

# Tongking Gulf under Reconquest? Maritime Interaction Between China and Vietnam Before and After the Diplomatic Crisis in the Sixteenth Century\*

YAMAZAKI Takeshi

## Introduction

On the 3rd day of the 11th lunar month 1540, a procession of Vietnamese noblemen gathered at the border gate to China. They were all celebrated nobles of the Vietnamese ruling class, with Mạc Đăng Dung 莫登庸 (1483?-1541), the former emperor of Đại Việt 大越, at the head of the party. On the other side of the gate, the Chinese governor-general and other officials of the Liang Guang 兩廣 (the two Guang provinces, Guangdong 廣東 and Guangxi 廣西) were ready to receive them. No other site could be so suitable for this meeting as this gate, which the Chinese called Zhennan guan 鎮南關 (“Gate for Pacifying the South”).

The Vietnamese party led by Mạc Đăng Dung entered the gate, and then took off their shoes to submit the instrument of surrender addressed to the emperor of Ming 明 China (1368-1644) in front of the temporary quarters established for this ceremony. Barefooted, clad in a white shroud, creeping and kowtowing northward just as prisoners, the Vietnamese ex-emperor and noblemen, with utmost humbleness, appealed to the mercy of the Ming emperor to cancel his punitive campaign against their land. Thereafter, Mạc Văn Minh 莫文明 (?-1546), a nephew of Đăng Dung and others were delegated as envoy and dispatched to the imperial court in Beijing. Fortunately for the Mạc and the Vietnamese people, their petition was accepted. The following year, the Jiajing 嘉靖 Emperor of Ming China recognized the Mạc as the legitimate ruler of the Vietnamese polity. After all, Vietnam was saved from Chinese invasion, thanks to the disgrace and poor repute the Mạc rulers forced themselves to bear.<sup>1</sup>

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Previous studies by modern Japanese and Chinese scholars have revealed that the authorization of the Mạc dynasty by Ming China resulted from prolonged disputes between the Jiajing emperor and his officials. Although these scholars have meticulously traced the policy making process at the Ming court and the outlines of the Sino-Viet diplomatic relations,<sup>2</sup> they seldom focussed upon the transnational grass-root interactions in the bordering region, largely ignoring the social backgrounds of local people. The reason for such a bias may stem from an understanding of China, which explains international contacts between China and other countries in terms of “tributary relations”. The idealized framework of “tributary system” allowed Chinese to conceive of their emperor as the ultimate suzerain over the rest of the world. This world-view was further reinforced under the Mongol and Manchu conquest dynasties. It still affects the modern studies of Chinese pre-modern diplomatic policies.

However, as Fuma Susumu 夫馬進 has pointed out, it may lead to serious misunderstandings if we literally take tributary relations as the Chinese world order, which allegedly dominated all diplomatic relations among the East and Southeast Asian countries in pre-modern times. Actually, in the case of the Ming dynasty, many tributaries may have rather voluntarily sent envoys to China in pursuit of prestigious and lucrative tribute-trade, whereas Vietnamese dynasties as well as those of Korea were rather compelled to do so out of security concerns. Nevertheless, Chinese relations with Korea and Vietnam also greatly differed according to the cultural backgrounds and political contexts of both countries. Since each of such “tributary states” had its own reasons to send envoys to China, Chinese reactions to them varied too. Only by inquiring into individual cases it is possible to illumine the reality of the Chinese diplomacy, distinct from its ideology and misleading image.<sup>3</sup>

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English draft. I also greatly appreciate the instructive comments given by Prof. Li Cho-ying 李卓穎 of National Tsing Hua University. However, I am responsible for any errors in this essay.

- 1 The most detailed description of this ceremony is found in *Cangwu zongdu junmen zhi* 蒼梧總督軍門志 34; see also *Ming shilu* 明實錄, Shizong 世宗 248 (20th year Jiajing, 4th month, *genshen*).
- 2 The process of the Ming-Viet diplomatic relations, see Fujiwara Riichiro 1975, Osawa Kazuo 1975, and Zheng Yongchang 1995.
- 3 Fuma 2007.

Moreover, state-relations serve as a point of departure for exploration of transnational interactions beyond state borders and cultural differences. Such a perspective will yield a more vivid and multifaceted understanding of China and its neighbors.

This study endeavors to illustrate an aspect of grass-root interactions between China and Vietnam that occurred in relation with the discussions in the Ming court on the expedition planned against Mạc Vietnam during the first half of the sixteenth century, with special attention to the descriptions on maritime interaction produced by two Chinese literati, Lin Xiyuan 林希元 (c.1480–c.1560) and Wu Pu 吳樸 (16th c.). Before going into the details of the main topic, the following section first offers a general overview of Sino-Viet relations on the eve of the diplomatic incident.<sup>4</sup>

### How Vietnam Mattered to China

When the Vietnamese came to recognize themselves as a “nation” is controversial. Although modernization helped forge national self-awareness, it is too simplistic to view the birth of the Vietnamese nation as a collective reaction to western imperialist powers. Struggles against the repeated interferences from their northern neighbor must figure prominently in any explanation of Vietnamese national identity.<sup>5</sup> Although they shared a common cosmology and pattern of thinking with the Chinese, Vietnamese scholars have been consistently writing their official history as an autonomous nation, fundamentally different and legitimately independent from the empire of China.<sup>6</sup> This is apparent in *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* 大越史記全書, compiled by Ngô Sĩ Liên 吳士連 in fifteenth century.

On the other hand, as can also be seen in *Daxue yanyi bu* 大學衍義補 (“Addendum for the Deduction from the Book of Great Learning”), compiled by Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421–1495), a Chinese scholar-official almost contemporary with Ngô, Chinese scholars claimed the land and population of the Red River delta as part of their empire. They argued that the territory had been unlawfully

4 Li Tana’s macroscopic overview on the overseas connections between Vietnam and other countries, especially China, helps us have the birds-eye view on the matter. See Li 2006. We could see similar perspectives in the essays in Cooke, Li, and Anderson 2011.

