A Transtemporal Study of the *Qianjie* Coastal Depopulation (1661-1683) and the Making of a Qing Maritime Frontier in Fujian and Guangdong

In *Qingxiang: The Translocal and Transtemporal Repercussions of Village Pacification, 1869-1975*, the fifth chapter in Melissa Macauley's recent book *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier*, Macauley documents Fang Yao's campaign of 1869 as the regional commander of the Army of the Green Standard to pacify the Chaozhou coast, a commercialised region on the eastern seaboard of Guangdong. Fang Yao's campaign would find symmetry in earlier violent campaigns of the Ming and Qing dynasties to sever Chaozhou from its natural water world from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Macauley suggests that 'these struggles represented the difference between popular and dynastic conceptualisations of the maritime frontier *(haijiang)* in the early modern era.'[1] Drawing on Ronald Po's work, she notes, whereas the Qing court understood the frontier as a coastal littoral charted in dynastic cartography and rendered impregnable to threats from the high seas, merchants 'did not conceptualise the outer realm as territory off-limits to international competition. It was viewed instead as a vital maritime pathway geographically linking the home territory to an ever-expanding frontier of settlement and economic extraction.'[2]

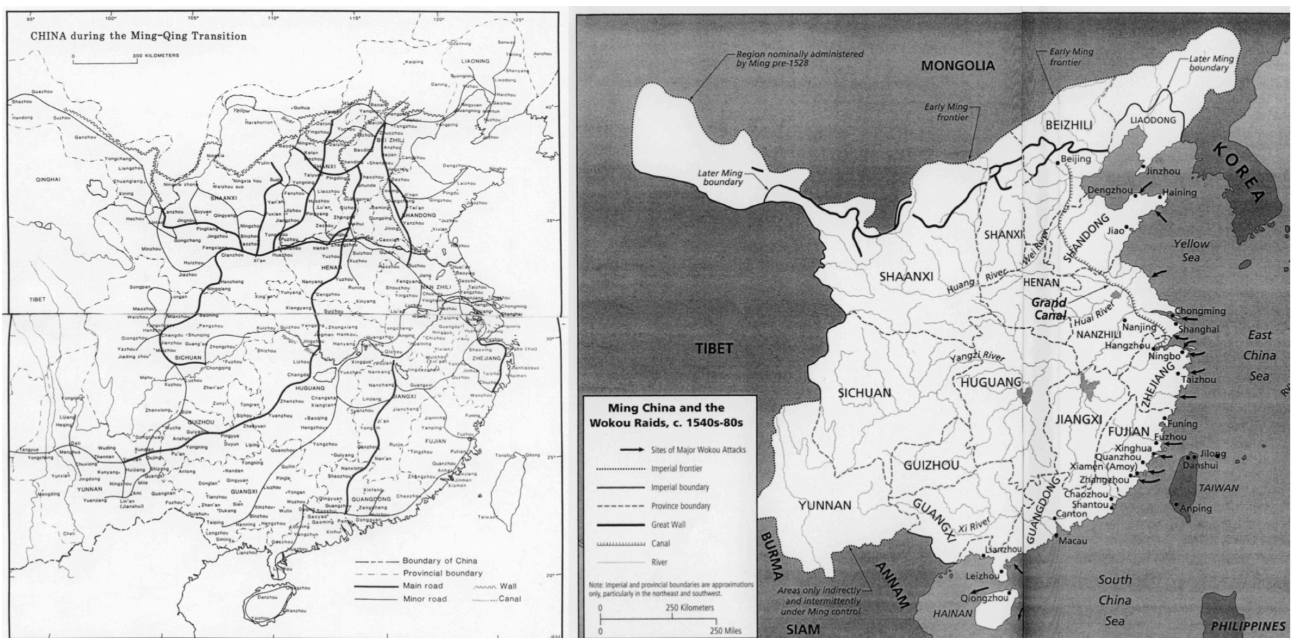
Fang Yao's pacification campaign in southeastern China was also an important milestone in the history of Shanghai and Southeast Asia. There, locals felt its reverberations without being particularly aware of the event itself. The purge of the underworld element in Chaozhou, Macauley writes, 'led to a dramatic increase in criminality in Singapore after 1869, forcing British administrators to intensify efforts to reform the criminal justice system and formalise colonial rule across the Straits Settlements. The British had been unaware of the causes of the crime wave until 1873, when an investigation into the origins of a riot in Singapore revealed to them the changing social dynamics of the colony.' Macauley conceptualises this transformative power of the local event as a type of 'entangled state-building in both Chaozhou and the British Straits Settlements on

[1] Melissa Macauley, Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier (Princeton University Press, 2021), 26

[2] Ronald Po, The Blue Frontier: Vision and Power in the Qing Empire (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 17–23.

the Malay Peninsula: 'historical incidents that occurred in two ostensibly separate geographical places in fact took place in one social and economic translocal sphere; they were distinct manifestations of the same event and shared mutually transformative consequences. Two states at the early stages of their development—one colonial, one provincial—sought to tame and subjugate the same set of free-wheeling sojourners who long had operated beyond the orb of governmental authority. In so acting, these states became transformed themselves.'[3]

Macauley attests to the application of the concept of transtemporalism to social history and frontier studies as a mode of multiscopic analysis that documents the 'specificity of historical contexts' even as one stresses 'linkages' and comparisons across longer stretches of time. Drawing on the work of Michael Werner and Benedicte Zimmerman, Macauley locates the 'space-structuring logic' of entangled histories and illuminates the agency of communities to diffract and shape transnational phenomena.[4] This paper draws on Macauley's conception of 'transtemporalism' as an intellectual tool with which to conceptualise 'entangled state building' between the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. In this sense, studies of the Ming and Qing maritime frontier begin not with a map of the southern seas but with a dynamic in-situ view of the Manchus as frontier peoples, moving southward and, as Daphon Ho notes, 'setting about to reconstruct the imperial order, picking up



[3] Macauley, *Distant Shores, 29*.

[4] Ibid., 16.

from the failures of the old Ming frontier policy that in banning maritime trade had militarised the Chinese coast, inadvertently encouraged oligopoly (by a confederation of smuggler-pirates) and then monopoly (in the rise of a sealord).[5] The maritime frontier in this respect presents a more complex tapestry of early Qing efforts to quell pockets of resistance on its coastal frontier regions, culminating in the *Qianjie*, Coastal Depopulation of 1661-1683 that would find its symmetry in Fang Yao's campaign of 1869. As Ho writes, the *Qianjie* was an attempt to control not the sea, but an artificial land boundary that would resolve the centrifugal tendencies on China's southern coasts.[6] In the making of the maritime frontier in Fujian, Ho examines the transtemporal repercussions of unifying policies by the Qing state and its unintended centrifugalisation of Chinese merchant networks into Southeast Asia with evolutionary and revolutionary implications in later centuries.

