



The issues of islands governing in early Ming Dynasty



Huang Li-sheng

College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Institute of Oceanic Culture, National Taiwan Ocean University, Taiwan

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Abstract Ming Dynasty is a key transitional period in China's maritime history. It marks the shift from outward expansion to passive defense, whereas underground marine trades were rampant and China had to face the rising Western powers. It deserves to examine Ming's maritime management by different perspectives including the coastal islands. This research focuses on *Veritable Records of the Ming* (明實錄) and explores key terms such as 'island' (島) and 'isle' (嶼) via the approach of 'Digital Humanities' to sum up the main issues of islands governing in early Ming Dynasty: 1. To subjugate political rivals on the sea and to defeat remnant Mongolian militaries. 2. To surrender rebels and appease refugees on the coastal islands. 3. To suppress and defend against Japanese pirates. 4. Diplomatic relations with neighboring countries. These issues reflected that Chinese dynastic regime transition from Yuan to Ming not only drastically altered the order of the East Asia seas after 14th c., but was also the key factor for the island governing policies in the early Ming period. This article investigates the issues of islands governing to discuss how the internal and external situation and the characteristic oceanic consciousness influenced the marine affair policy decision in early Ming Dynasty.

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Preface

Introduction

After Qin(秦) and Han(漢) Dynasties, the core areas of Chinese maritime culture gradually moved from the coast of Shandong(山東), Jiangsu(江蘇) and Zhejiang(浙江) southward to Fujian(福建) and Guangdong(廣東). During Han and Tang(唐) Dynasties, Guangzhou(廣州) was the most famous harbor of international trade in South and West Asia for its long-

lasting prosperity (Xu, 1999). Since the late Tang Dynasty, the 'Eastern Ocean Navigation Routes'(東洋航路) in the West Pacific had connected to the 'Western Ocean Navigation Routes' (西洋航路) in the Indian Ocean and thus formed the Maritime Silk Road and Asian trade circle based on the manufacturing exports from China. During the Five Dynasties(五代) period, 'The Eastern Ocean Navigation Routes' was then expanded southward, and cities like Fuzhou(福州) and Quanzhou(泉州) had been incorporated into the Asian maritime trade network before they became two major ports of the Song(宋) Dynasty (Yang, 1998).

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Since the Song Dynasty, Chinese maritime industry was in full swing across the east and south coast area of the country. It was no more individual phenomena, but a common undertaking in coastal communities. It fostered a large-scale maritime culture which highlighted the production of maritime commodities, shipbuilding, port management and navigation training, etc. In general, Yuan(元) Dynasty kept the same approach of Song and had broader diplomatic relations with foreign countries and was the only dynasty in the Chinese history that launched naval offensives abroad (Xu, 1999). The booming seafaring industry during Song and Yuan Dynasties turned many originally isolated islands off the southeast coast of China to an integrated maritime network and started the history of Han(漢) people's immigration to the outlying small islands (Huang, 2009).

In late Yuan Dynasty, there were various groups of coastal traders operating regional networks that spanned from the Bohai(渤海) in the northeast to Hainan(海南) and the Vietnam coast in the deep of south. Fujian, Guangdong and Zhejiang were the important bases for these networks. Trade along the Chinese coast, as trade in the open sea, provided many opportunities to make money to move up the social ladder. The local populace of certain coastal towns and villages was heavily orientated towards coastal and sea trade and derived much of its income from maritime commerce. The trade at the end of Yuan period was more or less free. Merchants could sail abroad without too many laws and regulations standing in their ways, and the tribute trade was not very significant (Ptak, VI, 1998).

But the commerce-oriented maritime policy in the peacetime had a major shift in Ming(明) Dynasty. The new government, highly centralized and tightly organized, aimed at restoring peace and order in the interior of China as well as trying to secure the border regions. It therefore also attempted to control the coast line and the wealthy merchants in the coastal centres, some of whom had openly worked together with anti-Ming forces during the transitional period from Yuan to Ming. To counterbalance the influence these merchants, Taizu Emperor(太祖, Hongwu(洪武), 1328–1398) prohibited private overseas trade (Ptak, I, 1998).

