

Article



Qing-Southeast Asian Interactions in the Context of Border Control and Sovereignty, 1700s–1800s

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Abstract

This paper discusses Qing China's interaction with Southeast Asia in the context of border enforcement, that is, the control of movement, and expression of sovereignty. It employs both the imperial logic and the commoners' daily logic to consider how these three topics interacted with each other in the eighteenth century. I argue that the Qing court considered these issues not in terms of population, territory, or maritime prohibition, but from a standpoint of security and stability, around which the border concerns, ways of controlling people, and sovereignty were all organized. For commoners, simply making a living was the primary concern and the court's overseas activities had little to do with identity, or an anachronistic concept of sovereignty. The Qing court forbade journeys to Luzon and Batavia, the "barbarian countries" dominated by Spanish and Dutch colonial powers, but intentionally left the door open for commoners to travel to Vietnam. However, when those Chinese people stirred up trouble in Vietnam and returned to the maritime border of China, the Qing government quickly intervened. It had its own logic for enforcing domestic sovereignty and controlling the migration of people between countries.

Keywords

Qing history – sovereignty – security – Southeast Asia – border

In 1724, the Fujian and Zhejiang governor-general, Gioroi Mamboo 覺羅滿保 [1673–1725], presented a memorial to Qing [1616–1911] emperor Yongzheng 雍正 [r. 1722–1735], informing him of problems with Qing maritime policy, particularly with reference to three regions: Annam 安南, Batavia 噶喇吧 (the Dutch East Indies), and Luzon 呂宋 (the Philippines). Mamboo indicated that Chinese “ocean-going commercial ships are not allowed to sail to places in the Southwestern Sea such as Luzon and Batavia,” but due to the restrictions, ships had learned to fake reports claiming to be “returning from the Eastern Sea” or “returning from Annam,” legal according to Qing regulations. He complained that “some people have also lied in stating that they had encountered [strong] winds and hence had drifted to Annam [unintentionally].”¹

While trade with Annam was legal in the sub-statutes of Guangdong Province, Chinese maritime authorities still had their suspicions that the claimed drifting to Annam was a sham, and that the real places visited were Batavia and Luzon, both, by contrast, illegal for trade. In any case, given winds and currents, where else could they have gone other than these places.²

Mamboo also explained how he had confirmed that the merchants had been lying about Annam:

[I] have checked and know that the commodities produced around the Eastern Sea are different from those produced around the Western Sea, but the commodities carried by the three ships [in question] are mostly from the Western Sea. [I] also hear that [they] are afraid to declare Western Sea dutiable goods, violating the prohibition; hence, [they] fake reports claiming that they are “returning from Annam.”³

1 “Fujian Zhejiang zongdu Manbao zou wei xiyang shangchuan buxu qianwang xiyang Lüsòng Galuoba dengchu maoyi shi zhe, 1724 福建浙江總督滿保奏為西洋商船不許前往西洋呂宋噶囉吧等處貿易事摺 (1724) [General Governor of Fujian and Zhejiang Gioroi Mamboo’s Memorial asking for the Forbidding of Commercial Ship Sailings to Luzon and Batavia for Trade, 1724],” in *Qingdai Zhongguo yu dongnanya geguo guanxi dang’an shiliao huibian, Feilübin juan* 清代中國與東南亞各國關係檔案史料彙編（菲律賓卷）[*The Collection of Archives between Qing China and other Southeast Asian Countries: Volume for the Philippines*], ed., Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’an guan 中國第一歷史檔案館 (Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubans gongsi, 2004), 111.

2 Ibid., 111–113.

3 Ibid., 111.

What worried Mamboo was not just that people violated imperial policy, but that there were internal dangers that would further jeopardize the foundations of the empire. Some Qing customs officers were also publicly allowing ships to sail to restricted areas:

As long as the [obligated] tariff is at least one times greater in value, they are in practice to double that per unit. Furthermore, each of the civil and military *yamen* 衙門 at the ports have their [own] “regulations,” and they have been paid varying amounts, from dozens to hundreds of taels. Moreover, the officials receive [overseas] local products, individually. Only the newly appointed Dinghai 定海 Regional Commander Zhang Pu 張溥 refused.⁴

According to this description, bureaucratic officers were conspiring with law-breakers. Mamboo found this a troublesome issue since it related to the agenda involved in the empire’s control of its borders, and over the movement of people and goods: “This crucial issue relates to the affairs of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong provinces, and I humbly beg Your Majesty to adjudicate secretly and indicate how we should proceed. It is for this reason that I submit this secret memorial.”⁵ The Yongzheng emperor, in addition to indicating his decision, commented in writing at the end in red: “The way of maritime defense is that it is only proper to supervise from a single position. This idea cannot be altered or deviated from in any way.”⁶ The emperor did not agree with relaxing the existing prohibition, but he also did not want to tighten channels of overseas trade. This echoes the emperor’s earlier judgment that “commercial ships are not allowed to sail to places in the Southwestern Sea areas such as Luzon and the others; let the Southwestern Sea products come on their own.” It seems that the emperor confirmed Mamboo’s judgment about how the Dutch in Batavia, and the Spaniards in Luzon, could “dare secretly covet Chinese wealth.”⁷

In terms of border enforcement, and control of movement, Mamboo’s memorial raised questions beyond general discussion of the tributary system. His discussion was more about the attitude and the ways that the “Central Empire” claimed its power in terms of looking at the outside world, and in

4 Ibid., 111.

5 Ibid., 111–112.

6 Ibid., 112.

7 Ibid., 111.

dealing with its own people. In other words, the discussion was about power and sovereignty.