Ming China and the Wako Pirate Raids

Distant Shores traces the interactions of Chinese state officials and coastal merchant communities through the Ming and Qing dynasties and the emergence of the Chinese Republic. Part I entitled The Curse of the Maritime Blessing, 1767–1891 opens with a chapter on *Pacifying the Seas: Imperial Campaigns and the Early Modern Maritime Frontier, 1566–1684* documenting the first ban on maritime commerce and travel that was imposed in 1371 by the first Ming emperor, Taizu. Paranoid, Taizu 'sought to transform his vast and increasingly commercialised empire into an idealised rural autarky in which people remained properly rooted in their villages, respectful of social hierarchy and imperial authority. He envisioned an international order that contrasted starkly with the free-wheeling, commercially interconnected world that had flourished under the preceding Yuan dynasty. Instead, he and his successors sought to institutionalise a system that was commercially controlled by the imperial bureaucracy and ritually centered on their capital, Nanjing (after 1421, Beijing).'[7]

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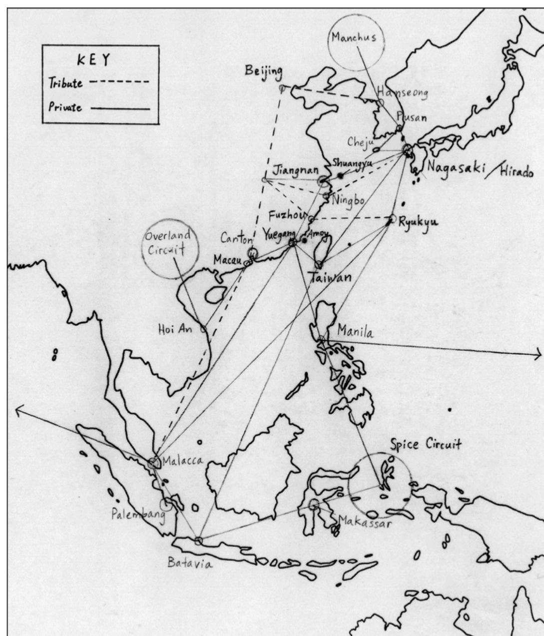
[5] Daphon Ho, *Sealords Live in Vain: Fujian and the Making of a Maritime Frontier in Seventeenth-Century China*. (University of California, San Diego, 2011), xv.

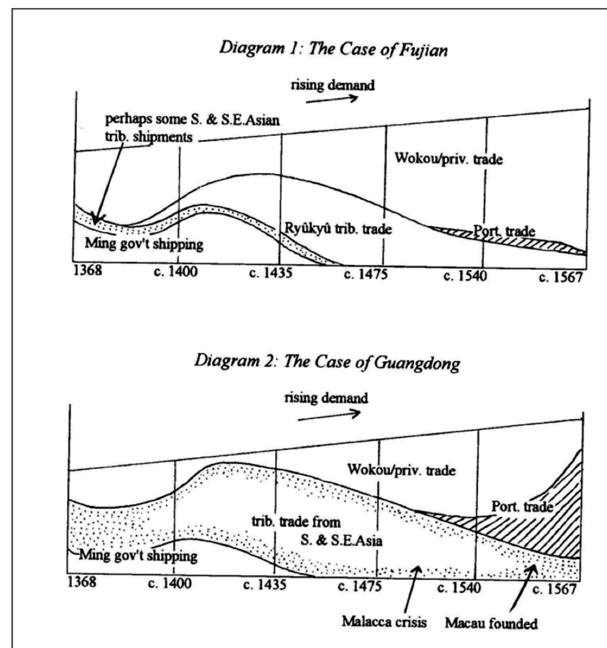
[6] Ibid., 18.

[7] Macauley, *Distant Shores, 39-40*

Macauley notes how Chaozhou by the fourteenth century experienced a notable level of development, artisans held a sophisticated understanding of nautical engineering and shipbuilding, as documented by Joseph Needham.[8] Taizu's interdictions led to the criminalisation of private commerce transforming merchants into 'pirates' and commodities into contraband. Xie Jie, the renowned scholar wrote in 1595, 'Pirates and merchants are one and the same. When commerce flourishes then pirates become merchants, when commerce is forbidden, then merchants become pirates.'[9]

In *Sealords live in vain: Fujian and the making of a maritime frontier in seventeenth-century China,* Daphon Ho provides some fascinating sketches of the tribute system, which 'restricted all official trade to three main ports of entry: Canton (for Southeast Asia and others), Ningbo (for Japan; later retracted), and Quanzhou (for Ryukyu; later the port changed to Fuzhou), and illicit private trade which did not observe these port restrictions. Both systems generally kept their separate ways as they were different in nature, 'the tribute system was a product of the state and determined by fiat, as was its primary port, Canton. Private trade had its own primary ports, which were not officially determined (first Shuangyu, then Yuegang). Ho notes that the one time that the official and the





[8] Joseph Needham, Wang Ling, Lu Gwei-Djen, *Science and Civilisation in China. Vol. IV, Part 3: Civil Engineering and Nautics* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971).

[9] Ibid., 41

Tribute / official system:

Primary (authorized)
Canton
Quanzhou/Fuzhou
Ryukyu
Malacca

Left out
Nagasaki (expelled after 1530s)
Manila
Batavia
Macau

Private trade: the flip side of the Seaban

Primary
Shuangyu (destroyed in 1548)
Matsuura/Hirado (Nagasaki vicinity)
Macau
Batavia
Manila
Hoi An

Secondary
Taiwan (became primary after 1620s)
Ryukyu
Pusan
Cheju

private systems "converged" (met halfway) was at Yuegang, with partial lifting of the Seaban and the opening of a trade licensing system in 1567.'[10]

Ho further traces the maritime periodisation of Roderich Ptak and locates a diagram in Ptak's *China, the Portuguese and the Nanyang* which illuminates the rising Chinese demand for tropical goods over time that was met by 1) tribute imports from the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia; 2) tribute imports via Ryukyu; 3) Ming government shipping (such as the Zheng He voyages); 4) illegal imports from Wako smuggler-pirates; and 5) Portuguese trade. Ho locates the divergence between Canton and Fujian. Under support by the imperial government, more tribute trade (the dotted zone) flowed into Canton, which developed something of a "taker mentality" while in Fujian, the burgeoning of Wokou or private trade illuminated the presence of Fujianese merchants innovatively expanding into the illegal private sector.[11]

