from the Korean peninsula to the northern coastal regions of the Chinese mainland in the early Ming period, but in the second half of the period, from the Jiajing era onwards, there are reports of them attacking Jiangsu, Zhejiang and southwards to Fujian and Guangdong. Records frequently show that *wokou* and pirates were associated with each other.

One of the reasons for the appearance of Japanese pirates in the Jiajing era, as given in the entry for 6 April in the thirty-fifth year of Jiajing (1556) in the *Shizong shilu*, is that Wang Zhi (see page 50), Mao Haifeng and others led bands of pirates on raids because they were unable to make great profits due to the severity of the maritime ban. It theorizes that another reason was that famine in Japan had caused the price of rice to rise and people were suffering from starvation, while pillaging was rife, but the rulers of Japan were unaware of this. As this analysis points out, this clearly coincided with a rise in demand for maritime and overseas trade among the Chinese population in the coastal regions.

The appearance of Japanese pirates came during the rule of Ashikaga Yoshiteru,[32] the thirteenth shogun of the Muromachi *bakufu*, and reflects the fact that the authority of the Muromachi *bakufu* had collapsed, with the warring daimyos dividing up the country. It is difficult to distinguish between *wokou*

32) **Ashikaga Yoshiteru** (ruled 1546-65): Thirteenth shogun of the Muromachi *bakufu*. Eldest son of the twelfth shogun, Yoshiharu. He succeeded his father as shogun when the authority of the Ashikaga shogunate had slipped following the Ōnin War, and was shogun in name only, as his father Yoshiharu had ceded power to the *Kanrei* Hosokawa Takakuni, and Yoshiteru's rule was a time when the power of the Hosokawa *Kanrei* was growing, as was that of the Miki and Matsunaga families.

and pirates in this period. The historical terminology *beilu nanwo* (Mongols in the north and Japanese pirates in the south) that has been used in the past results from *nanwo* and *wokou* having been studied in terms of Japanese history or the history of Sino-Japanese relations. However, since Ming era pirates are indivisible from *wokou*, as explained above, research on *wokou* needs to be refocused in terms of the history of maritime East Asia and the history of the East and South China Seas.

The reality of Chinese pirates in the Ming dynasty

Where did most periods in the Ming period originate? Did the people especially in the coastal regions seek a living at sea and overseas because they were unable to bear the burden of heavy taxation? Or were they ex-officials forced out of the Ming political system at the time, and other dissatisfied elements? Which coastal regions were most involved, for example merchants from Fujian? I shall illustrate what they were actually like mainly from records in the most fundamental historical source for the Ming dynasty, the *Ming shi lu* (*Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty*).

According to an entry for 19 August in the twenty-fourth year of Hongwu (1391) in the *Taizu shi lu* within the *Ming shi lu*, the pirate Zhang Ama carried out a raid with a band of Japanese barbarians, but government forces repelled them. It is recorded that Zhang Ama was a scoundrel from Huangyan County in the district of Taizhou in Zhejiang, who was a frequent visitor to Japan and led other gangs to ravage the coast, bringing great misery to people on the coast. This Zhang Ama must be the first pirate known in the Ming period. As is recorded in the *Records*, he was a dissolute man from Huangyan County in the district of Taizhou in Zhejiang. The men Zhang Ama used as his accomplices were clearly gangs of Japanese pirates. This is because he is said to have had constant contact with Japan. This shows that there were close connections between what the Ming called *wokou* and Chinese pirates.

In 1407, Chen Zuyi, a pirate from Jiugang (Palembang) was taken by the eunuch Zheng He, who had been sent to the West. Chen Zuyi, who had been captured alive, was sent to the capital and sentenced to death. He was a Chinese pirate who had laid waste to the southern seas.

In 1449, Chen Wanning, a pirate from Fujian, attacked Chaoyang County, on the coast north-east of Guangdong. Chen Wanning had lured people from the coast of southern Fujian and Chaozhou to go to sea with him and engage in piracy.