Sovereignty is the supreme power or authority of a governing body over itself. In modern times, land and border control are heavily emphasized in terms of sovereignty.⁸ By relying on a conceptualization of domestic sovereignty and the idea of an interdependent sovereignty, a cooperative sovereignty, this paper offers a new account of China's historical sovereignty, one that focuses primarily on the power of the government over people as this power relates to borders. In it, I discuss Qing China's interaction with Southeast Asia in the context of border enforcement, the control of movement, and thus sovereignty. I argue that the Qing court considered these issues not in terms of population, territory, or maritime prohibition, but from a standpoint of security and stability, around which the concerns of the border, ways of controlling people, and sovereignty were all structured.

1 The Background of the Border Enforcement and the Control of Movement

Chinese domestic people have a very long "tradition" of moving to Southeast Asia by crossing the borders. Before the coming of the Western colonists, overseas Chinese had controlled sites on the Malay Archipelago, either through small military forces, or through negotiation with local chiefs, as their successors did several centuries later in southern Vietnam.

Ma Huan 馬歡 [b. 1400], one of the main interpreters with the Zheng He 鄭和 [1371–1433] Armada, visited Gresik in the early fifteenth century. He wrote: "Moving east to Turban for another half day [we] reached Gresik, whose barbarian name is Geerxi. It was originally a place of sandy beaches, but since the Chinese have come and settled down there, it has become a 'New Village.' The head of the village is, so far, a Cantonese, and the village has thousands of [Chinese] households. Many barbarians come there from everywhere to trade."⁹

8 About the debates of the concepts of sovereignty, see Jorge Emilio Núñez, "About the Impossibility of Absolute State Sovereignty," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 27, no. 4 (2014). Stephen D. Krasner, *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

9 Ma Huan 馬歡, *Yingya shenglan* 瀛涯勝覽 [*The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955), 9–10. Gresik was the central port of East Java in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Later it was replaced by Surabaya. The Shunta state (Bantam) which managed Gresik, was also well known to the Hokkien as "the Lower Harbor." See Zhang

According to the records of Fei Xin 費信 [b. 1388], another military personnel with Zheng He's fleet, over one century before Zheng and Fei's team reached Southeast Asia during its fourth expedition [1413–1415], Kubilai Khan 忽必烈 [r. 1260–1294] had sent a fleet and squadrons of soldiers to invade Java in 1293. Some people in this group of Yuan [1206–1368] soldiers settled down in Java after the battle.¹⁰ The “chief” Fei Xin mentions was Jayakatwang [d. 1293], who led the Kediri (Gelang-gelang) army to attack the Singhasari Empire (East Java) in 1292, and successfully usurped power from and killed King Kertanegara [r. 1268–1292].

Kertanegara's son-in-law, Raden Wijaya (Nararya Sanggramawijaya, r. 1293–1309), took the opportunity to lead Yuan Chinese troops astray in 1293, to take revenge for the Mongol overthrow of Jayakatwang. While the unsuspecting Yuan troops thought they were fighting against the arrogant Kertanegara, who had humiliated Kubilai Khan's envoys by cutting and scarring their faces, they were confused by “ally” Raden Wijaya's sudden attack on their column. As a result, the Yuan troops were in chaos and had to withdraw.¹¹

There were many other Chinese in the areas of the islands of Java and Sumatra before the Dutch settlement.¹² According to a Chinese record, Palembang was

Tingyu 張廷玉 et al., *Ming shi* 明史 [*History of the Ming Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 324.8405. Shunta is also written Shunda or Shunha, Shunta, Xintuo, and Xintiao. All transliterations of Sunda, but Xintuo more broadly refers to the western Java, and Shunta mostly only refers to Bantam.

- 10 Fei Xin 費信, *Xingcha shenglan jiaozhu* 星槎勝覽校注 [*Annotation of the Description of the Starry Raft*], annot. Feng Chengjun 馮承鈞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954), 9–10.
- 11 For the confused history of the invasion see now David Bade, *Of Palm Wine, Women and War, the Mongolian Naval Expedition to Java in the 13th Century* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013); Toru Aoyama, “Where was the ‘Eastern Capital’ of Java? Reconsidering the Division of Majapahit 1379–1406” (Paper presented at the 13th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, Jōchi Daigaku, 1994). On November 2 in the same year, Raden Wijaya established the Majapahit Empire. For a general description of the process, see Ooi Keat Gin, ed., *Southeast Asia: A Historical Encyclopedia, from Angkor Wat to Timor* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 1208–9.
- 12 For example, Zhang Lian 張璉 [d. 1562], another Teochew native who came from Raoping 饒平 County, was a “notorious” escaped criminal. Although whether Zhang really succeeded in escaping to Palembang is doubtful, his title – “Master of the Flying Dragon” [*feilong renzhu* 飛龍人主] – remained as a banner for those pirates. Charles Wheeler also refers to Zhang Lian and the Ming Loyalist community which used the false imperial name “Flying Dragon.” But he wrongly identifies Zhang as a Fujianese pirate (should be Teochew pirate/bandit) and mixes his case up with those of the “Japanese bandits” [*wokou* 倭寇]. See Charles Wheeler, *Cross-Cultural Trade and Trans-Regional Networks in the Port of Hoi An* (PhD diss., Yale University, 2001), 135–136. Others such as the Cantonese Shi Jinqing 施進卿 [1360–1423] built his autonomous kingdom with the support of Zheng

permanently occupied by the overseas Chinese [*Huaren liuyu zhe* 華人流寓者] militarily:

There was a man named Liang Daoming 梁道明 who came from Nanhai County in Guangdong. He had lived in that country [Palembang] for a long time, and several thousands soldier families and commoners in Fujian and Guangdong followed him when he took to the sea, electing him to be their leader.¹³