Under the Ming Emperor Jiajing (r. 1522–1567), the sea ban was rigidly reinforced with draconian new legislation and the dispatching of larger naval squadrons to bend merchants to the emperor's will.[12] Macauley illuminates the story of Lin Feng and Lin Daoqian and the thoughts of Xiao Yan, an official in the imperial war ministry who in 1576 wrote that if the Ming did not "eliminate" figures such as Lin Feng, the dynasty would appear weak. Rather than executing the buccaneers, Xiao suggested that the authorities might consider "securing them in the inland regions, a mode of "civilian" resettlement in the interior as pacification, which would find symmetries in Qing efforts to break the connection between the coast and the sea spaces in the Qianjie, coastal depopulation of 1661 - 1683.[13] Ho stresses, from Frederick Wakemen's *The Great Enterprise* (1985), how the Ming-

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[10] Ho, *Sealords in Vain*, 61-62

[11] ibid., 70

[12] Macauley, Distant Shores, 42.

[13] ibid., 45

Qing transition was not a sudden coup, but rather a long and violent effort to solve the structural crises of the late imperial polity - exigencies made all the more dire by the conditions of the 17th Century general crisis and the climatic Little Ice Age that was sweeping the world.[14] The transition was both an invasion and a civil war which Ho argues in the broadest possible terms lasted for one hundred years, from the northeastern marches with Nurhaci's drive to unify the Jurchens in 1583, ending in the southeastern seas with the conquest of Taiwan from the last sealord scion, Zheng Keshuang, in 1683. It is a story, Ho writes, that begins and ends in the frontiers.[15]

The Qing Empire's Scorched Shore

Ho undertakes a transtemporal study of the Qianjie, coastal depopulation of 1661-1683. To add to Ho's work, Macauley's 'entangled state-building' concept gives further space to the idea of residual Ming thought being actively considered and worked against by Qing frontiersmen, an entangled elderly and young state coexisting. As Ho writes, 'while the seaban and depopulation are often lumped together as a single inglorious specimen of history: a Chinese maritime "closed-door," of which "the policy was the product of autocracy and obscurantism, and had a profound, pernicious and lasting influence on Chinese politics", an emblem of imperial isolationism and anti-commercialism (as if the Qing had taken on the very worst of the Seaban inherited from the Ming), a close study enables scholars to examine how they were distinct policies adapted to dynamic settings that changed along with the frontier itself, and how "state" and "society" reshaped themselves around the frontier.'[16] In contrast to the simplistic question, 'were the Manchus afraid of

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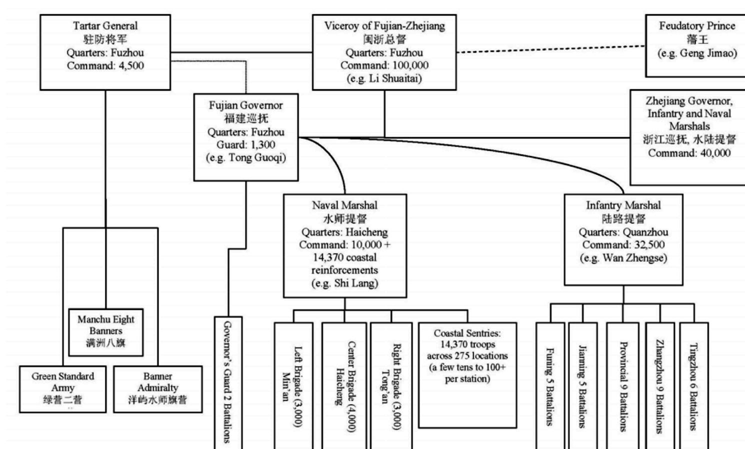
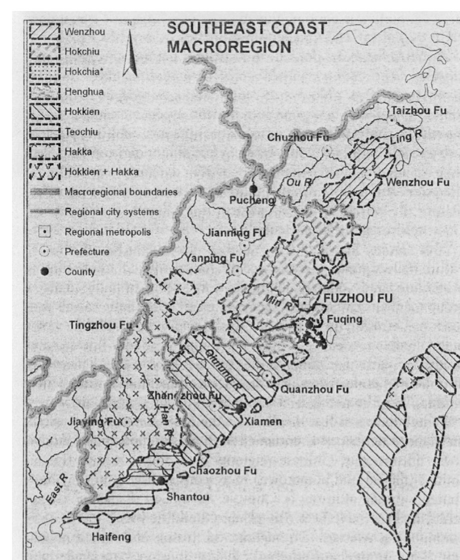
[14] In *Crisis and Catastrophe: The Global Crisis of the Seventeenth Century Reconsidered*, Geoffrey Parker notes simultaneous state breakdown in the 17th Century. In the 1640s, Ming China, the most populous state in the world, collapse; the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the largest state in Europe, disintegrated; much of the Spanish monarchy, the first global empire in history, seceded; and the entire Stuart monarchy rebelled - Scotland, Ireland, England, and the American colonies. In 1648, a tide of urban rebellions began in Russia (the largest state in the world), and the Fronde Revolt paralyses France (the most populous state in Europe); meanwhile, in Istanbul (Europe's largest city), irate subjects strangled Sultan Ibrahim, and in London, King Charles I went on trial for war crimes (the first head of state to do so. In the 1650s, Sweden and Denmark came close to revolution; Scotland and Ireland disappeared as autonomous states; the Dutch Republic radically changed its form of government; and the Mughal Empire, then the richest state in the world, experienced two years of civil war following the arrest, deposition, and imprisonment of its ruler.

[15] Ho, *Sealords in Vain*, 1.

[16] ibid., 115-116.





Map 1.1. Southeast coast macroregion dialect groups. Produced after Skinner (1985) and Li Rong et al. (1988).

Source: Philip A. Kuhn, Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 30.