5 Keith Taylor (1983, “introduction”, vii-xi) refers the formation of “Vietnameseness” to the long process from the third century B.C.E to the tenth century C. E., during which the Chinese empire dominated Vietnamese people until the latter finally obtained independence.

6 For the Vietnamese historiography and its national consciousness, see Wolters 1996.

occupied by barbarians due to the Song dynasty's poor management. While admitting the Vietnamese polity as an autonomous state, the empire of China ostensibly behaved as suzerain, regarding Vietnam as its vassal kingdom, giving it a name Annan 安南 ("Pacifying the South"), which had been applied to a colonial province located in what today would be northern Vietnam during the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907). Before its ultimate independence from Song China, the rulers of the Red River Delta had received titles as regional military governors, and their territory had been regarded as an administrative unit under the Chinese jurisdiction. Such historical ties made it quite common for Chinese literati of later generations to think of the Red River delta as a proper part of Chinese domain.<sup>7</sup>

Having attained an autonomous polity and formed a distinctive independent identity from China, managing the peaceful relations with their northern neighbor demanded Vietnam's closest attention. At the same time that the Vietnamese rulers sent tributes to China as the vassal king of Annan, in the meantime, they ruled their land and people by the authority of the "Southern Emperor", calling their realm principally, following the Chinese style, by the name of Đại Việt 大越 ("Great Việt"). They suffered repeated incursions from the north by Song China and the Yuan Mongol regimes. They survived such attacks and expelled the enemy troops from their territory at the cost of innumerable human lives on the both sides.<sup>8</sup>

It was the Yongle 永樂 (r. 1403–1424) Emperor of Ming China who first succeeded in conquering Vietnam after its independence. The war began with a claim by Yongle against the usurpation by Hồ Quý Ly 胡季犛 (1336–1407?), who had been a subject of the Trần 陳 dynasty (1225–1400), and ascended the Vietnamese throne, replacing his master. On the pretext of punishing an usurper, Chinese troops invaded northern Vietnam, and almost immediately occupied the whole Red River delta. The conquerors, however, showed little interest in restoring the throne to the survivors of the Trần family, and instead established Jiaozhi province to regulate the people, lands, and resources under Chinese occupation.

After twenty years of Chinese occupation in northern Vietnam, Lê Lợi 黎利, a rebel leader from Thanh Hóa 清化 drove the Chinese government out of Vietnam, and ascended to the throne. At home, the empire of Đại Việt was

7 *Daxue yanyi bu* 143 ("Yu Yidi" 馭夷狄).

8 For the historical process of China and Vietnam from the tenth century to the nineteenth century, see the series of chronological essays in Yamamoto 1975.

proclaimed, and though it regularly sent tributary envoys to Ming China every three years. It achieved great prosperity as an autonomous Vietnamese polity during the rest of the century, especially under the reign of Lê Tu Thành 黎思誠 (1442–1497), posthumously called Thánh Tông 聖宗, who made expeditions to the neighboring Lao and Cham kingdoms and expanded Vietnamese influence over them. However, after the deaths of Thánh Tông and his son, Hiến Tông 憲宗 (r. 1498–1503), the dynasty began to decline. The Lê family fell into severe conflicts with each other, and the court split into factions among prominent officials and minions of the emperors struggling for power. As the state influence deteriorated outside the capital, those who were frustrated with the political strife in the court retreated to their native land, and rose up against the central government. A series of coups and massacres within the court and royal family ensued. Innocent infant emperors, enthroned by the support of conflicting nobles, were no more than their puppets, incapable of dealing with the rebels spreading through their dominion.

Confronted with such chaos, the Vietnamese court allowed Mạc Đăng Dung's ascendance to the position of predominance. Known as a brave warrior, an accomplished general and a charismatic leader, after having supported his puppet emperor Lê Xuân 黎椿 (1506–1527) only for two years, he turned from a minister of great reputation to an emperor of the utmost notoriety in the Vietnamese traditional historiography. The usurpation actually took place in 1527, when Mạc Đăng Dung forced the infant emperor to yield the throne to himself in the “lawful” procedure of traditional *thiện nhượng* 禪讓 ritual.<sup>9</sup>

The incident went unreported to the Chinese court for several years. In fact, it may have been covered up by local officials on the Chinese side, especially those of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, who feared that the emperor might embroil his subjects in foreign strife of no advantage to themselves.

Their foreboding proved correct. The information reached the Jiajing Emperor's ear in 1536, when he had given birth to his heir and demanded congratulatory envoys from his tributary kings. He noticed that the king of Annam had not submitted tributary gifts for more than twenty years. Offended by imperial pride, the emperor decided duty required action. Therefore, the Ministry of Rites finally informed him of Mạc Đăng Dung's coup. Although his minister

9 For the chronological process of Mạc Đăng Dung's usurpation, see *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* 14–15. More concise chronology depending on Chinese Records, see Osawa 1975 and Zheng 1995.

advised him to leave the barbarians to be as they would be, outraged by the incident, the emperor insisted on dramatic action. This is how Jiajing emperor came to be interested in the Annan issue and develop the plan for a punitive expedition.

As the emperor showed an extraordinary zeal for this campaign, his ministers immediately expressed their approval, and the bureaucratic apparatus of the empire began to investigate the incident and prepare for the war. As far as considering contemporary reviews, many of the literati outside the court assumedly applauded to this campaign.

However, some officials voiced opposition, expressing concern about the bitter experience of the Chinese occupation in Vietnam, growing tensions on the northern border, the deteriorated strength of Chinese army, and daunting economic costs of war. They argued that, if no territory was gained through military action, this would offset the costs of occupation.