The expansion of trade in the South China Sea

When, in the first year of the Longqing era (1567-72) the Governor of Fujian, Tu Zemin sought to trade with the countries of south-east Asia – except for Japan, which was seen as the ringleader of the *wokou* – the maritime ban was relaxed and overseas trade flourished. The number of Chinese ships venturing to south-east Asia, especially in the second half of the sixteenth and early part of the seventeenth centuries, grew from fifty in around 1567 to eighty-eight in 1589, one hundred in 1592, and 137 in 1597. This subsequently grew to forty per year from Fujian alone by 1612. Forty-three ships are recorded for 1628. So dozens of Chinese merchant ships were traveling to south-east Asia every year.

The destinations for Chinese merchants from the coast, principally Fujian, were port cities in Luzon in the Philippines, the Moluccas, the Indonesian archipelago, and the Malay peninsula, where they traveled to trade. In these island ports they encountered trading ships from Europe, which was entering its so-called Great Age of Sail. One of the best known ports at the time, Bantam (Xiagang) in the east of Java, was known for the visits of Dutch and British ships seeking to import raw and woven silk and

other Chinese products brought there by visiting Chinese vessels. In 1623 a sea merchant from Fujian went trading, as he did every year, in the Kingdom of Dani (Sultanate of Pattani) on the east coast of the Malay peninsula, in what is now Thailand, and in Java in Indonesia. The merchant, Pan Xiu, met a Dutchman in Pattani and recommended him to trade in the Penghu Islands west of Taiwan. The Dutchman therefore tried to trade with Chinese in Penghu, but was rejected by the Ming authorities.

4 Sea merchants and pirates since the Qing dynasty

Maritime trade in the Qing dynasty

Overseas trade in the Qing dynasty was characterized by greater entrenchment, compared to the Ming period, of the countries with which coastal merchants traded. Chinese merchants ventured abroad with large volumes of Chinese goods designed to satisfy the demands of the countries with which they traded.

The cargo of a Chinese merchant vessel that reached Singapore from Xiamen in 1824 included around 660,000 pieces of porcelain of thirty-two kinds, 10,000 floor tiles, 200 coping stones, 15,000 paper umbrellas, confectionery, dried foods, silk products, tobacco, pickled vegetables, cotton, and tea, while the cargo of another Chinese merchant vessel that visited Nagasaki at the same time consisted almost entirely of drapery, sugar and medicine. In the case of Singapore, these were mostly goods for the *huaqiao*[33] (overseas Chinese) living there, building materials and ordinary tableware, foodstuffs, and fancy goods, without which the lives of the local Chinese would clearly have been difficult, while in the case of Japan they were so-called *hakuraihin* (imported goods) and luxury goods.

Trade which had been irregular in the Ming period became regular and frequent in the Qing. This was also why Japanese who had been shipwrecked in various parts of south-east Asia were able to make their way back to Japan. As Chinese merchant ships frequently visited the islands in the South China Sea and elsewhere, shipwrecked Japanese went with them when they returned to China proper and were taken from their port of arrival to ports from which ships departed to Japan. A broad network had been built up by Chinese merchants, which allowed them to return from here on ships going to Japan.

This network developed not only for overseas trade, but also as a coastal trading network. Along the coast of the Chinese mainland, sailing ships from Tianjin and Shandong in the north, sand junks from the vicinity of Shanghai, *ningchuan* from Ningbo, and *niaochuan*[34] from Fujian traversed the Bohai, Yellow Sea, East Sea (East China Sea), Taiwan Straits, South Sea (South China Sea) and other seas, engaged mostly in the transport of goods.

There were also ports that linked this coastal activity with overseas trade. A good example is Zhapu in Zhejiang, which specialized in trade with Japan. Chinese sugar imported into Japan was produced in

33) ***huaqiao***: A word that came into use at the end of the nineteenth century, meaning Chinese, or people of Chinese descent, who had moved or were staying abroad. '*Qiao*' suggests temporary settlement, and recently the term '*huaqiao* and *huaren*' has become more widely used, including '*huaren*' (foreign nationals of Chinese origin).