Another famous pirate, Chen Zuyi 陳祖義 [d. 1407], one of the main leaders of the overseas Chinese, was originally a Hokkien-dialect-speaking Teochew native. After he fled to Palembang, the ruler appeased him and let him be the leader of the “Old Harbor” (Palembang). “The Cantonese Chen Zuyi et al. fled there with his whole family. He plundered the properties of any ships passing by.”¹⁴

In the sixteenth century, there were also some very famous incidents stirred up by overactive overseas Chinese in the Philippines. For example, Pan Hewu 潘和五 [1567–1622], a man from Jinjiang 晉江 County in South Fujian, led laborers to assassinate Philippine Governor Dasmariñas [1539–1593] and kill his soldiers.¹⁵ Lin Feng 林鳳 [d. 1575] was also involved, but little was known even as late as the 1930s, when his name was misread.¹⁶ Given too the activities

He's armada, and he even passed his leadership position on to his daughter: “He died [but] did not pass the position to [his] son, hence his daughter Shi Erjie 施二姐 became the king.” See Ma Huan, *Yingya shenglan*, 17.

13 Zhang Tingyu, *Ming shi*, 324.8408.

14 Ma Huan, *Yingya shenglan*, 16–7. For the full English translation, see J.V.G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan: Ying-yai Sheng-lan: “The Overall Survey of the Ocean’s Shores” (1433)* (Cambridge: University Press for the Hakluyt Society, 1970). As the Arabic translator, Ma Huan accompanied Zheng He's fleet three times to Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean in 1413, 1421, and 1431. He began to write this book in 1416 and finished it thirty-five years later.

15 While Pan's case has been a common theme in the Chinese academic world, it has been less stressed in English writing, although John E. Wills, Jr., Edgar Wickberg et al. have discussed it. See John E. Wills, Jr., “Relations with Maritime Europeans, 1514–1662,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 2*, eds., Denis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 333–75. The record of this case has been translated and introduced to the English-speaking world only recently, see Timothy Brook, *Mr. Selden's Map of China: Decoding the Secrets of a Vanished Cartographer* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2013), 124–5.

16 A few Chinese scholars did reveal his history at the time, although they generally misunderstood his name. Scholarship in English first mentions him some time later, but also is limited in what is said. Andrew Wilson only mentions Lin Feng once in his monograph, with a brief notice that he attacked Manila. See Andrew Wilson, *Ambition and Identity:*

and huge numbers of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, Chinese imperial governments were cautious and maintained a stance of denial.

The early Qing regime showed that its ideas of border enforcement and control of movement were not that different from the approach of Ming [1368–1644]. The control of borders was quite loose from a modern perspective. The essential part of this control was that Chinese people registered in their former districts, maintaining their status as residents in the empire without “unnecessary” movement, especially the crossing of borders. Mobile people returned to their original places of residence.¹⁷

The issue of sovereignty was also far from being just a consideration of land, especially in the overseas regions. The case of Taiwan before 1700 shows the interplay of sovereignty, border enforcement, and control of movement. Emma Teng explains “how an island that was *terra incognita* for the better part of Chinese history came to be regarded as an integral part of China’s ‘sovereign’ territory.”¹⁸ Tonio Andrade indicates that the Japanese, the Dutch, and the Spaniards had different understandings of territoriality and taxation rights in the case of Taiwan in the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries.¹⁹ This problem disappeared only after the expulsion of the Dutch by Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 [1624–1662], and the Chinese administration of Taiwan. In these terms, border issues were closely connected with power and sovereignty.

By then the Manchu emperor had had to fight with anti-Qing powers in Taiwan, and the Qing court debated whether it needed to establish prefectures or counties in Taiwan. The final decision was not based on land considerations but on security: no more anti-Qing powers could be allowed to set up house on the island. Hence, the Qing court kept Taiwan as its administrative region, and as a foreign barrier of the empire.

While sovereignty and the border enforcement were clear, the control of movement was even clearer: the empire did not allow its people to migrate to this island out of concern that it become occupied by too many people and able to challenge the empire from its periphery.²⁰

Chinese Merchant Elites in Colonial Manila, 1880–1916 (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004).

17 Boyi Chen, “Borders and Beyond: Contested Power and Discourse around Southeast Coastal China in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 15, no. 1 (2018).

18 Emma Jinhua Teng, *Taiwan’s Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683–1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 7.

19 Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 1–99.

20 It was not until late in the second year of the Yongzheng reign, over forty years after the Qing had taken over the island from the Zheng regime, that the court allowed Cantonese

It is in this sense that Mamboo's memorial connects the imperial ideas of sovereignty and the control of movement. Earlier scholarship has also shown that the court was quite active in pushing overseas trade in the early Qing era.²¹ The Qing court forbade sailing to Luzon and Batavia, the "barbarian countries" dominated by Spanish and Dutch colonial powers, but intentionally left the door open for commoners to travel to "the Eastern Sea" (Japan, Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan island, *etc.*) and Vietnam (and for those who claimed to be returning from Vietnam). This clear signal given by the policy is apparent: it was the concept of sovereignty that guided border enforcement and the control of movement for the sake of security and stability.

2 High Qing: The Southern Sea Prohibition and the *de Facto* *Laissez-faire*

Early Qing maritime policy, as seen above, emphasized imperial security and stability in terms of its border enforcement and control of movement. In the fifty-sixth year of the Kangxi 康熙 reign [r. 1661–1722], to deal with the challenge of pirates, and border-crossing Han Chinese who were stirring up riots, the emperor prohibited trade in Luzon and Batavia (the so-called "Southern Sea Prohibition") and mentioned the potential dangers from Taiwanese collusion with the Philippines.²²

Shi Lang 施琅 [1621–1696], the Fujian commander-in-chief of the Qing navy, asked to offer a deadline for those who had gone overseas to return. Later, the Emperor Kangxi approved. Those who had left before 1717 could return provided they did it during a three-year grace period. In general the prohibition

to migrate to Taiwan. In 1732, the court further allowed that the migrants could bring partners along with them.