Although the emperor's main concern was justice and imperial dignity, the majority of the officials responsible for this campaign remained reluctant to dedicate themselves to the plan, which may have seemed to them a product of the emperor's arbitrary will and likely to come to naught. The emperor gradually found himself isolated at court, facing frank objections presented by rather faithful subjects as well as the noncommittal attitudes of the rests.

Before the emperor met final defeat, he encountered a supporter who advocated war almost as ardently as he did. His name was Lin Xiyuan 林希元, an official from southern Fujian. He was a mere local magistrate, but he was serving Qinzhou 欽州, a sub-prefecture in the western end of Guangdong province, bordering Vietnam, where he was improving the region's social infrastructure and collecting intelligence on the neighboring domain. His proposals matched to the emperor's own design, and the information he brought from the borderland proved useful to the emperor in persuading the weak and vacillating subjects to believe in his promise of victory. Therefore, despite his humble post, Lin Xiyuan's opinions were treated as important as those of high officials in the discussions.

To understand the social background behind the Sino-Viet relations in this period, Lin Xiyuan is a key person. His letters and writings provide information on the relations between China and Vietnam, and his involvement in this issue implies intriguing grass-root connections between Vietnam and southern China, especially his native southern Fujian.

## Lin Xiyuan Cries for War

Lin Xiyuan was born in Tong'an 同安 county, which belonged to Quanzhou prefecture in southern Fujian.<sup>10</sup> He passed the imperial civil service examination in 1517, and soon received a position in the Supreme Court of Justice (*dali si* 大理寺) in Nanjing. According to several editions of his biography, he was such a man of admirable boldness when confronting with any sort of social injustice, that sometimes he justly persecuted men of great influence without avoiding their displeasure. It seems certain that he was harsh and uncompromising against his rivals, as seen in the fact that he once voluntarily quitted his post and was twice downgraded during his official career for his outspoken accusations against officials of higher rank.

Lin Xiyuan is also known as a Confucian scholar belonging to the middle Ming Fujianese school, which proclaimed to be the authentic follower of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) teachings. He confessed to be an admirer of Cai Qing 蔡清 (1453–1508), a scholar-official, who had been the Principal of the National Academy (*guozijian* 國子監) and was honored as the central figure of the Quanzhou branch of Confucian school.<sup>11</sup> Even though scholars of the Qing dynasty highly appreciated Cai Qing as a genuine scholar, they despised his follower's works as nothing more than textbooks for exams, a typically derogatory comment used by literati of Jiangnan and Zhejiang to deprecate Fujianese scholarship.<sup>12</sup> Though included in the Imperial collection *Complete Library of Four Branches* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書), Lin Xiyuan's scholarly work *Critical Analysis on the Book of Changes* (*Yijing cunyi* 易經存疑), was disdained by the editors of the authoritative bibliography *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目 as plagiarism.<sup>13</sup>

Even though it does not seem proper to regard Lin Xiyuan as a prominent scholar in the history of Confucianism, he was an assertive scholarly activist. His final dismissal from officialdom resulted from presenting his books to the em-

10 There are several biographies of Lin Xiyuan as below. "Yunnan anchasi qianshi Lingong zhuan" 雲南按察司僉事林公傳, in *Guochao xianzheng lu* 102, "Qianshi Li Yunnan anchasi qianshi Lin-gong zhuan n Ciya xiansheng xuepai" 僉事林次崖先生學派, in *Minzhong lixue yuanyuan kao* 63, and "Lin Ciya xiansheng zhuan" 林次崖先生傳 by Cai Xianchen 蔡獻臣, in the preliminary volume of *Tong'an Lin Ciya xiansheng wenji*. Also see his biography written by Bodo Wiethoff, in Goodrich and Fang 1976, 919-922 ("Lin Hsi-yüan").

11 See "Qianshi Lin Ciya xiansheng xuepai", in *Minzhong lixue yuanyuan kao* 63.

12 For the literary tradition and trends of Fujian schools overlooked in a long span from the Song to Ming dynasties, see Nakasuna Akinori 2012.

13 *Siku quanshu zongmu* 5 ("Yijing cunyi").

peror, including a revised text of *Book of Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學). Although borrowing the idea from his predecessors, this work by his hand overtly defies the authority of the orthodox text edited by Zhu Xi himself. He no doubt had intended to reject Wang Yangming's 王陽明 revision of it, which had been enthusiastically propagated among many of his contemporaries, especially in Jiangnan and Zhejiang provinces. Consequently, he was interrogated and degraded to a commoner; all his publications were burnt.<sup>14</sup>

However, the editors of the *Veritable Records of the Ming [Emperors]* (*Ming Shilu* 明實錄), relating this event, comment sympathetically on his scholarly accomplishment.<sup>15</sup> In fact, his works became standard textbooks for students taking the imperial exams, which may also indicate that his scholarly fame was widely acknowledged by his contemporaries as well as by later generations at least in Fujian. And even the editors of *Siku* apparently could not help but appreciate his poetry and writings, as seen in their remark that his literary works, sometimes in unrefined expressions, plainly represents what he really means to say without too much embroidering of words and phrases.<sup>16</sup>

Lin Xiyuan was born in a small village located on the northern coast of Amoy Bay.<sup>17</sup> He had no significant family background, even not knowing the name of his own paternal ancestor of four generations before. His family owned some strips of land, which they rented, while also cultivating their property by themselves. He received only a basic education in his childhood, and his village was isolated from the intensive learning of urban society. Thus, he grew up in the midst of peasant and fishermen with no literary atmosphere. Before he succeeded in the imperial civil service examination, his father died at the age of 40, having been driven off his property by a rival clan and fatally disappointed. All this may have contributed to his stubborn, competitive personality and his willingness to confront against what he considered to be unjust. After embarking on his official career, his character provoked such a sense of awe in some of his contemporaries, as to be revered as a man of iron.<sup>18</sup> Although his official life

14 Lin Xiyuan's scholarly life, especially in respect of anti-Yanming discourses, see, Kojima Tsuyoshi 1996.

15 *Ming shilu*, Shizong 368 (29th year Jiajing, 12th month, *xinwei*).