34) ***niaochuan (bird boats)***: Ocean-going sailing ships developed mostly in the coastal areas of Fujian from the end of the Ming dynasty onwards. In the Qing period increasingly large ships were used, and the *niaochuan* that went to Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Edo period for the Nagasaki trade carried a large amount of cargo and a crew of over one hundred. They seem to have been so called because, as they floated on the sea, they resembled resting birds.

southern Fujian or at Chaozhou in south-east Guangdong, and in the first half of the Edo period it was shipped directly from these locations to Nagasaki. From the mid-Edo period onwards, Zhapu became a base for trade with Japan, and sugar was brought by coastal trading boats to Zhapu, from where it was exported on specialist ships for the Japan trade.

Chinese sailing ships in the Qing dynasty

Thus, in the Qing dynasty, there was a flourishing of maritime activity that had not been seen in Chinese history before the Qing. In particular, coastal transport and overseas transport were seen to be integrated, with a network developing throughout almost all the coastal regions of the Chinese mainland. Sea transport in these regions was carried out by Chinese sailing ships. Coastal and ocean-going ships sailed these waters and their names reflected the contemporary construction of the ships: the *weichuan* found mostly in Tianjin, the *shachuan* (sand junks) that were based in Shanghai south of the Yangtze and that plied the northern coastal waters, the *ningchuan* that traveled to northern waters from Ningbo in Zhejiang, and the ocean-going *niaochuan* that were mostly from Fujian and were found in all sea areas. Some of these also visited Nagasaki, and they were often seen in commemorative photographs taken by visitors to Nagasaki and in the *Nagasaki hanga* that were used as postcards.

As maritime activity flourished using these sailing ships, among those who were unable to participate in their commercial activities were some who pursued illegal activities at sea, and pirates made an appearance. The areas where pirates made their bases were the coastal islands from the Zhoushan archipelago to Wenzhou in Zhejiang, and islands along the coast from Fujian to Guangdong, while the range of their activities extended over the whole coast of mainland China. The names of many pirates throughout the Qing period are known, but the most famous was Cai Qian, from Dong'an County in Fujian, who appeared in the Jiaqing era. He grew to be a rebel who caused considerable trouble to the Qing government, tried to occupy Taiwan, and almost made a maritime empire for himself.

Piracy in the Qing dynasty

Who looked enviously on these ships that crisscrossed the oceans, as described above? Of course there must have been people who targeted the merchant ships laden with treasure. At the start of the Qing dynasty, any political forces who opposed the Qing, such as Koxinga, were called pirates. However, apart from these forces, there were also pirates, known as *haidao* or *yangdao*.

In the first year of the Yongzheng era (1723), Guangdong and Fujian had the most pirates, followed by Zhejiang. Within Guangdong, Chaozhou on the north-east coast and Huizhou on the central coast were problem areas for piracy. Places on the coast of Jiangnan and Zhejiang where pirate boats congregated were the islands scattered where Jinshan and the ocean side of Huaniao meet Xiabashan and Yangqushan, which belong to Zhejiang, where present day Hangzhou Bay meets the East China Sea, which were places where it was difficult for the eyes of the government to see, located as they are on the provincial border of Jiangsu and Zhejiang.

Gao Qidao's report to the Emperor Yongzheng dated 21 April in the sixth year of Yongzheng (1728) reads: 'The Nan'ao area is most important and is the entry and exit point for pirates from Guangdong and Fujian. It will allow us to search the area thoroughly and block off the entrance for pirate ships, and to search out the pirates' hideaways.' The Nan'ao Islands were a good place to escape from the authorities, as they are made up of a complex series of islands.