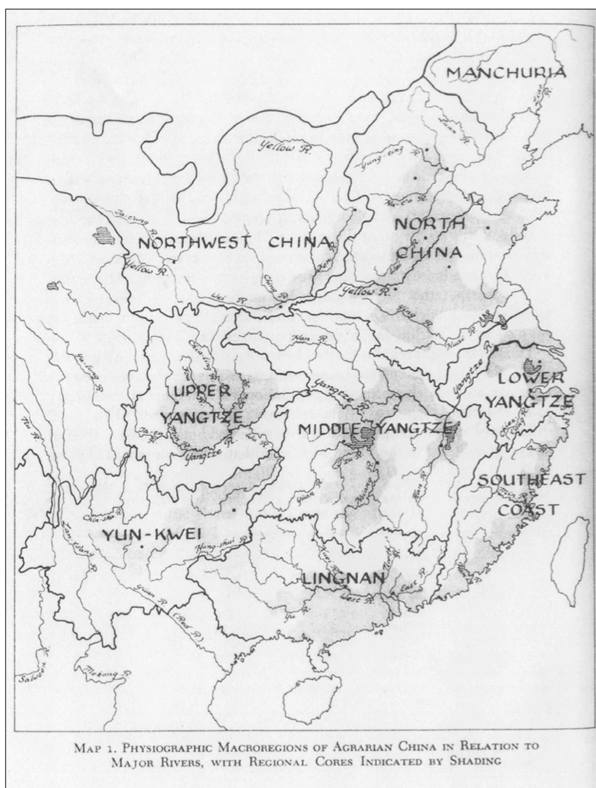
water?' the Qing state was more than the Manchu, Qing conquest elites were frontiersmen who were expert in the military and political use of boundaries and were responding in the collapse of the Ming dynasty to a complex tapestry of forces on China's southern maritime frontier: roving rebels, Southern Ming princes and their rump courts, motley armies of loyalists and bandits, regional warlords. Ho sketches the structure of the Qing military command, the Depopulation was not administered as a civil statute, but as a policy that from the start was built and policed for and by the military.[17]

Koxinga, who was born in Japan and first came to Fujian as a child only knew his father as an eminent and successful admiral of the great Ming dynasty. He would soon seize a part of the mercantile-military machine still beyond Qing control, and would come to dominate and monopolise trade in the China-Japan-Southeast Asia trade triangle to finance his personal naval and land forces. Koxinga's father, Zheng Zhilong, Ho suggests, was qualitatively different from the Wako merchant pirates, he was a 'sealord' whose political, economic, and military power coalesced into an organised trading system akin to a sort of quasi-state. Like his European rivals, the sealord encountered what might be called a hub problem. Each European empire tried to construct a double-hub system to link the Southeast Asian zone with East Asian zone. All aimed for monopoly power, though success was evanescent: Spanish: Manila + (attempted Taiwan, destroyed by Dutch); Dutch VOC: Batavia + Taiwan (lost Taiwan to Koxinga in 1661); Portuguese: Malacca (lost to Dutch in 1641) + Macau; Zheng Zhilong: Amoy + Hirado; Koxinga and successors: Amoy + Taiwan (lost to

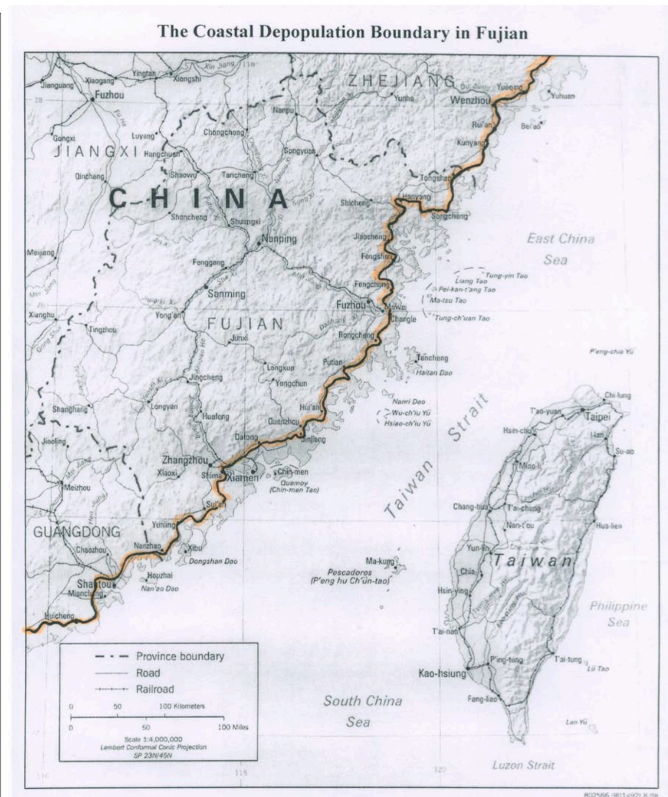
[17] ibid., 244.

the Qing in 1663 and 1683 respectively). This attempt toward the establishment of a military-cum-commercial monopoly was furthermore anathema to Confucian thought.[18]

The Qing tried to negotiate with Koxinga in the years 1645-1654, but when the talks broke down, they hardened their position, culminating in a series of draconian sea bans and the scorched earth policy of 1661 that would come to be known as the Coastal Depopulation Law (Qianjie Ling). Daphon Ho describes the episode: 'coastal dwellers in a thousand-mile stretch from Shandong to Guangdong were ordered to relocate 10-15 miles inland, and Qing troops laid waste to what remained, building watchtowers to patrol the no-man's land and punish those who tried to return to the coast. Some observers wrote of smoke from burning towns darkening the sky for days. Hundreds of thousands migrated to Southeast Asia, to inland provinces, or eastward to islands like Taiwan' in one of the largest forced migrations of the early modern era.[19] The transtemporal repercussions of this episode would lead to processes of Southeast Asian state-building as legions of anti-Qing resisters fled overseas, the descendants of whom would develop a revulsion for the Qing



Map 1. Physiographic Macroregions of Agrarian China in Relation to Major Rivers, with Regional Cores Indicated by Shading



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[18] ibid., 104.

[19] ibid., 129.

and form secret brotherhoods and societies such as the Tiandihui ("Heaven and Earth Society," or "Triads").[20]

Macauley traces how Chaouzhou merchants were active in the Southeast Asian opium economy. Even before the colonial order arose to remap the geography of Southeast Asia - separating "British Malaya" from the "Dutch East Indies", Chaouzhouese plantation owners supplanted their incomes by instituting their own opium farms. Opium smuggling transformed villages such as Wang Xingshun's in Chenghai near the mouth of the Han River into formidable political entities, 'indifferent to the governing agenda of the Qing.'[21] Daphon Ho traces an earlier episode in the 'militarization of rural society' during Zheng Zhilong's lifetime, where as the center collapsed under the weight of its insoluble civil-military divide, homemade castles (tulou: earthen towers) emerged where villagers formed structures and behaviours of self-defence. From 1838-1858, the Qing court would undertake a campaign against the illicit opium trade, the economic repercussions of which would further fracture anti-Qing feeling among villages such as Chenghai. It was in this context and the heightened imperial alarm following the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1866) that Fang Yao commenced his rural pacification campaign.