16 *Siku wuanshu zongmu* 176 ("Lin Ciya ji" 林次崖集).

17 Lin Xiyuan accounts his own family background in his father's biography. See, "Xianfujun Mingfu xiansheng xingzhuang" 先府君明夫先生行狀, in *Tong'an Lin Ciya xiansheng wenji* 14.

18 See "Yunnan anchasi qianshi Lin-gong zhuan", in *Guochao xianzheng lu* 102.

lacked the glory of an outstanding statesman, amongst Fujianese literary circle, he became a charismatic figure due to his prominent “scholarship”.

One of his biographers relates that Lin Xiyuan frequently advised local governors about how to solve local problems of banditry and famine for the sake of his fellow countrymen. It seems that he personally exerted considerable influence on the local government in his homeland. With their prestige as office-holders, when ex-officials retired to their homes, they quite commonly intervened in the local administration in terms of fiscal and juridical issues during the late Ming period. Cooperating with local gentry was indispensable for the administrators to keep the local population under control, as those bands of elites functioned as mediator between the government and rural society, gathering information, consulting opinions, executing government policies and so forth. Meanwhile, it was often the case that those behind the scene fixers in behind actually controlled local administration, virtually replacing the power of legitimate governors, a development Qing scholars often criticized as a structural corruption of the Ming society.<sup>19</sup>

Grand inspector Zhu Wan 朱纨 (1494–1550) is well-known for his tragic death, as he challenged the corruption of the local society and consequently ruined himself in suicide. Appointed as a grand coordinator of Zhejiang and concurrently governor-general of coastal Fujian in 1547, Zhu Wan undertook the difficult task of reconstructing social order by reinforcing the government prohibition against local people sailing overseas. In his report to the Jiajing Emperor, Zhu Wan condemned Lin Xiyuan as the godfather of smuggling and piracy in southern Fujian and asserted that Lin Xiyuan patronized those seafarers, who were suspected of allying with foreigners and engaging in piracy. Zhu also exposed the scandal that Lin possessed no less than five illegal ships of his own harbored in the bays around Zhangzhou 漳州 and Quanzhou 泉州. Further, Zhu revealed that smugglers owed money, ships and crews to Lin Xiyuan, relying on the protection provided by his authority and prestige, which the local militia and police dare not offend.<sup>20</sup>

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19 The questions concerning the status and prestige of ex-officials in the late Ming local society inspired a series of arguments among Japanese scholars from 1970s to 80s. See Shigeta Atsushi 1975, and Kishimoto Mio 1999.

20 Zhu Wan, “Yueshi haifang shi” 閱視海防事 (26th year Jiajing, 12th month, 26), in *Piyu zaji* 2. As for Zhu Wan’s policy and the local reactions in Zhejiang and Fujian Provinces, see Higgins 1980, Yamazaki Takeshi 2003 and Liao Dake 2009.

Although Lin Xiyuan flatly denied his participation in smuggling and piracy, he could not help but acknowledge that he knew that some of his fellow countrymen engaged in smuggling with Portuguese in Amoy Bay. Lin also controlled a man who served as an intermediary between the local government and the smugglers, both Portuguese and Chinese.<sup>21</sup> Although we lack sufficient documentation to know with certainty whether or to what extent he fiscally benefited from smuggling trade, there is no question that he was intimately familiar with the smuggling trade operating in his homeland. However, Lin Xiyuan kept it in total connivance; he may even have run it himself.

Like many of his contemporaries during the turbulent times of the middle Ming onward, Lin Xiyuan showed great interest in military affairs. The Ming military organization based on *wei* and *suo* 衛所, which was consisted of the households registered in military category, was wracked with problems. Officers inherited their posts and performed their duties only desultorily. Soldiers were in their proper service only when they were too old to do other jobs. None were capable of fighting in real battlefields. In response, the Ming government hired more and more of soldiers to augment the government forces. In his letters to the emperor, Lin Xiyuan occasionally advocated incorporation of outlaw soldiers to introduce into imperial forces. He also recommended those from Fujian and Guangdong provinces as the most capable, especially of his native Quanzhou and Zhangzhou prefectures.

Insisting on the expedition against the Mạc dynasty, Lin Xiyuan proposed to the emperor to organize seafarers of Fujian and Guangdong into a battle fleet in order to attack the Mạc and the Vietnamese capital Thăng Long 昇龍 from the sea. According to Lin Xiyuan's research, Mạc Đăng Dung's palace in his birthplace Cổ Trai 古齋 was located on the seacoast in the middle of the way from Qinzhou to Thăng Long by sea, where the Mạc commanded ten thousand soldiers, and set around innumerable stakes in the waterbed for defense against invaders from the sea. In addition, seven generals and their forces were reportedly deployed around his palace, and on the seaside was established another navy base to train twenty thousand marines. Then, Lin insists that, even if the Ming troops overcome Thăng Long by land, the Mạc would inevitably take refuge in Cổ Trai, and advocates to attack the Mạc

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21 "Yu Weng Jianyu biejia shu" 與翁見愚別駕書, in *Tong'an Lin Ciyu xiansheng wenji* 5.

maritime base at first and thence to capture Thăng Long.<sup>22</sup> In order to bring the idea into practice, during his mission in Qinzhou, Lin Xiyuan even returned to his native southern Fujian and incited the local chiefs to rise up for the expedition.<sup>23</sup>

Ostensibly, Lin Xiyuan's proposals to the emperor were dedicated to imperial glory. However, his enthusiasm on this issue may have come from something more substantial than the mere satisfaction of the emperor's vanity. It is possible that he was a kind of political person, who could appeal to his contemporaries, representing, by his own statements and actions, some of the wordless frustrations accumulated in the mind of common people. Though not having had a great success in his official career, Lin Xiyuan was a revered scholar in his homeland. Considering his fame, it is possible to suppose that Lin's defiant attitude to the mainstream of officialdom provoked a sense of awe in the frustrated mind of his fellow countrymen, who felt alienated from their contemporary regime and government authority, which were not amiable to people who made their lives on the seas.