21 Xu Yi 許毅 and Long Wuhua 隆武華, "Shilun Qingdai qianqi duiwai maoyi zhengce yu haijin de xingzhi 試論清代前期對外貿易政策與海禁的性質 [On the Foreign Trade Policy and the Nature of the Sea Prohibition in the Early Qing Dynasty]," *Caizheng yanjiu* 財政研究, no. 7 (1992); Gang Zhao, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013).

22 *Shengzu shilu* 聖祖實錄 [Veritable Record of Shengzu], tome 6 of *Qing shilu* 清實錄 [Qing Veritable Record] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 270.649–650; 271.658. For Kangxi's concern of the western threat and reaction to issuing a ban, see Gang Zhao, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies*, 153–161. As to the background and the influence of the prohibition, see Dong Lingfeng 董凌鋒, "Lun Qingdai Nanyang jinling shishi de lishi Beijing yu lishi yingxiang 論清代南洋禁令實施的歷史背景與歷史影響 [The Background of the Restriction Order for the Southern Sea and its Significance]," *Liuzhou shizhuan xuebao* 柳州師專學報, no. 1 (2007).

policy of the Kangxi era was quite loose, more concerned about national security than other things, and without any cases of legal punishment.

The early Qing policy toward overseas trade actually benefited and facilitated mobility to the Vietnamese eastern coast. Even in 1717, when the Qing court forbade commercial ships to sail to Southern Sea destinations such as Luzon and Batavia, Vietnam was not targeted.²³ In 1718, the Ministry of War confirmed with Yang Lin 楊琳 [d. 1724], the governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, that “Macao’s foreign ships trading in the South Sea and inland commercial ships trading in Annam ... were not on the list of those trading with forbidden destinations.”²⁴ These policies pushed many sojourners to sail to Vietnam since other places were illegal to visit.

Of course, due to the Qing prohibition, we could also imagine that some people did not actually sail to Vietnam but just used it as a camouflage. Vietnam, not on the list of prohibited places, had gained an advantage in terms of legal sailing compared to other places. As a seventeenth-century scholar-official described this situation: “Vietnam is located in the southwest and neighbors China, and is also far from countries such as Luzon and Batavia. Hence, its case should follow the statutes of the Eastern Sea [trade] and [we should] allow the merchants to trade there.”²⁵ The official policy deliberately retained loopholes. In other words, in practice, a *de juris* prohibition evolved into a *de facto laissez-faire*, and involved tremendous personal profit and corruption.

Against this background, Mamboo tried very cautiously to test if the new emperor Yongzheng would be willing to lift the ban. Mamboo raised the key concerns of security over sovereignty, informing the emperor: “I find that the original purpose of the sub-statutes was to guard against the foreign barbarians. In the Southwestern Sea, *hongmao* 紅毛 (‘the Red Hairs,’ which refers to the Dutch), Luzon, and other states are located beyond the ocean’s extremity, and they all rely on trade to survive; hence, how dare they secretly hide their intentions to covet Chinese wealth?”²⁶

But as a sophisticated high official, he also tried another approach in the following statement suggesting moving back: “However, since [we] have followed [the edict of the Kangxi emperor] to prohibit [overseas trade], [we] should

23 *Shengzu shilu*, 270.650; 271.658.

24 *Ibid.*, 277.719.

25 Chen Menglei 陳夢雷, ed., “Lüling bu huikao 律令部彙考 68 [Collected Substantial Studies of the Laws and Statutes],” vol. 82 of “Xiangxing dian 祥刑典 [The Judicial System],” in *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 [Complete Collection of Illustrations and Writings from the Earliest to Current Times] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju; Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1985), 772:32b.

26 “Fujian Zhejiang zongdu Manbao zou,” 111.

obey the imperial rules.”²⁷ Still, he was not sure if the new emperor wanted to solve the disconnection between ban and reality:

Regarding the distant “barbarians” in the outer ocean, since they have no other intentions by nature, and the coastal merchants and commoners rely on [trade to] live, if it were I, having the insights of Your Majesty into the desire for relaxing the previous prohibition, I would then defer for a while until the imperial edict [is issued].²⁸

Mamboo’s discretion was rewarded. Although Yongzheng did not want to lift the ban, he also did not want to create vulnerability, or block any loop-hole. Although he criticized Mamboo’s “improper” thinking on loosening the prohibition, his attitude of maintaining the status quo was clear in his remarks written in red with a brush:

Perusing your memorials, I think that you want to lift the ban on selling to the Southwestern Sea and the others by using [the excuse of] this case. This is very improper. Over the past decade or so, the sea has been at peace, and that is a most proper situation. [You should know that] only the proper rules deserve to be defended, and that the normal practices should not be changed. You should still adhere to the spirit of the old rules checking and taxing, executing a strenuous effort, strictly regulate subordinates, and not act with partiality or defeat the goals of justice.²⁹

Although the Yongzheng emperor did not officially abandon the earlier Kangxi policy, the Southern Sea Prohibition existed in name only during the first several years of his reign.³⁰ When Yongzheng finally lifted the ban in 1727, still, he did not approve overseas Chinese freely returning to China. This distinction thus echoes the focuses of this paper: border enforcement, the control of movement, and sovereignty.