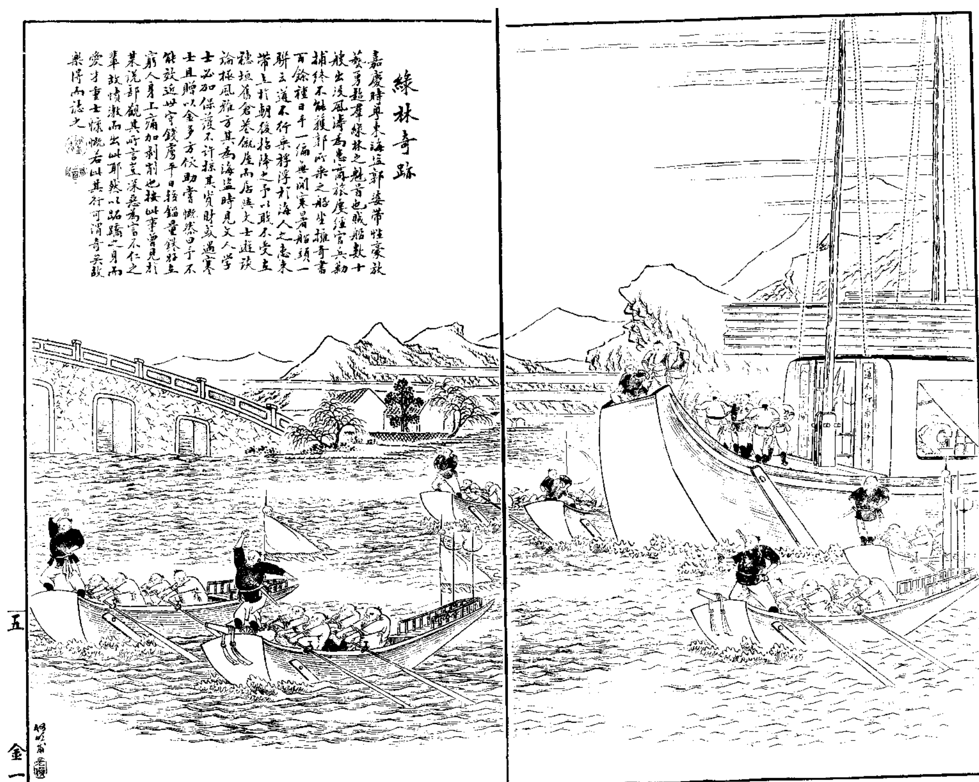
Towards the end of the Qianlong era frequent mention is made of *yangdao*, as pirates who terrorized the seas.

> Recent pirates are mostly gathered on islands at sea, and investigations into the criminals Wang Kunshan and Wang Masheng, who were arrested in Zhejiang and Guangdong, have shown that they are originally from Fujian. It is currently difficult to investigate all of the islands in the short term. However, the Zhangzhou and Quanzhou regions in Fujian are places where pirates frequently appear, and laws must be established to prohibit them.
>
> (*Qianlong shang yu dang*, volume 15, p. 29)

This shows that around the fifty-fourth year of Qianlong (1789) pirates known as *yangdao* made frequent appearances in the seas from Zhejiang to Guangzhou.

An edict dated 7 April in the fifty-sixth year of Qianlong (1791) shows that bandits appeared in the seas off Jinzhou in Shengjing, who turned out to be from Fujian. Damage from raids at sea off Jinzhou and Gaizhou was very costly, and since the pirates were originally from Fujian, it was deduced that they had local guides throughout Jinzhou and Gaizhou. So pirates were also found on the coast of the Bohai, in the north east. The remote cause was said to be the coastal activity of Fujian merchants.

According to an edict dated 2 March in the fifty-sixth year of Qianlong, bandits appeared at sea throughout Zhejiang and Fujian, not only attacking merchant vessels, but even attacking a naval patrol boat on patrol in the area. These pirates were all people from coastal regions, who were short-tempered by nature, and as the regional administrators had been unable to change them or show leadership, they



Piracy Guobadai (郭波帯)
“Dia-shi-zhai-hua-dao (點石齋畫報)” Vol.3

had turned bad and become people who were only too willing to break the law. An important function of the navy was originally to suppress piracy, and it had been successful in this, but there were those in the navy who illegally sold weapons to pirates.