If we remind ourselves of the social atmosphere in southern Fujian during the sixteenth century, this assumption may seem even more persuasive.<sup>24</sup> From the beginning of the Ming dynasty, when the first emperor Zhu Yuanzhang decreed the ban against overseas sailing, having private contact with foreigners was officially prohibited for Chinese citizens and persecuted by force. However, private seafarers had increased from the late fifteenth century on, and drastically swelled in number at the turn of the century.

In 1529, Lin Fu 林富, the governor-general of the *Liang-Guang* provinces reported to the Jiajing Emperor that, after the year 1522, authorities of Guangdong province had expelled *Folangji* 佛郎機, the outrageous Portuguese, out of the Guangzhou port. Thenceforth, even the Vietnamese and Malaccans were not allowed to enter Guangzhou. As result, he continued, those vessels haunted to the sea around Zhangzhou, seeking the opportunity to trade with Chinese merchants. Thus, as Lin Fu observed, while Guangzhou had lost profits from legitimate taxes, Fujian was flourishing through illegal smuggling.<sup>25</sup>

22 Lin Xiyuan, "Chen yujian zan miaomo yi tao Annan shu" 陳愚見贊廟謨以討安南疏, in *Huang Ming jingshi wenbian* 164 and *Tong'an Lin Ciya xiansheng wenji* 4.

23 See Lin Xiyuan, "Mo Dengyong zhi Qinzhou touxiang jishi jietie" 莫登庸至欽州投降紀事揭帖, in *Tong'an Lin Ciya xiansheng wenji* 6.

24 The social atmosphere of Southern Fujian is most eloquently described in Zhu Wan's letters to the emperor compiled in *Piyu zaji*. See Higgins 1980, Yamazaki 2003, and Liao 2009.

25 *Ming shilu*, Shizong 106 (8th year Jiajing, 10th month, *jisi*).

Those smugglers actually came from all along the southeastern coastal provinces, including Jiangnan, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong. Those from Zhangzhou and Quanzhou of southern Fujian were the most numerous, active, and even aggressive. When China came to be involved in the growing maritime commerce of this period, the conflicts between government authority and local people also began to intensify in the area. Quite a number of Chinese seafarers engaged in clandestine trade with foreigners, seeking safety by equipping themselves with arms. They hid among the islands along the southeastern coastline in order to escape the reach of official restrictions. Some outlaws preyed on other outlaws, who in turn sought brutal vengeance upon their rivals. Alienated from civil society and frustrated with the present regime, they sought success through increasingly violent activities. It seems proper to call them pirates rather than mere merchants, given the rough and dangerous life in the sea destined for them to endure.<sup>26</sup>

It was this sort of men whom Lin Xiyuan proposed hiring for soldiers. Such a measure was also intended to provide those outlaws of his homeland with the opportunity to participate in official services. As the prime minister Xia Yan 夏言 (1482–1548) reportedly criticized him as a bloody chauvinist,<sup>27</sup> his persistent proposal to the emperor for war and killing may also have aimed at setting up a collective enemy outside the empire, in the hope of directing the hostility of the Chinese multitudes to something other than themselves. By his public expression of belligerence, Lin embodied the rebellious sentiment and crude chauvinism developing among the outlaw seafarers, and by his repetitive proposals of military operations, represented the swelling power of violent activism prevailing and accelerating in the coastal provinces of southeastern China.

Despite his appeals to the emperor, Lin's proposal for the southern campaign did not win general approval from the majority of the officialdom. Although the emperor himself was also enthusiastic for the expedition, those officials, who were either coming from or taking charge of the provinces bordering with Vietnam, especially of Guangdong and Guangxi, opposed destroying the present tranquil relationship between China and Vietnam by provoking such hostility at the cost of human lives.

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26 As for the general conditions of smuggling trade and piracy in this period, see Chang 1969 [Zhang Tianze 1988], So 1975, and Lin Renchuan 1987.

27 Lin Xiyuan, "Annan shi shimo ji" 安南事始末記, in *Tong'an Lin Ciya xiansheng wenji* 10.

## Commerce and Conquest in Tongking Gulf

The disputes at the Chinese court on the “punitive” expedition to Vietnam ceased to make sense when Mạc Đăng Dung and his followers totally subjugated to the Ming in 1540. As they yielded to the Jiajing emperor sovereignty over the whole land and people of their dominion, Mạc Phúc Hải, Đăng Dung’s grandson and the proclaimed ruler, was endowed with the title commander-in-chief of Annan (*Annan dutong shi* 安南都統使). This disposition literally meant that the kingdom was abolished and the royal throne replaced with one of the departments of the Chinese government. As many of contemporaries believed, Ming China had ostensibly succeeded in reconquering Vietnam and annexed it into its proper domain without any cost of economic expense and human lives.

However, it was obvious before long that this was no more than a nominal disguise to save imperial face and had little to do with the previous relationship between China and Vietnam. The commander-in-chief still proclaimed himself as the emperor of Đại Việt and used his proper era name in his own dominion, just the same as the kings of previous dynasties had done. If literally referring to legitimacy, such an assumption constitutes intolerable violation of imperial prestige. However, no one in the Ming court took up this and called for disputes again, as preceding emperors similarly connived with Vietnamese kings as well. Through this compromise, both China and Vietnam rectified the still existing discords between themselves, and resumed the conventional relationship between tributary and tributée without bringing about fundamental change in it.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, even from decades before, the informal intercourses between Vietnam and China had been increasing in scale. The economic growth in China encouraged seafarers to expand their commercial activities overseas. The developing power of smugglers overwhelmed the coastal police and militia, while those official institutions were also involved in the commercial economy, following the process of “corruption” in the midst of the structural transformation of Chinese economy and society.