The emperor realized it was a problem that related to sovereignty since “those people who choose to stay in those lands were all eager to live in the

27 Ibid., 111.

28 Ibid., 112.

29 Ibid., 113.

30 Before the prohibition in 1717, there were 16 ships that went to Batavia for trade each year on average. In 1723 and 1724, the number of ships reached 21 and 18 respectively, indicating that the ban was gone and the number of ships had returned to what they were. See Wu Jianyong 吳建雍, “Qing qianqi Zhongguo yu Badaweiya de fanchuan maoyi 清前期中國與巴達維亞的帆船貿易 [The Sailing Trade between China and Batavia during Early Qing],” *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究, no. 3 (1996): 31–34.

foreign countries.”³¹ His second concern regarding such border-crossing people was that they “stayed overseas for a long time, but then suddenly returned back inland [to China].” Hence, “their traces are untraceable.” “If they have had a connection with foreigners, their evil and sly conspiracies,”³² it should be prevented.

When control of the movement of these people failed, Yongzheng asked local officials to “double check” and “try to gradually lure and interrogate to make sure that their backgrounds are all known well”³³ when the overseas migrants returned. The court specially indicated that two types of people should be focused on:

... The rogues who illegally migrated to the barbarian states and lived there for years; they served the barbarians as *kapitan*. There are also the poor people who have fallen away to the barbarian lands, but have lured overseas women to marry them, and have had children; when they have had nothing to live on, they have attempted to move inland [to China] again and wantonly lure and act ostentatiously.³⁴

These two types of people, apparently, related to security and stability. The former might be too close to the foreigners and the latter, a loose prick (metaphor of a single man), might cause problems of instability in inland society. For other overseas commoners, Yongzheng generally just let them pay a penalty for violating the statute against delayed sojourning overseas and go. On the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month of the eleventh year of the Yongzheng reign, when Fujian Governor Hao Yulin 郝玉麟 [d. 1745] and Governor-general Zhao Guolin 趙國麟 [1673–1751] asked if Batavian sojourners Chen Wei 陳魏 and Yang Ying 楊營 could donate 13,000 *shi* [of rice] to offset the established punishment, the emperor commented that “in the matter of their attachment to their hometown,”³⁵ it should be approved.

31 *Shizong shilu* 世宗實錄 [Veritable Record of Shizong], tome 7 of *Qing shilu*, 58.892b.

32 *Zhupi yuzhi* 硃批諭旨 [Vermillion Rescripted Decree and Remarks] (Shanghai: Dianshi-zhai, 1887), 46.33a; for a similar but slightly different version, see Zhang Shucai 張書才, ed., *Yongzheng chao Hanwen zhupi zouzhe huibian* 雍正朝漢文硃批奏摺彙編 [A Compilation of Chinese Language Vermillion Rescripted Palace Memorials for the Yongzheng Reign] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1989), 11.353a.

33 Ibid., 46.46b; Zhang Shucai, *Yongzheng chao Hanwen zhupi zouzhe huibian*, 13.167a.

34 Chen Shouqi 陳壽祺, ed., *Chongzuan Fujian tongzhi* 重纂福建通志 [Recompiled General Gazetteer of Fujian] (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1968), 270.5131b–5132a.

35 *Zhupi yuzhi* 硃批諭旨 [Vermillion Rescripted Decree and Remarks], in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 [Complete Collection of the Imperial Four Treasuries] (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 214.277–283.

In short, before the maritime prohibition in the seventeenth century, the Qing Empire was quite active in overseas trade. Border enforcement and control of movement turned into a separate consideration. In the early eighteenth century, the Southern Sea Prohibition turned into a *de facto laissez-faire*. After 1727, although the ban was lifted, the court considered more the issues of security and stability; hence, the restrictions against Chinese in Southeast Asia were maintained.

Previous studies tend to use cases from the Qianlong 乾隆 reign [r. 1736–1796] to prove that the persecution of overseas Chinese was fierce. However, this perspective ignores a special context. The Qianlong emperor seems to have been stricter in the control of movement, and less forbearing to returning overseas Chinese, but his position had a reason. In 1741, Fujian officials asked if the court would like to ban the Southern Sea trade to destroy it, in reaction to the 1740 Batavia massacre [*Hongxi can'an* 紅溪慘案]. A scholar-official suggested that if it was only the Batavian regime that had insulted Chinese merchants, then it would be fine for the government to just ban the trade with Batavia.³⁶ It was in this context that the Qing court was on its guard against Batavia.

In this regard the most famous case, Chen Yilao's 陳怡老 persecution, was the one that mixed state politics with security considerations. In 1749, Chen brought thirty-two people, including six or seven family members and other "barbarians," to go back home to Longxi 龍溪 County by secretly hiring fishing boats in Xiamen. However, local officials had been waiting to catch them. The Qianlong emperor received a memorial from the Fujian Governor Pan Siju 潘思渠 [1695–1752], who considered Chen as the Chinese leader in Batavia (*kapitan*), and who might "take the opportunity to threaten the barbarians and bluff, or he might also reveal the inland situation and stir up other matters,"³⁷ since Chen had lived in Batavia for over ten years. Unfortunately, Pan's information was wrong. Chen was actually not the *kapitan* but the deputy, the lieutenant. He had very little real power and was more like the channel between the Chinese community and the Dutch authorities. He did not have the ability, political power, or intention to harm Qing imperial security and stability.

Protecting its sovereignty in this over-sensitive way, the Qing court also provided its bailiffs and government office (*yamen*) runners with the opportunity to blackmail returning sojourners. After the case of Chen Yilao, the Chinese in Southeast Asia were very hesitant to return home without a lot

36 *Zhangpu xianzhi* 漳浦縣志 [*Gazetteers of Zhangpu*] (Guangxu 光緒 version) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2000), 22.13–14.

37 *Gaozong shilu* 高宗實錄 [*Veritable Record of Gaozong*], tome 13 of *Qing shilu*, 346.785a.

of preparation. But we can speculate that most of them were quite safe once they paid their “tributes.”