Autonomous Historiography of the Overseas Merchants

In a seminal text of Southeast Asian historiography, Victor Lieberman delineates how Western understandings of precolonial Southeast Asia have passed through three phase whose successive emphases display a contrapuntal logic. 'The earliest historiographic tradition applied the trope ""indigenous incapacity/external benefaction" with added force from the belief that Southeast Asia, unlike India, China, or the Mideast, had never engendered its own civilization.'[22] The terms 'Farther India', 'Indo-China' and 'Indianisation' were utilised to describe a process whereby early Indian religious, architectural, and scriptural traditions were transferred to Southeast Asia during the first

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[20] Macauley, *Distant Shores,* 95.

[21] ibid., 126.

[22] Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*. Volume 1. *Integration on the Mainland*. (Cambridge University Press: 2007), 7.

millennium c.e. as primarily the fruit of Indian, rather than Southeast Asian, initiatives. Next came, 'the historians of the era after Indianization that, with the arrival of European ships at the great regional emporium of Melaka in 1511, became the history of archipelagic Southeast Asia as a history of Portuguese, Dutch, English or Spanish influences in Asian waters – their wars and trade, their refashioning of local societies – with indigenous peoples reduced to European foils.'[23]

Lieberman writes of an unwritten "law of Southeast Asian inertia": unless acted upon by external forces, native societies remained at rest, without external stimuli, Southeast Asian societies existed in space but not in time. If the first two traditions represented externalist historiographies, Lieberman notes a third orientation of autonomous historiography that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s highlighting how 'Europeans were latecomers in a huge maritime commerce, pioneered by Asians, linking China, Japan, South East Asia, India, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and East Africa. Far from awaiting the Promethean touch of merchants from Europe, a 'global' economy already existed.'[24] The young Dutch historian J.C. van Leur would write shortly before his death in 1942 in the battle of the Java Sea at the age of 34: 'the sheen of the world religions and foreign cultural forms is a thin and flaking glaze; underneath it the whole of the old indigenous forms has continued to exist.'[25]Lieberman's insights are important to a transtemporal study of Southern China's merchant influences across Southeast Asia because it raises to the fore the importance of critically interrogating source material and searching for records of voices outside the imperial point of view. As Daphon Ho writes,

> 'we are still a long way from an integrated history maritime East Asia that can disentangle policy and reality, despite the blood traces left by sailors and sealords in sources scattered from Amoy to Nagasaki, Taipei to Shanghai. Until relatively recently, the search for detailed local histories of the practices and malpractices of Chinese maritime policies paled against the explanatory staying power of insular Chinese

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[23] ibid., 8.

[24] John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 10.

[25] JC van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society* (The Hague, 1955), 18

> mentality. The organised and politicised maritime prowess of the Fujianese, which had inspired such respect and hatred from Dutch captains and Jesuit priests in the days of Nicholas Iquan, became quaint historical artifacts. Sealords could only survive and thrive in an inter-state environment that was rapidly changing in the early modern period. Born in the frontiers of the 17th century, they would die in those frontiers, and never re-center their world or its mainstream narrative. The Manchus, whether they were afraid of water or not, would not tolerate rival claimants to the right of frontier rulership.'[26]

A Chinese Frontier Colliding with an Anglo-Dutch Frontier

In a subchapter of Eric Tagliacozzo's *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States Along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865-1915*, titled 'Chinese Populations in Colonial Minds', Tagliacozzo documents the emergence of mining and agriculture *kongsis* (Chinese cooperatives) in Borneo that existed as semi-independent polities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The kongsis, especially the powerful confederations in western Borneo had their own roads, defences, waterworks, and foreign policies. Tagliacozzo notes how as late as 1890, the Leiden sinologist J.J.M. de Groot would lament the lack of European knowledge about the Chinese: "Their train of thought, their internal lives, their religion, morals, and customs, the ancestral practices which are the chief driving force of all they do—all of this is still a closed book for us."[27]

Wang Gungwu writes of how during the fifteenth century, before the arrival of the Europeans, port communities of Chinese traders were servicing a thriving trade that many people in eastern and Southeast Asia were actively seeking to expand. As Macauley writes, in its simplest form, Chinese territorialism was resource extraction and commercial supremacy without the establishment of a colonial state. Their power and influence were sustained through a mosaic of familial, brotherhood, and commercial relationships tessellated across the port regions of maritime Chaozhou: Bangkok, Singapore, Saigon, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Swatow. Wang Gungwu illuminates the story of the Spanish arrival in Manila that captures some of the socio-historical dynamics and psychologies of

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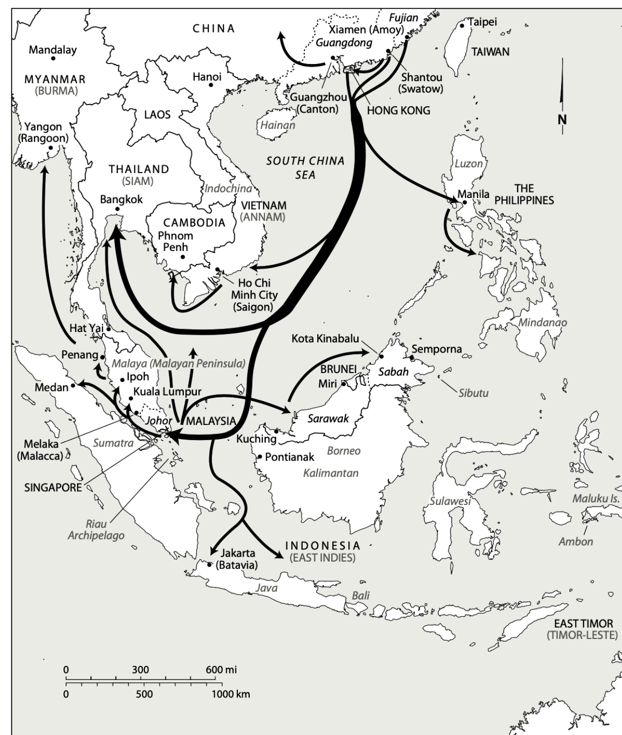
[26] Ho, *Sealords in Vain*, 329.