Adjacent to China all along the northern border, Vietnam was also involved into the international circulation of money and goods. The dissolution of the centralized regime under the Lê dynasty in the early sixteenth century was considerably owed to the flourishing commerce in the downriver region of the Red

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28 Osawa 1975.

River delta. In 1516, a rebellion exploded in Quảng Ninh 廣寧 and Hải Dương 海陽, the northeast littoral of the delta. The rebel leader Trần Cảo 陳嵩 was a native of present Hải Phòng 海防 prefecture, posing as a legitimate descendant of the emperor Thái Tông 太宗 of the former Trần dynasty.<sup>29</sup> This event brought the whole delta into confusion and civil wars, by that Mạc Đăng Dung, who supported the Lê emperors suppressing a sequence of court struggles which followed, finally attained the hegemony in the ruling society. Trần Cảo was the predecessor of his suppressor Mạc Đăng Dung in a respect. Mạc Đăng Dung's birth place Cổ Trai was situated at the inlet estuary of Red River in the present Hải Phòng, where he was born as a fisherman's son. In China, he was widely believed to be a member of boat-housed Chinese community, the *Danjia* 蠶家, resided in Dongguan 東莞 county of Guangzhou.<sup>30</sup> Although this dubious rumor was not corroborated by Vietnamese records, in fact, the Vietnamese and Chinese people likely had commercial intercourse with each other all along the coastline from southern China to northern Vietnam. The booming commercial exchange in the downriver of the Red River delta had led to the great transition of the Vietnamese politics in this phase. Although the actual state of affairs was not well documented, a contemporary Fujianese scholar, Wu Pu 吳朴, gives some intriguing accounts on this issue, relating to the commerce and politics in the border between China and Vietnam.

Wu Pu was born in Zhao'an 詔安 county of Zhangzhou, southern Fujian.<sup>31</sup> As a local scholar reading and writing all his life in his native land, he was famed, at least among his fellow countrymen, for his multifarious learning, which was reportedly ranged in astronomy, geography, navigation, history, tactics, medicine and so on. Although few of his books have survived today, *Longfei jilue* 龍飛紀略 (*Abbreviated Chronicle of the Dragon's Rise*) seems to have widely circulated and its copies still exist in several libraries.<sup>32</sup> Given the date of his self preface, the book was assumedly completed in 1542. Learning from the style of *Tongjian gangmu* 通鑑綱目 by Zhu Xi, Wu Pu arranged chronology of the events concerned with the foundation of the Ming dynasty, adding the annota-

29 *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*, 8th year Hồng Thuận 洪順, third month, 6. Yao Takao 2009

30 *Yueqiao shu* 越嶠書, vol. 7. Also see *Dongxiyang kao* 東西洋考 12. However, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), an influential intellectual in Jiangnan area, states a family of Jingmen 荊門 of Huguang 湖廣 province as his origin without citing any evidences. See *Yanzhou sibu gao* 80 (“Annan zhi” 安南志).

31 For Wu Pu's biography, see Mingshan Cang 名山藏 97, also quoted in *Zuiwei lu* 罪惟錄 18.

32 Although the author of *Longfei jilue* was controversial, now it is properly acknowledged as Wu Pu's work. See Zheng Liju 2012.

tions and commentaries, which, although some being unrefined miscellaneous, contain valuable information as historical accounts of his contemporary times, especially on Chinese relationship with overseas countries. Lin Xiyuan highly appreciated his scholarship, rendering him an exaggerated applaud in the foreword to *Longfei jilüe*, which Lin contributed for the publication of the book in 1544. Moreover, the title *Longfei jilüe* was given by Lin Xiyuan himself, replacing the one given by a provincial scholarly supervisor, which sufficiently implies how intimate and influential Lin Xiyuan was with the author.

Contrary to Lin Xiyuan's great zeal for conquest of Vietnam, Wu Pu preferred promoting commercial relations between China and Vietnam. He refers to Lin Xiyuan in his *Longfei jilüe*, giving a favorable account on his policy, which admitted Vietnamese merchants to come and trade in Qinzhou.<sup>33</sup> This account was cited in another book *Pengchuang rilu* 蓬窗日錄 (*Daily Records of Pengchuan*) compiled by Chen Quanzhi 陳全之 (1512–1580), where the name "Lin Xiyuan" is replaced by *xianchen* 憲臣 ("judicial official").<sup>34</sup> If we trust both versions of this account, this disposition was made by Lin between 1539 and 1550, when he was Provincial Surveillance Commissioner (*ancha si qianshi* 按察司僉事) of Haibei dao 海北道.<sup>35</sup> Although lacking other supporting evidences either in Vietnamese or Chinese records, this is a unique reference to the official admission of Sino-Viet free trade by a local (but not by the central) government.

As for the profits from the trade in Qinzhou, Wu Pu reports that the provincial government imposed seasonal taxes upon the merchants, by which the government provided for temporary expenditure, and he encouraged local governors to take enough care for the convenience of Vietnamese merchants, so that they willingly come to trade in China, and the annual incomes would amount even twice of the neighboring prefectures.<sup>36</sup>

The Vietnamese merchants flocking to Qinzhou port were from various origins, such as Đông Đô 東都, Sơn Nam 山南, Hải Dương 海陽, An Bang 安邦, Hải Đông 海東, Vạn Ninh 萬寧, and Vĩnh An 永安. Except for Đông Đô, the present Hà Nội, all the rest cited here were from the littoral area of present

33 *Longfei jilüe, dingchou* (30th year Hongwu), second month, 666.