As mentioned already, the members of pirate gangs had local characteristics from their places of origin. An edict for 18 March in the fifty-sixth year of Qianlong mentions four *huodao*, including Gao Zao, captured by a Zhejiang patrol boat, and the *daoshou* (pirate leader) Lin Qi and twenty-eight *huodao*, including Chen Qiu, from Fujian, as well as more than twenty *yangdao*. As the mention in this edict shows, there were pirates known as *daoshou* and *huodao*. This shows that pirate gangs had an order of precedence, with pirate leaders known as *shoudao* and their subordinates known as *huodao*, with the addition of '*huo,*' meaning 'comrade.'

Conclusion

In *Relations Between Taiwan and Southern China, Current Institutions and Future Strategy*, compiled in the sixth year of Taishō (1917) by the Police Headquarters in the Welfare Department of the Governor General's Office of Taiwan, Part 1 Chapter 3, 'The Control of Piracy and Relations with Southern China' states that pirates operating in the coastal regions of southern China were frequently seen in the seas around Taiwan, especially in the Taiwan Straits, attacking ships, and engaging in brutal activities that terrorized the inhabitants. The season when pirates appeared was summer, to benefit from the seasonal winds, and every year between June and September they attacked ships sailing the coast of Taiwan or traveling between Taiwan and the mainland. In terms of the pirates' origin, it was reported that the most brutal were 'those based in the region of Xiaoxi, Meizhou, Da Niaogui, Xiao Niaogui, and Nanridao' along the coast of Fujian. It is clear that the activities of pirates were also a problem in Taiwan under Japanese rule.

The same book also mentions forty-one cases of pirate attacks in the Taiwan Straits and elsewhere between the thirty-first year of Meiji (1905)nd the fifth year of Meiji (1916). The earliest case is from 6 June Meiji 31, when a Taiwanese ship, the *Shunwanyi*, was attacked by pirates. The ship was suddenly ordered to stop in mid voyage and, in addition to the killing of one crew member and serious injuries to two others, 190 *koku* of brown rice and various articles were stolen. When the Taiwanese *Xinrifa* was attacked by pirates on 24 June Taishō 4 (1914), '127 bags of rice, thirty *hakamas*, five coils of rope, one lock, three sails, two yen and forty sen in cash, with an estimated value of over 650 yen' were plundered from onboard. The pirate ship that attacked the *Xinrifa* was a three-masted sailing junk with a capacity of around three hundred *koku*, painted red above and white below. On 3 September Taishō 5 (1916), the Taiwanese ship the *Jinlianmei* was attacked by three pirate ships at sea off the Chinese mainland; the pirates stole its cargo of timber worth 1,167 yen 98 sen at the time, as well as the crew's clothing worth 402 yen, and also the ship and its fittings worth 2,716 yen and 50 sen.

I have discussed the questions of Chinese sea merchants and pirates, and what is clear throughout is that, although it has received little treatment in studies of Chinese history to date, the people of China have left many traces of their involvement with coastal waters and the high seas.

The history of the coastal regions of mainland China, from Liaoning in the north to Hebei, Tianjin, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and Hainan cannot be told without mentioning their relationship with the sea. The present, and future economic development, are intimately connected with the sea. The inland provinces adjacent to these

also affect, and are affected by, the sea to some extent. Sea merchants have been responsible for one part of economic activity in the coastal regions, and the wealth they have brought from overseas has contributed to the economic development of China. From overseas, Chinese sea merchants brought back spices, silver, rice, dried goods and marine products. In return, to countries overseas they took raw and woven silk, ceramics, Chinese medicine, tea and all kinds of necessities, for which many countries yearned. Harming the operations of these Chinese sea merchants, and sometimes living off them, were the pirates, some of whom gave a serious jolt to the government of the time. In this sense, too, China's involvement with the sea is an indispensable angle from which to look at the country's history.