[27] Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders* (Yale University Press, 2009), 131.

the frontiersmen: 'the Spanish in the Philippines - unlike the Portuguese who had conquered well-established city-ports like Goa and Malacca - settled on an undeveloped chain of islands on the frontiers of sophisticated, "oriental" civilizations.'[28]

'It quickly became clear to the handful of Spanish officials, priests, and soldiers that if they wanted to defend and develop what they had, they needed to expand the China trade and, what was more, they needed Chinese ships, traders, and skilled artisans to build up Manila as a great maritime center and help speed up Spanish control of the islands. Thus they welcomed the coming of Chinese traders as no one in the region had ever welcomed them before. In less than thirty years, the Chinese population reached some ten thousand, perhaps more if the mixed-blood descendants were all counted.' Interestingly, Wang Gungwu notes how over time, Chinese merchant communities in the Philippines divided into two related but different groups: 'a sojourning non-Catholic community and a transitional Catholic one that had become a localised community of mestizos (of part-Chinese descent), many of whom concentrated on the trade with the Chinese sojourners from their ancestral

MAP 2. **Maritime Chaozhou, Nineteenth Century**



The Nanyang: Trajectories of Chinese Overseas Migration to Southeast Asia, 1850–1950. Contents adapted from "Chinese in Southeast Asia," in *The World Today: Concepts and Regions in Geography*, 5th ed. by H.J. de Blij, Peter O. Muller, Jan Nijman, and Antoinette M.G.A WinklerPins (New York: John Wiley, 2011), 397.

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[28] Wang Gungwu, *Merchants without Empire: the Hokkien Sojourning Communities,* (Cambridge University Press: 1993), 409.

homes in Fujian, but whose descendants were on the way to becoming future Filipinos.'[29] In this capacity, Wang Gungwu illuminates the important dimension of identity and its branching evolution in the frontier.

Wang Gungwu notes a similar story play out in the seventeenth century with the Dutch coopting the large Chinese merchant community in Batavia into their ambitions to control the Malay Archipelago, the Indochina coasts, and Japan. Eric Tagliacozzo documents the agency of Chinese merchants as both middlemen intermediaries of the colonial state but also perceived sources of revolutionary ferment by the Dutch colonial agents, 'certain categories of Chinese made Batavia nervous. One of the foremost among these categories was secret societies, or *geheime genootschappen,* which were found throughout Malaya and the Indies and whose heritage could be traced back to the Ming era Seaban and Depopulation exodus to Southeast Asia.[30]

Much scholarship has been written on the key differences and transtemporal repercussions of European state-making and Ming and Qing state-making in the maritime frontiers of Southeast Asia. The Ming and Qing dynasties, Macauley writes, 'were not inclined to establish formal colonial states in Southeast Asia.'[31] Whereas privateering was a key component in early modern war-making in Europe and the United States from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the ritualised order the Ming sought to uphold overseas withheld support for Francis Drake equivalent buccaneers like Lin Feng or Lin Daoqian. Some Chinese historians such as Zeng Shaocong and Dai Yixuan criticise the Ming for abandoning Southeast Asia to the early modern colonial powers.[32] Wang Gungwu documents how under the Sung dynasty (980-1276) and the Southern Sung during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, opportunities in contrast were extended to merchants to create wealth to increase the imperial revenues and at the same time strive for upward mobility.[33]

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[29] ibid., 411

[30] Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders,* 132.

[31] Macauley, *Distant Shores*, 50.

[32] ibid., 366.

[33] Wang, *Merchants Without Empire*, 401.

In Nagasaki, Wang Gungwu notes, the Dutch had the advantage over the Chinese because they dealt with the shogun's officials as representatives of a foreign state. The Hokkiens could make no such claims as lowly provincial merchants remote from the Chinese court. Drawing on Jürgen Osterhammel's work, Macauley suggests that in Chaozhou, in contrast to the metropole-colony relation established by European states throughout the nineteenth century, the key metropole to an expanding periphery was not the home port of Swatow but the overseas port polities of Hong Kong, Shanghai, Saigon and Bangkok, 'the home port of Swatow was never as economically important to maritime Chaozhou as the collective impact of these distant cities.' As the political order disintegrated after 1891, the overseas ports emerged as havens for investment, settlement, and banking.[34]

What is interesting to note is how Daphon Ho's scholarship on Zheng Zhilong (1605-1661) as a sealord whose political, economic, and military power coalesced into an organised trading system akin to a sort of quasi-state challenges the idea that Chinese sojourning communities were rendered ineffectual actors by the absence of state support. Ho's map of parallel private trade and tribute trade routes further suggests that, beyond the concentric idealism of a tianxia cosmology, Ming and Qing officials were cognisant of the dynamics of the maritime frontier while occupied by resolving centrifugal tendencies separating China's coastline from its heartland.[35]

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[34] Macauley, *Distant Shores*, 28

[35] Victor Lieberman's scholarship is again interesting from a comparative perspective. He describes how centrifugal rather than integrative tendencies would predominate in archipelagic Southeast Asia after 1670 related to geographic tendencies of the archipelago: supply ports were widely separated by treacherous seas; the Straits of Melaka could not provide an avenue of communication and control comparable to the Irrawaddy or Chaophraya. In Malaya, tin and other resources were so dispersed that in contrast to most of the mainland, the growth of international demand in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries actually encouraged political devolution. Lieberman writes of the volcanic soils of Central and Eastern Java which were able to contain a population comparable to the Burmese or Thai lowlands, however with no unifying riverine artery or easy island wide communication, and with mountains and swamps, the tendency toward centrifugality reigned. In Java, tensions between the mercantile coast and the agrarian interior led to severe outbreaks of violence in Southeast Asia such as the destruction of Java's north coast ports in the 17th century and owed more to Mataram's attacks than to Dutch interference. A curious dimension to Lieberman's scholarship is whether similar centrifugal forces conditioned Qing state and coastal community interactions in southern China.

An Integrative History of the Ming-Qing Maritime Transition

Joseph Fletcher worked extensively on problems related to the history of the Qing Empire, and was among the first to argue forcefully for the integration of Manchu sources into the historiography of China's final dynasty. Fletcher 'demonstrated the importance of the Inner Asian frontier to the governing consciousness of the Qing rulers, thereby balancing the earlier tendency to focus on coastal interactions with the West as the primary window through which to understand Qing foreign relations.'[36] In Daphon Ho's account, he returns to the Qing maritime frontier, aiming at 'an interpretation, through the Fujianese historical experience, of an East Asian maritime system that may furnish a working vocabulary for integrating the Chinese littoral with early-modern world history.'[37]

The question of whether there is a Liebermanian 'law of East Asian inertia' present in externalist historiography of China's maritime frontier is still open. Ho writes of the simplified tendency of scholars to speak of an '"open" China and a "closed" China—as if there were only two kinds—instead of messy and multiple Chinas or quasi-states that had forcibly absorbed or not absorbed their maritime peoples, or further to conceive of an imperial state formation that had historically made and then unmade a maritime frontier and spilled so much blood to integrate a single province.' It became easy for historians (as for the British officers who bombarded the Bogue with impunity in 1841) to 'project a simple and seemingly unshakeable determinism to the maritime history of China: that it was always peripheral to the landlocked civilization of the Chinese, and that China's ships and seamen had always been inferior, her docks empty, her civilization having slammed the door on early modernity.'[38]

'Born in the frontiers of the 17th century, they would die in those frontiers' illuminates much of the difficulty of locating source material from overseas merchants or smugglers scattered as Ho notes across records from Amoy to Nagasaki, Taipei to Shanghai. The agency, geographic extent and

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[36] https://ealc.fas.harvard.edu/joseph-fletcher

[37] Ho, *Sealords in Vain,* xv.