The only two cases we know of are those of Yang Tingkui 楊廷魁 and Chen Lisheng 陳歷生 [d. 1784]. Yang was a Fujian military provincial examination military degree holder [*wu juren* 武舉人] doing business in the Philippines. He returned to China as vice ambassador of a tributary mission, and was exiled by the Qing court to the borderland for labor, as well as having his personal property confiscated. By contrast, Chen Lisheng was *kapitan* in Semarang. He asked others to bury him in China after his death. When his coffin reached China, he was charged by local officials of “illicitly having had a liaison with a foreign country.”³⁸ His relatives bribed the officials, and his coffin was then passed. In other words, both Yang and Chen (or his dead body) both encountered trouble as a political threat, or local government sensitivities, but not on account of the prohibition of sojourning itself.

Indeed, Qianlong was sensitive to the political threat from overseas, and his concerns about security and stability were not that different from those of his predecessors. His idea about sovereignty was not as much about juridical or administrative power, as about security and stability that should be closely focused on in border enforcement, and in the control of movement.

In the nineteenth year of the Qianlong reign, the same year that the Qing government caught Yang Tingkui, the court offered those overseas Chinese wishing to return home “generous” provisions, but only if they were “good commoners” that the boatmen could guarantee. Hence, what the real concerns of the empire were is very clear. Many Chinese in Southeast Asia as a consequence also felt quite safe to return to China, especially after the second half of the eighteenth century, or Chen Lisheng would not have asked people to take his body back.

Another Chinese lieutenant in Batavia, Gao Genguan 高根官 [d. 1787], required his servants to send his children back to China in his will: “[you] must send my children back home and let them bring the money back to my mother.”³⁹ Gao and the others knew the line and the logic of the Qing Empire well, but while the “good commoners” would not be targeted, what if the Chinese caused troubles overseas? This was another concern entirely.

38 Ibid., 364.1009.

39 Leonard Blussé 包樂史 and Wu Fengbin 吳鳳斌, annot., *Gong an bu* 公案簿 [*Minutes of the Board Meetings of the Chinese Council*] (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2002), 1:8–11.

3 Qianlong: Hitting the Pirates and the Interactions with Quảng Nam

Overseas Chinese engaged in the new Vietnamese civil war (“the Fighting between New and Old Nguyễn”) as mercenaries, and played key roles during 1773–1802. It was a war between the new rebel leader Nguyễn Nhạc 阮岳 [r. 1788–1793], and the *de facto* rulers, the Nguyễn and Trịnh lords. In 1774, the Trịnh lord of northern Vietnam ordered his troops to advance southward. For him, it was a great opportunity to “unify” with the southern regime by taking advantage of the chances for riot in southern Vietnam.

During the march, the Vietnamese encountered a group of armed men from Guangdong led by Chaozhou 潮州 merchant Jiting 集亭 [Tập Đình, or Li Aji 李阿集, d. 1775]. Jiting and his soldiers were mostly from the southeastern coastal macro-economic region as defined by William Skinner.⁴⁰

According to the Vietnamese official record, this group was unexpectedly formidable: “Tập Đình’s mercenaries were all people from Guangdong and they wore red cloth wrapped on their heads. They were adorned with gold and silver paper, and were armed with rattan shields and broadswords. They broke through [our troops], stripping half-naked to fight more vigorously.”⁴¹ The Vietnamese leader, General Hoàng Ngũ Phúc 黃五福 [1713–1776], had to expend considerable effort to turn impending defeat into victory through his use of cavalry.

This key battle changed the political and military situation in Vietnam. The rebellious Tây Sơn 西山 leader Nguyễn Nhạc surrendered to the northern lord, while his partner moved to stand on the side of the southern lord Nguyễn Phúc Thuần 阮福淳 [r. 1765–1777].

Born in Chaozhou, Jiting had migrated to Quy Nhơn 歸仁 before 1759, and had established connections there with a group of local overseas Chinese. Jiting’s partner, Li Cai 李才 [Lý Tài, or Li Azhi, d. 1777], moved to Quảng Nam 廣南 from southern Fujian in the Qianlong reign to earn a living. He led another force to stir the pot.⁴²

40 Most of them were from southern Fujian province and from Chaozhou prefecture in eastern Guangdong province. As William Skinner has highlighted, they belonged together to the same “macro-economic region” in southeast coastal China. See G. William Skinner, *Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2001).

41 Phan Thanh Giản 潘清簡, *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục* 欽定越史通鑑綱目 [*The Imperially Ordered Annotated Text Completely Reflecting the History of Vietnam*] (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1969), 44:23.

42 Li Shiyao 李侍堯, “Zou wei nahuo zaifan zishi Hong Ahan Li Aji deng gefan zunzhi fenbie shenni shi 奏為拿獲在番滋事洪阿漢李阿集等各犯遵旨分別審擬事 [A Memorial on Capturing the Trouble Makers Hong Ahan, and Li Aji et al. in the Land of ‘Barbarian,’

Jiting played a major role in stirring up domestic conflict in Vietnamese national politics by joining the Tây Sơn army to go against the southern lord, capturing the Lord Nguyễn Phúc Dương 阮福暘 [1750–1777], and forcing him to go together within him to Hội An 會安 before the northern army's attack. However, Jiting was defeated by General Hoàng, and escaped back to China, and then was captured by the governor-general in Guangdong.