Therefore, the most parts of the maritime trade routes transformed into a naval defense and tributary system. From the late Yuan to the early Ming periods, the partisans of Fang Guozheng(方國珍, 1319–1374) and Zhang Shicheng(張士誠, 1321–1367) both were Zhu Yuanzhang's(朱元璋) political rival, fled between offshore islands and were complicit with Japanese pirates to loot the coast area, so the order of 'Eastern Ocean Navigation Routes' was disrupted. In the year of 1372, the Ming government ordered Fujian and Zhejiang Provinces to build warships for the defense against Japanese pirates, and set up all kinds of naval defense facilities at the key locations along the coast, and implemented a strict patrol system to beef up its naval security after 1387 ((Ming) Zhang Tingyu, vol. 91; vol. 322). Moreover, Ming Dynasty issued many times the bans of communication with foreigners. It regulated that only certain countries or tribes can trade with China in a tributary form, and no other private overseas trade was allowed ((Ming)Feng et al., vol. 280).

Even though, Taizong Emperor(太宗, Yongle(永樂), 1360–1424) supported the Seven Treasure Voyages along 'Western Ocean Navigation Routes'(西洋航路) directed by Zheng He(鄭和, 1371–1433), which marked the peak of maritime

development in Ming periods. According to the preface of 'Handwritten Copy of Navigation Chart in Ming Period'(傳鈔明代針簿) which had been preserved in Quanzhou(泉州), Yongle Emperor started in 1403 sending several imperial envoys, including Zheng He, to the Eastern and the Western Oceans for the purpose of inspection, political propaganda and implementing policies. The navigation chart used for the voyages had been preserved since the Yuan Dynasty (Zhuang, 1996). Therefore, the achievement of navigations by Zheng He was based on the maritime development during Song and Yuan Dynasties, which the pattern is different from how the Europeans explored and discovered the new routes around a hundred years later. Zheng He successfully maintained the maritime traffic between East and West Asia, and set up the foundation for Chinese merchants to prevail on the Maritime Silk Road (Xu, 1999). A lot of coastal islands were the key location of the voyages.

A hand-written manuscript of navigation chart composed in the early Ming period with the title "*Shunfeng xiangsong*" (順風相送, 'Despatched on the Following Winds') with the accompanying pronunciations in Roman script for the four characters by Michael Shen during his visiting to Oxford University in 1638: 'Xin Fum Siam Sum,' which is now preserved in the Bodleian Library of Oxford University (Brook, 2013). The manuscript records the water-ways from Fujian to Jiaozhi(交趾, in Vietnam), which went by the following islands as key landmarks: Wuhumeng(五虎門) – Guangtangshan(官塘山) – Dongshashan(東沙山) – Wuqiushan(烏坵山) – Taiwushan(太武山) – Wuyu(浯嶼) – Nanaoshan(南澳山) – Dashinjian(大星尖) – Dongjianshan(東姜山) – Wuzhushan(烏豬山) – Hainanlimushan(海南黎母山) – Haibaoshan(海寶山) (Bailongwei Island(白龍尾島), now in the Beibu Gulf(北部灣), west of Leizhou Peninsula(雷州半島)) (Yang, 1998).

After Zheng He, the official large-scale voyages of Ming Dynasty were replaced by naval defense, seafaring prohibition, fights against Japanese pirates and limited tributary trades. As the naval defense was tightened, the Ming Dynasty's overseas trade with surrounding countries was maintained by tributary relationships; but Japanese and Chinese naval militant groups took the advantage of the shortages of supply and demand to do illegal international trade. In fact, they looted most of the time. The rise of Japanese and Chinese pirates was closely related to Ming's monopolist tributary trade and the seafaring prohibition policy. It reflected the insuppressible demand for the commercial activity in the East Asia and the prosperity but imbalance of the maritime trade network in the region. Ming's stress on naval defense and maritime ban had prompted civilians to engage in maritime smuggling or even immigrate abroad. Such a trend hence gradually became the main drive of the expansion of marine activities. And coastal islands were the strategic places for the geo-political wrangles and conciliation between authorities and civilians as well as between Ming Dynasty and the Japanese pirates.

Background

Islands seem to be isolated spots in the ocean, but traditionally, they have been the key reference points for navigation and were highly important for voyager's fresh water supply as well as resting and trading. Hence, originally isolated islands became a connected seafaring network. The islands absorbed

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