[38] ibid., 329.

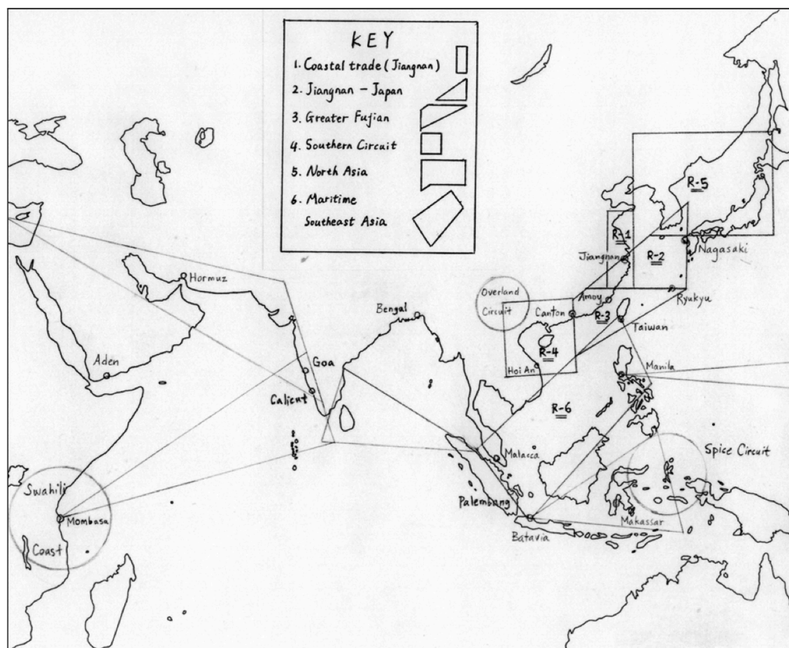
impact of non-statist Chinese merchants overseas is further noted in Wang Gungwu's assessment of the Hokkien sojourning communities who 'because they were not legitimate in the eyes of China, no official accounts are available, and the Chinese sojourners themselves were either illiterate or too discreet to record anything. Their better educated counterparts in ports in China who supported them were unable to admit publicly to their profitable involvement with this trade.' Interestingly, Wang Gungwu notes that, scholars only began to have a fuller picture of these communities when first the Portuguese, then the Spanish, the Dutch, the Japanese and finally the Chinese themselves - when Ming policy was all but abandoned after 1567 - left us descriptions of some of the notable ones in Faifo, Malacca, Patani, Hirado, Nagasaki, Manila, Bantam, and Batavia.'[39]

On state influence in the maritime frontier, there is also emerging scholarship which adds complexity to the argument of an insular Qing state, uninterested in the ocean. Ronald Po's revisionist historiography of the maritime consciousness of Qing scholars such as Wang Dahai and Xie Qinggao (1765–1821). Chen Lunjiong, who from the Kangxi to the Qianlong periods (1721 - 1747) was transferred to different coastal cities would compile the *Haiguo Wenjian Lu*, drawing on prior Ming maritime writings to describe the geography of the maritime frontier, the Bohai area, the southern coast of the empire, covering Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong. In the the outer seas, Chen delineated several categories: the Eastern Sea (*dongyang*) Southeastern Ocean (*dongnanyang*); Southern Ocean (*nanyang*); Small Western Ocean (*xiaoxiyang*); Great Western Ocean (*daxiyang*).[40]

Po stresses the distorting lens that emerges if we analyse Qing maritime consciousness from the historical juncture of the defeat of the Qing navy in the Opium Wars, the Battle of Fuzhou, and the Battle of the Yellow Sea in the nineteenth century. Similarly, Daphon Ho questions the historiography of Ming naval weakness as a projection of this 'sick man of Asia image of China from the 19th Century back onto the 16th and 17th Centuries. 'In 1521 and 1522, Ming warships decisively defeated Portuguese attempts to force an entry, and only as late as 1557 were the

[39] Wang, Merchants without Empire, 408.

[40] Po, *The Blue Frontier*, 183.



Ho sketches an East Asian version of K.N Chaudhuri's Indian Ocean world system map. He describes each region, Region 1 circumscribes the Chinese coastal trade centered around Jiangnan, also known as the Lower Yangzi Delta. Jiangnan was the wealthiest region in late imperial China with abundant agricultural and human resources and the richest cities (e.g. Suzhou, Hangzhou, Nanjing), and thus it carried a disproportionately large weight in economic and cultural life. Region 2 connects Jiangnan, Korea, Japan (via Nagasaki), and Ryukyu (present- day Okinawa). This region was the triangle for a lucrative illicit trade in silk and silver in the 1540s and thus the crucible of the first great maritime Enemy: the Wako of the mid- 1500s (before the pirate wars moved down to Region 3). Region 3 is what might be called Greater Fujian, the geographical stage of much of the action between Fujianese merchants and Qing frontiersmen. The sea space encompasses the Taiwan Straits plus much of Skinner's Southeast Coast macroregion and connects to Ryukyu. It was in the 1500s an expanding littoral sphere and a pirate haven and in the 1600s it was the crucible of the new Enemy: the sealord. Region 4 is essentially the "Cantonese" (South China) water world uncovered by Dian Murray. This maritime region was also loosely linked with the overland circuit of northern Southeast Asia.

Region 5 and Region 6 represent maritime Northern Asia and maritime Southeast Asia and can be further subdivided to fit the needs of Japanese, Korean, Ainu, Manchu, and Southeast Asian specialists. Because Region 6 is a complex and mixed space of Southeast Asian, European, and East Asian interaction, I refrain from breaking it up at this time. As for the unlabelled spaces on the diagram, they are merely sketched as ideas based on my reading of Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian maritime research. I put them there only as a sample to show that the East Asian regions were connected to trans-oceanic regions that may themselves be analysed as sea spaces. (Ho, Sealords in Vain, 44).