Although Jiting was later executed by the Qing government, and he failed to influence politics, he had played an important role in Quảng Nam, and had influenced Vietnamese national politics. His partner Li Cai, who allied with the Tây Sơn army, also helped further develop Vietnamese “national” politics.⁴³

In terms of these contexts, the significance of overseas Chinese in the history of Vietnam was special. The cases of Jiting and Li Cai, especially the waves they made, also reveal interesting facets of border, movement, and sovereignty in the context of Sino-Vietnamese relations. When such Chinese people stirred up trouble in Vietnam and returned to the maritime borders of China, the Qing government quickly intervened.

and on Interrogating Them Respectively under the provisions of an Imperial Edict],” in *Junjichu lu fu zouzhe* 軍機處錄副奏摺 [*Grand Council Copies of Palace Memorials*], Archival No.04-01-01-0347-038, Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan 中國第一歷史檔案館. This memorial is also preserved in Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan lishi suo 中國社會科學院歷史所, ed., *Gudai Zhong-Yue guanxi shi ziliao xuanbian* 古代中越關係史資料選編 [*Selected Sources of Ancient Sino-Vietnamese Relations*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan, 1982), 654–56, but the date given for it is incorrect. Li Aji's case is also seen in three other memorials preserved at the Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan: Li Shiyao 李侍堯, “Zoubao xuhuo Liu Amei dengren ji chachu Li Aji jiagai shi 奏報續獲劉阿眉等人及查出李阿集家財事 [A Memorial on Continuing the Apprehending of Liu Amei et al., and Finding the Home Property of Li Aji],” Archival No.03-1419-001; Li Shiyao 李侍堯, “Zou wei shenni Li Aji deng zai yang qiangduo sharen yi'an zhong zaishi renfan zhongzui qingni fengzhi shenchi xie'en shi 奏為審擬李阿集等在洋搶奪殺人一案中在事人犯重罪輕擬奉旨申飭謝恩事 [A Memorial on Reviewing the Convicted Felony Crimes Receiving Light Punishment in the Proposal for the Case of Li Aji et al., Robbing and Killing People at Sea: Accepting the Rebuke of the Emperor and Thanking the Emperor for Favor],” Archival No. 04-01-01-0361-020; Yang Jingsu 楊景素, “Zouqing jiang Li Aji qi Chenshi deng liuming fenshang Jiangning dengchu zhufang bingding shi 奏請將李阿集妻陳氏等六名分賞江寧等處駐防兵丁事 [A Memorial on Requesting Permission to Respectively Award Li Aji's Wife Miss Chen and Five Others to the Soldiers of Jiangning Garrison Etc.],” Archival No.03-1360-041.

- 43 Cheng Swag-Ming has given many examples. See Cheng Swag-Ming 鄭瑞明, “Shi lun Yuenan huaren zai xin jiu Ruan zhi zheng zhong suo banyan de jue 試論越南華人在新舊阮之爭中所扮演的角色 [The Roles of Chinese in Vietnam during the Conflict between the Two Nguyens: A Preliminary Discussion],” in *Yuenan, Zhongguo yu Taiwan guanxi de zhuanbian* 越南、中國與台灣關係的轉變 [*Changes in Relations among Vietnam, China, and Taiwan*], ed., Xu Wentang 許文堂 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 2001), 1–36.

In 1776, after reading the interrogation recording Jiting's last confession in prison, the Qianlong emperor instructed that Jiting and others should be "executed immediately" for the crime of "robbing and killing people overseas," "causing troubles in the barbarian area," and "accepting an illegal official position."⁴⁴ The Tây Sơn Uprising offered an opportunity for Jiting to assert himself, and show the fearful potential power of the overseas Chinese.⁴⁵ Qianlong's attitude toward this case also provided an indication of his position: his first concern was the control of movement and the overseas order, and then sovereignty.

Unlike the Qing logic of enforcing the domestic sovereignty and controlling the movement of people overseas, the search for a better life meant everything for the commoners and even the so-called pirates. For commoners, the pursuit of wealth or simply making a living was the primary concern and their overseas activities had little to do with identity or an anachronistic concept of sovereignty. Hence, many chose to follow Jiting, and he could then assign different individuals from various places in China to be in charge of different issues, including army provisioning, weapons, horses, and other necessities.

Also, Jiting "recalled Fujian native Luo Aqi 羅阿奇 to ghostwrite an official denunciation of the enemy, calling upon the Chinese guest people [*neidi kemin* 內地客民] to take up arms. As a result some merchants and commoners felt discouraged and angry. For example, Wu Azhu 吳阿珠 and his seventy-two men feared Jiting's power but could not help but agree to offering the soldiers, due to being controlled by Jiting."⁴⁶

Despite the fact that such records of opposition exist, other records make clear the bravery and ferocity of Li Aji's troops, explaining the possibility of their victory that was foreseen at the time.⁴⁷

During the Tây Sơn Uprising, many overseas Chinese joined the side of the Nguyễn lords, and helped to restrain their opponent. Most of these Chinese were lower class migrants, as is revealed in Qing records. They were utilized by the dominating local powers in the civil war: Li Cai's gang is a good example of overseas Chinese involvement; He Xiwen's 何喜文 [d. 1801] gangs,

44 Li Shiyao, "Zou wei nahuo zaifan zishi Hong Ahan Li Aji deng," "Zou wei shenni Li Aji deng zai yang qiangduo sharen yī'an"; Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan lishi suo, *Gudai Zhong-yue guanxi shi ziliao xuanbian*, 656; *Gaozong shilu*, tome 21 of *Qing shilu*, 999.360. It was the twelfth month of the fortieth year of the Qianlong reign in the lunar calendar, so it was early 1776.

45 For a detailed study of this movement, see George Edson Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

46 Li Shiyao, "Zou wei nahuo zaifan zishi Hong Ahan Li Aji deng."

47 Phan Thanh Giản, *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục*, 44.23.

including Liang Wenying 梁文英, Zhou Yuanquan 周遠權, Zhang Baguan 張八觀, and some other pirates, was another good example of those serving the regime in 1786.⁴⁸

Most lower-class overseas Chinese in Vietnam however joined the Tây Sơn side, no doubt due to common connections in economic status and a common social background. Dian H. Murray has pointed out it was the Tây Sơn regime that supplied the pirates warm nests to breed in on the coasts from Vietnam to Guangdong.⁴⁹ Most of the so-called pirates were connected with Tây Sơn power and developed Tây Sơn strongholds.