34 *Pengchuang rilu* 2 ("Annan Gonglu" 安南貢路).

35 Wu Pu appointed provincial surveillance commissioner in December 1539 and dismissed in December 1550. *Ming shilu*, Shizong 232 (18th year Jiajing, 12th month, *gengwu*); 368 (29th year Jiajing, 12th month, *xinwei*).

36 *Longfei jilüe, dingchou* (30th year Hongwu), second month, 666.

northern Vietnam. This may indicate that most of those Vietnamese merchants engaged in Qinzhou trade were seafarers, who came to China sailing along the coast of Tongking Gulf.

Wu Pu also recounts some products from various places of Vietnam, as local tribute paid to the Vietnamese ruler, such as beeswax (*huangla* 黄臘), honey (*fengmi* 蜂蜜) and cinnamon (*guipi* 桂皮) of Vọng Giang 望江, elephant tusks (*xiangya* 象牙) and rhinoceros horns (*xijiao* 犀角) of Tân An 新安, gold and silver of Tuyên Hoá 宣化 and of Thái Nguyên 太原, horses and silk of Thái Bình 太平 and of Trân Man 鎮蠻, gold of Chí An 至安, pearl and sea turtle shells (*daimao* 玳瑁) of Vân Đồn 雲屯 and of Tĩnh An 靖安, mercury (*shuiyin* 水銀) and cinnabar (*zhusha* 硃砂) of Câu Lâu 勾漏 and of Thạch Thất 石室, pepper, boa snakes (*ranshe* 蝮蛇), cotton and white porcelains of Giao Châu 交州. While the *Ming huidian* 明會典 (*Collected Statutes of Ming Dynasty*) enumerates as tributary goods from Vietnam only such products as gold and silver vessels, several kinds of incense including agarwood, white silk, rhinoceros horn, elephant tusk, paper fans,<sup>37</sup> Wu Pu's reference more luxuriantly illustrates the wealth and fertility of Vietnam so as to attract the readers' interest for trading.<sup>38</sup>

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese official Tomé Pires (c. 1568–c. 1640) mentioned the kingdom of “Cauchi China” in his introductory accounts on the Asian maritime world, *Suma Oriental*. He mentions gold and silver as the main product of Vietnam, and also agarwood, porcelains, raw silk, pearl shell, and several kinds of taffeta as also notable products. What he found the most profitable merchandise to sell in Vietnam was sulfur, because, he explains, the Vietnamese consume a great deal of gunpowder both in war and feast. The provenance of their sulfur was China and Java, possibly brought by Chinese merchants.<sup>39</sup>

Pires also reports that the kingdom possesses a great number of *lancharas* and thirty to forty *junks*, by which they sail all over the rivers within the realm. However, he continues, although the Vietnamese were very powerful on land, few people lived by the sea, where they were very weak. Reportedly, they seldom sailed to Malacca by their own ships, but first sailed to Guangdong in China or Champa to join merchants of those places, and then come to Malacca in Chinese ships.<sup>40</sup>

37 *Ming huidian* 明會典 97.

38 *Longfei jilüe, dingchou* (30th year Hongwu), second month, 665f.

39 Cortesão 1940, 115; 1944, 392; Loureiro 1996, 144.

40 Cortesão 1940, 114f; 1944, 391f; Loureiro 1996, 144.

This special connection with China was indispensable for the overseas activity of Vietnamese merchants around the sixteenth century. The Vietnamese maritime trade almost totally depended upon Chinese commercial networks, which were spread all over Southeast Asia.

In addition to Qinzhou, Wu Pu also suggests establishing more market places to promote Chinese commercial interactions with Annam with official initiative. He proposed opening new markets at the border gates of Zhennan-guan 鎮南關 and Nanjiao-guan 南交關 in Guangxi, as well as inland boundaries such as Mengzi 蒙自, Longmen 龍門 and Cheli 車里 in southern Yunnan, Laowo 老撾 in present Laos, Tuyên Quang 宣光 on the northern edge of the Red River delta, all of which were located among multi-cultural frontiers inhabited by Chinese and Vietnamese merchants and Thai, Lao and other tribal farmers and highlanders.<sup>41</sup>

Wu also mentions as possible choices for establishing new international market places, the inlet bay of Thái Bình 太平 in the southern estuary of Red River, and Tân Châu 新洲, called Thị Nại in Vietnamese, the former Champa port located near the ruined capital Vijaya in present Quy Nhơn city. He shows special interest in Tân Châu, which, according to his remark, was an unpopulated buffering zone between Vietnam and Champa, since Vijaya had been conquered by the Vietnamese troops in 1471. He explains Tân Châu as such a desirable place for intermediate trade, and the land in its vicinity so fertile and suitable for farming, fishing and salt making, that it is worth establishing there a colony for overseas Chinese as an international commercial center. Then he suggests resettling the Champa kingdom again in Tân Châu, in order that those Chinese refugees in various places in overseas countries could relocate themselves in Tân Châu, be allocated land and housing for each household, and in the meantime, be organized in the local militia with their leaders as *centurions* 千百戶. If done successfully, foreign ships would quickly throng Tân Châu, and Chinese merchants from Jiangnan, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong provinces would also go and trade with them. Moreover, if the rebellious Vietnamese rose against the sovereignty of China, the recovered Champa kingdom would provide a strategic footstep and reinforcement for the empire to contain their expansion.<sup>42</sup>

According to his suggestion, if a few more international market places were established in those specific points in the borderlands, and if merchants were

41 *Longfei jilüe, dingchou* (30th year Hongwu), second month, 666.

42 *Longfei jilüe, gengshen* (thirteenth year Hongwu), eighth month, 605-607.

deliberately invited for trading and honestly treated by the government following the Qinzhou model, the barbarous aliens of Annan would be faithful to China, and other foreign merchants would willingly flock to the Chinese market.