Portuguese granted a trading post at Macau as a small peninsula connected to the mainland of Canton by a very narrow isthmus, by which the food supplies to the Portuguese city could be cut off at any time. The Ming state had just expelled Japan from the tributary system and sought to use the Portuguese as temporary allies against the waves of Chinese and Japanese pirates that were then ravaging the coast.'[41] In the chaotic years following the collapse of the Qing dynasty, overseas merchant communities would become enmeshed in early communist movements in the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, and British Malaya. In a recent monograph, *The Nanyang Revolution, The Comintern and Chinese Networks in Southeast Asia, 1890–1957,* Anna Belugorova documents the overlapping energies, centrifugal and unifying tendencies and the significance of identifying 'revolution' as a concept in frontier studies.

Conclusion

Ho documents how Chinese maritime development, as part of the larger East Asian system, 'was not stamped out because of the Seaban or the end of the Zheng He voyages but was instead forced onto a different path. The sea peoples did not meekly follow the dominant "Confucian" culture of their day, but fulfilled their wants and needs in the larger system of maritime activity beyond the purview of the state, despite the risk of running afoul of the authorities.'[42] In this sense an

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[41] Ho, *Sealords in Vain*, 60.

[42] ibid.

autonomous historiography of the sojourning merchants of southern China is still to be integrated into a revised historiography of the psychological complexity of Ming and Qing decision-making on its maritime frontier. Locating the maritime as a concept in extension onto the key dialectic of coastal and interior income differentials, power struggles and local affiliation and linguistic identities illuminates a far more complex image of the frontier as a polyvalent, nebulous zone of psychological agency, cross-currents and autonomous sequences, closer to Frederick Turner's grasping of the frontier as the 'graphic line which records the expansive energies of the people behind it, a form of society rather than area.'[43]

The psychological cross-currents of anti-Qing sentiment, Manchu frontiers policy and Ming residual loyalties is one important conceptual avenue that might be further explored. Maritime trade as Ho writes, 'had to traverse linguistic, monetary, geographical, and technological obstacles and constraints', furthermore rather than being country-to-country, it was an exchange (of people, goods, services, ideas) between multiple productive areas within sea spaces or betwixt them, often involving and spurring specialisation.[44] By returning to the making of the Fujianese frontier, Ho opens up the promise of an integrative history of China's littoral with the complex broader zones of maritime Northern Asia and maritime Southeast Asia and the mixed space of Southeast Asian, European, and East Asian interaction.

Macauley suggests that a transtemporal lens further enables us to identity symmetries where Kenneth Pomeranz identified divergences, 'Pomeranz', Macauley writes, 'was right to point to the ecological challenges confronting the Chinese mainland after 1750, but understanding Chaozhou across its translocal world illuminates, not a divergence with European modernity, but a convergence in colonised sites that were critical to the industrial revolution and accelerating levels of capital accumulation. 'Southeast coastal emigrants participated in a Chinese sphere of commercial modernity that adapted to political and cultural transformations. With superior institutions of migration and a masterful application of legal and illegal tactics in their competition

[43] Macauley, *Distant Shores*, 27.

[44] Ho, *Sealords in Vain,* 41-42.

with Western imperialists, they emerged among the commercial masters of the South China Sea, serious rivals to the foreign powers before things began to fall apart in the 1930s.' This historiography further revises the image of the Chinese civilization 'having slammed the door on early modernity.'[45] A transtemporal heuristic might also apply to the genealogy of current South China Sea discourse, opening space for more granular readings of maritime interaction between state and non-state actors as conditioned by linguistic, monetary, geographical, and technological obstacles and constraints, and closely connected to developments on the Chinese littoral.

It is interesting that in the initial book I came across that sparked my imagination on Sino-Nanyang interactions, *The Mandarin-Capitalists from Nanyang: Overseas Chinese Enterprise in the Modernisation of China*, 1894 - 1911, Michael R. Godley is writing the preface from Hilo, Hawaii in 1980, recollecting how his research began in Singapore in 1970. Why Singapore and why Hawaii opens up the dimension of how research is informed by its geography and whether an island view is needed to contend with the continental thought emanating from the North American or Eurasian shelf. Another important dimension related to the geography and directionality of scholarship is the many-sidedness of frontier zones requiring an element of cubist elision. In this capacity, an 'integrative history' of the maritime frontier would require locating the elisional moments between Southeast Asian historiography, Nanyang historiography, New Qing historiography and non-statist historiography and social history of southern Chinese merchant communities.

Studying a parallel course to Chinese Frontier Societies in South and Southeast Asian Studies at the School of International Studies of Peking University this term was illuminating in this capacity, the work of authors such as O.W. Wolters on 'localisation'; Victor Lieberman on the generative dialectics of coastal and interior income differentials over time and strange parallels; and linguists such as Tom Hoogervorst examining China-Southeast Asia, the Bay of Bengal and East Africa as a contiguous zone of linguistic and material evolution opens up a transtemporal history of the Ming-Qing maritime frontier to the vitality of parallel thought and the pull of cross-currents.

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[45] Macauley, *Distant Shores,* 33.

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Maps: page 2, Map 1: China During the Ming-Qing Transition, from Frederic Wakeman, Jr., The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China ; (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 28-29 (cited in Ho, 2011) ; Map 2: Ming China and the Wako Pirate Raids, from Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., China goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 256-257 (cited in Ho, 2011); page 4, Map 3: Two Trade Systems, Daphon Ho, Sealords Live in Vain: Fujian and the Making of a Maritime Frontier in Seventeenth-Century China, 2011, 61; Map 4: Comparison of Maritime Fujian and Guangdong, Roderich Ptak, *China, the Portuguese and the Nanyang*, I-188 (cited in Ho, 2011); page 7, Diagram 1: Command Structure, Daphon Ho, 2011, adapted from Zhu Min haijun junshi bianzuanshi 驻闽海军军事编纂室, Fujian haifangshi 福建海防史 (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1990), 170-172; and Zhu Weigan 朱维幹, Fujian shigao 福建史稿 (Fu'an: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 1986), vol. 2, 403; Map 5: Southeast Coast Macroregion, Philip A. Kuhn, Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times, 2008, 30 (cited in Ho, 2011, 177); page 8, Map 6: Skinner's Nine Macroregions, G. William Skinner, ed. The City in Late Imperial China, 1977, 214 (cited in Ho, 2011, 32); Map 7: The Coastal Depopulation Boundary in Fujian, Ho, 2011, 221; page 12, Map 8: Maritime Chaozhou, Nineteenth Century, Melissa Macauley, 2021, 10; Map 9: The Nanyang Trajectories of Overseas Chinese, Brian Bernards, 2015, 8; page 17, Map 10: Sea Spaces, Ho, 2011, 42.