According to Chinese records, Fang Weifu 方維富 led Liang Wenke 梁文科, and together they went to give themselves up. They “confessed that Chen Tianbao 陳添保, the head of the pirates, is now in Vietnam, and wants to try to lead the gangs in the direction of showing their allegiances to him.”⁵⁰ Chen contributed to on-going battles with the Quảng Nam regime, then returned to coastal Guangdong to recruit Mo Guanfu 莫觀扶 [d. 1802], Zheng Qi 鄭七 [1760–1802], and Fan Wencai 樊文才 [d. 1802] for Vietnam, and so obtained an official rank.⁵¹ According to the *Qing Veritable Records* [*Qing shilu* 清實錄], Chen Tianbao “is a famous big pirate. [He] once accepted illegal Vietnamese grants ... send him to Ying County of Nanxiong Prefecture to restrain him.”⁵² Mo Guanfu, a Cantonese who plundered on the sea and fought against the Nguyễn force, recruited over one thousand bandits and pirates. He was defeated in 1801 and captured by the Nguyễn army.⁵³

Like Jiting and Chen Tianbao, He Xiwen was also accused of accepting “illegal official ranks” overseas. He and two other pirates were sent back to the Qing by Nguyễn Phúc Ánh 阮福映 [r. 1802–1820], and were accused of “accepting illegal official positions” and being Chinese villains who “robbed a company of travelling merchants.”⁵⁴

Another two pirates, Fan Wencai and Liang Wengeng 梁文庚 [d. 1802], were executed, together with Mo Guanfu. Some other famous pirates, such as Lun Guili 倫貴利 [d. 1800], Zheng Qi, Zhang Yalu 張亞祿 [d. 1802], and

48 *Dại Nam chính biên liệt truyện sơ tập* 大南正編列傳初集 [*The First Biography of the Veritable Records of Greater Vietnam*] (Sài Gòn: Nhà xuất bản Hồn Thiêng, 1967), 28.1–2.

49 Dian H. Murray, *Pirates of the South China Coast, 1790–1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

50 *Renzong shilu* 仁宗實錄 [*Veritable Record of Renzong*], tome 28 of *Qing shilu*, 50.624b.

51 Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo 歷史語言研究所, ed., *Ming-Qing shiliao geng bian* 明清史料庚編 [*The Seventh Collection of Ming-Qing Historical Sources*] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan, 1960), 3.211–212.

52 *Renzong shilu*, tome 29 of *Qing shilu*, 89.172.

53 Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, *Ming-Qing shiliao geng bian*, 3.211–12.

54 Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan lishi suo, *Gudai Zhong-Yue guanxi shi ziliao xuanbian*, 577–587.

Feng Liangui 馮聯貴 (Tiedanzi 鐵彈子, d. 1808), Wu Shi'er 烏石二 (Mai Youjin 麥有金, 1765–1810), were also executed sooner or later by Qing court or the Nguyễn court, except for Huang Wenhai 黃文海 who, like Chen Tianbao, went to surrender and confessed.⁵⁵

Interestingly enough, while we might feel familiar with the accusations against such people, the details of the accusations show us more about imperial concerns in the areas of security and stability than simply about criminal activities. Nguyễn Quang Toản 阮光纘 [r. 1792–1802], the third and last emperor of the Tây Sơn Dynasty [1788–1802], was also accused by the Qing court as “sheltering traitors and refugees,” “harboring Chinese bandits and criminals,” “feeding the pirates,” and “being ungrateful for the kindness of the emperor and betraying him.”⁵⁶

It is clear here that the concerns for security and stability, more than the “tributary system” or “diplomatic relations,” held greater importance than the idea of imperial sovereignty. The Qing court considered border enforcement and the control of movement not in terms of population, territory, or any prohibitions, but as security and stability issues.

4 Conclusion: A Natural Evolution

As we can see from the discussions above, with a very conservative (if not negative) guiding ideology, the Qing Empire developed its relations with Southeast Asia as well as with the migrating people going to that region in similar ways. Relying on border enforcement and the control of movement to guard sovereignty, or maintain security and stability, turned out to be the mainstream approach. Ways to interact with polities abroad also partly shaped the Qing Empire's conceptual frameworks of national interest or sovereign rights. From the perspectives of the emperors and officials, the regimes in Batavia and Luzon were not just “barbarian states,” but more a potential source of threat that should be taken into serious consideration. Regimes in Annam, although not that dangerous to begin with, could turn into hotbeds of maritime challenge to the empire (e.g. Tây Sơn), that would need to be nipped in the bud.

Individuals who participated in the construction of Qing overseas policy also helped to redefine the concept of “China,” and this redefinition introduced their agendas and advanced their interests. Chinese in Southeast Asia,

55 Ibid., 577–587.

56 *Renzong shilu*, 102.361, 106.427.

including merchants, laborers and soldiers that were overseas, showed their talents in military assistance and in diplomatic negotiation.

We can also observe those “Chinese” under the colonial system, working with the British, going against the Chinese in China when political loyalty superseded “ethnic” identity. In the nineteenth century, some overseas Chinese were not that “Chinese” anymore, or some were not “Chinese” before and even after their migration. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the separation has continued.

The distinctions involved were not necessarily the result of imperial enforcement or division. They were a natural evolution of the idea of sovereignty expressed in terms of border, movement, and administration and jurisdiction enforcement, at least the process giving rise to the distinctions was speeded up by this fact. (Somehow too the process was in resonance with the identity splits of British, French, and Spanish in the Americas.) Although the conflicts in terms of border and sovereignty never stopped, regulation and separation likewise never stopped the development of peoples. After all, the search for a better life meant everything, involving those borders-crossers in business, conflict, and war.

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