Although Wu Pu was cautious about immediate military action against the Mạc, at least seen in his rhetoric, he did not intend Vietnam perpetually to remain independent from the Chinese empire. In *Longfei jilüe* Wu plainly declares that promoting commercial interactions between China and Vietnam brings more information on the Vietnamese domestic situations for the sake of Chinese future conquest.

Wu Pu obviously expected that the Chinese influence would prevail over its southern neighbor, and the barbarians willingly assimilate and subjugate themselves to the Chinese civilization. In his logic, commercial interactions between China and Vietnam would promote Chinese dominance on Vietnam, in the way that the Chinese economic influence over the Vietnamese realm may increase the sophistication of life of the people by Chinese products, inspiring their admiration of Chinese advancement, and finally transforming them into voluntary and “civilized” imperial subjects. Here, after all, we could see Wu Pu’s very intention did not differ so much from the Lin Xiyuan’s more obvious version of expansionism.

Although he apparently won relatively few readers, Wu Pu’s arguments attracted considerable attention from some of the contemporary literati. His ideas for opening new markets in Vietnam, following Lin Xiyuan’s Qinzhou model, also resonates with the contemporary preference to relax the prohibition on private maritime trade. As their source of information on the present situation outside China, Wu Pu and Lin Xiyuan must have considerably relied upon both maritime and inland smugglers. Obviously, they were both proponents rather than persecutors of outlaw seafarers.

In this context, we see how Lin Xiyuan’s enthusiastic proposals for military expedition and Wu Pu’s rather modest suggestions overlapped. They both corresponded to the desire of Chinese seafarers for the commercial profits in the South China Sea. No matter whether by conquering Vietnam or reinforcing Champa, they both advocated official authorization of Chinese colonies in the south, where the Chinese community had already existed without support and protection by the imperial government. As Lin and Wu probably understood, such colonies would extend the political and economic power of the empire farther into the present Southeast Asian maritime world.

## Conclusion

As a preliminary attempt to illustrate a comprehensive vision of the socio-political relations between Vietnam and China as a whole, this essay has endeavored to throw a light on maritime activities in the Tongking Gulf during the first half of the sixteenth century, with special attention to descriptions produced by two Chinese literati, Lin Xiyuan and Wu Pu. From their narratives on the political and economic state of affairs around the border sea between Vietnam and China, we see the growing power of seafarers, both Vietnamese and Chinese, smugglers and pirates, outside official protection, and potentially or overtly rebellious to the government authorities on the both sides.

Revered as a prestigious statesman in his native southern Fujian, Lin Xiyuan represented the interests of his fellow countrymen in memorials to the emperor concerning the military campaign against Vietnam, hoping that those outlaw seafarers might take part in the imperial expedition and become lawful components of the present regime. However, Lin's efforts did not reach their fruition as Mạc Đăng Dung surrendered to Ming China, and consequently, the political tension between China and Vietnam was greatly reduced. When the empire lost its collective enemy in the south, the opportunity for many of the Fujianese seafarers to serve as imperial marines was suspended for another decade.

On the other hand, as a local intellectual of southern Fujian and an intimate ally of Lin Xiyuan as well, Wu Pu propagated Lin Xiyuan's policy of relaxing the maritime prohibition in Qinzhou and ardently advocated encouraging the commercial intercourses between China and Vietnam. Wu's commentaries reveal the significance of Chinese seafarers in Vietnam, and correspondently frequent sailing of Vietnamese merchants to China, as their mutual interactions along the coast of Tongking Gulf were increasing after the subjugation of the Mạc dynasty. Wu believed that the flourishing commerce in the Tongking Gulf might promote "sophistication" of those foreigners of the south, and along with proper administrative care by local officials, might lead them voluntarily to submit themselves to the imperial authority of Ming China.

However, the Ming central government did not respond to their suggestions, and delayed the decision for recognizing its subjects engaged in private maritime commerce. Rejecting government control, the amorphous floating population along the southeastern coast of China gradually formed a great

sea-power that almost surpassed the maritime forces of Ming China. Coincidentally but not accidentally, the surge of the maritime violence exploded in 1550s as *wokou*, “Japanese piracy”. The *Wo*, though literally signifying Japanese, largely consisted of the smugglers and pirates from Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong provinces, with a relatively small number of those *zhen-Wo*, “real Japanese” serving as the vanguard in their bands. The “anti-Japanese war” devastated Jiangnan, the economic heartland of Ming China, as well as towns, villages and military offices in other southeastern coastal provinces. The outlaw seafarers caused decades of turmoil in Chinese society, and finally, those who survived this ordeal saw overseas sailing from Zhangzhou port to Southeast Asian countries got authorized around 1567 by the local and central government in sequence.

Having accepted Mạc Đăng Dung’s surrender and recognized the Mạc dynasty as the legitimate ruler of Vietnam, Ming China never resumed the policy of military expansion over the domain of its southern neighbor. As a result, Chinese seafarers lost hope of military support from the Ming government in expanding their maritime activities, and had to manage their commercial and political activity overseas on their own. During decades of the anti-Japanese campaign in the southeastern littorals, the Ming government also revised the official prohibition on sailing overseas, to reduce the tension in the coastal area and to control the growing sea-power of its subjects.

Thus, the course of Chinese overseas emigration from the sixteenth century onward took the form of a transnational diaspora rather than military expansion, so that their communities in Southeast Asia more or less existed as economic autonomies politically dependent upon a variety of local rulers as well as European colonial governments. Ming Chinese political and economic interactions with the Mạc dynasty formed a fragment of the maritime history of East and Southeast Asia, just as the development and flourishing of maritime commerce in the Tongking Gulf also had a considerable impact upon Sino-Viet relations in this period.

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