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CONTRIBUTING TO GLOBALISATION FROM THE SHADOW: PIRACY AND OVERSEAS CHINESE BEFORE 1684

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This article revisits the entangled relationship between piracy, migration, and early globalisation by foregrounding the role of the overseas Chinese before 1684, the year the Qing court formally lifted its maritime ban and authorised private overseas trade. While dominant narratives of globalisation emphasise the role of formal empires and state-led expansion, this study shifts focus to informal, often stateless actors – pirates, smugglers, and migrant merchants – who operated beyond the official gaze of the state. Drawing on sources in Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Southeast Asian languages, the article examines how Chinese settlements in Malacca, Patani, Nagasaki, Manila, and other littoral spaces contributed significantly to the formation of transregional linkages long before Qing maritime liberalisation. The central argument asserts that the overseas Chinese were not merely victims of imperial maritime restrictions, but strategic actors who created resilient, mobile, and adaptive networks that transcended political boundaries. Rather than viewing piracy as a threat to order, the article reinterprets it as a functional and often necessary mechanism of connectivity. Piratical and commercial activities overlapped with diplomacy and religious exchange, facilitating the movement of people, capital, and knowledge across maritime Asia. The study contends that these interactions formed a decentralised yet coherent infrastructure of early global exchange.

By comparing case studies across the East and Southeast Asian maritime sphere, the article challenges linear assumptions about Chinese migration, which often begin with 19th-century diaspora or Qing reform. Instead, it reveals a longer and more complicated history in which Chinese actors shaped regional transformations through alternative and often extra-legal means. In highlighting these contributions from the periphery, the article argues for a revised understanding of globalisation – one that emerges not solely from imperial centres, but also from the shadow networks sustained by non-state Chinese agents across maritime Asia.

Keywords: globalisation; maritime Asia; migration; the overseas Chinese; piracy; unofficial networks; 17th century

Introduction
Imperial China and Oversea Chinese in Early Globalisation

Eurocentric historiography has often depicted Imperial China as a predominantly agrarian and inward-looking empire until at least the 20th century, contrasting it with the commercially vibrant and maritime-oriented Western Europe and North America. Globalisation in such historiography was thus conceptualised as the growth of Europe-originated networks, like how Immanuel Wallerstein portrayed as an expansive “modern world-system”. The paradigm received different kinds of revision since 1990s, but the basic structure viewing China, or East Asia, passively being integrated into a globalised economic

system lasted for a longer period [Jürgen 2014, *724*; Wallerstein 1974]. International commercial activities were neglected or marginalised in many of the discussions of economic history before the last decade of the 20th century. In classical discourse, China was not a member of the fast-growing globalised trading network, at least the imperial government attempted to avoid it [Fu Zhufu 1980, Vol. 2, *454–492*; Nanjing daxue Lishixi Ming-Qing shi yanjiushi 1987].

Some Asian historians were also following Eurocentric historiography. Pang Naiming 龐乃明, in his portrayal of Chinese perceptions of Europe, assumed that the cultural contacts between Ming China and Europe was primarily initiated by Europeans [Pang Naiming 2006, *38*]. Similarly, Lew Bon Hoi 廖文輝 believed that Imperial China had limited involvement in the political developments of the Malay archipelago since the end of Zheng He's voyages 鄭和 (1371–1433). In his recent monograph on the pluralistic dimension of Malaysian history, the China factor was noticeably absent from the mid-15th century until the start of the Larut Wars (1861–1874) [Lew Bon Hoi 2019, *131–235*]. Scholars concerning global history shared similar views. Seo Yongseok 서용석 and Takekawa Shunichi 竹川 俊一 suggested that the advent to the global system of East Asia was associated with the intrusion of the Western imperialist world system: China rejected Western ideas and practices, relying on a deep-rooted self-confidence stemming from the ideology of the "middle kingdom" in the 19th century, and this resistance to change led to humiliation and the imposition of "unequal" treaties. China was thus forced to cede parts of its territory to Western powers, highlighting the consequences of its reluctance to adapt to the changing world order [Seo Yongseok, Takekawa Shunichi 2006, *227*].

Some insightful historians, however, recognised that international and long-distance commerce had been a longstanding tradition in China since the 10th century. In 1968, Shiba Yoshinobu 斯波義信 illustrated the development of communications and transportation as a core part of the Song [Sung] economy. He revealed to his readers that long-distance junks operated by Southern Chinese sailors were active in trading across East Asian and Southeast Asian waters. Shiba emphasised the role of connection and exchange in the economy, believing that commercial activity is a natural phenomenon in human society. It was not solely developed after the state approved such activities, nor did it rely on the foundation of modern capital accumulation or a well-established financial market [Shiba Yohinobu 1992, *4–10*; 1997, *6*]. Mark Elvin, who translated Shiba's monograph on the Song economy, also contested the portrayal that assumes limited Chinese involvement in maritime affairs. He concurred with Shiba's observation that China experienced a period of flourishing commercial expansion and maritime trade, which he believed continued until the 12th to 13th century and abruptly ended in the 15th century. Similar to Lew, Elvin argued that after the conclusion of the Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1433) expedition, the Ming Empire shifted its focus to the threat posed by the Mongol reigns, with the ocean losing its significance as a major concern for the newly established empire. Janet Lippman Abu-Lughod, who introduced the concept of a "premodern world system" before Immanuel Wallerstein, proposed the existence of pre-modern world systems spanning Eurasia in the 13th century, she posited that China also made significant contributions to the maritime commercial network in East Asia, at least until the 14th century [Elvin 1989, *316–340*].

The assumption that China completely withdrew from the maritime economy in East Asia after the Mongol reign, or Zheng He voyages is incorrect. Hung Ho-fung 孔誥烽 responded to the above discussions by repositioning the role of "China" during the early era of globalisation, examining the form and impact of trade between "China" and England. He highlighted the flawed belief that "China" viewed foreign trade as a favour to the foreigners. Sino-English trade relied on a significant level of mutual dependence, the Chinese government desired foreign trade as much as the English. Secondly, despite extensive trade between each other, the economic exchange was regulated through a system

of designated ports that preserved China's political economy and aimed to secure trade revenue during periods of economic and financial fluctuation. Thirdly, the integrity of China's political economy did not imply stagnation or immunity from external influences. Hung specifically pointed out that the substantial influx of silver imports into China played a significant role in the profound socio-economic transformation of the empire in the 18th century, leading to the emergence of an integrated national market and a more complex specialisation between core and periphery regions. Although Hung comprehensively demonstrated the importance of maritime activities to the Qing Empire during the 18th century, he did not address the developments of around 300 years since the end of Zheng He's expedition. His analysis does not enlighten us as to whether China, under the Ming Empire, retreated from the sea since the 1440s [Hung Ho-fung 2001, *473–513*]. However, trading knowledges and network could not be transmitted directly from the 15th century to sailors and merchants of the 18th century.

One of the reasons many historians struggle to explain the role of "China" in early period of globalisation, as this article intended to argue, was that we encounter a dilemma created by the abundant amount of evidences showing how the Ming government intended to maintain its sea-ban and trade regulations; but at the same time also sufficient evidence that Chinese traders and settlers were actively contributing economically, culturally, and even politically in coastal areas of China and East Asia areas including Japan, Formosa, Nusantara archipelago, and Indochinese Peninsula. Timothy Brook provided one of the most comprehensive explanations for the absence of maritime activities between Zheng He's expeditions and the resurgence of international commerce that resulted in the influx of silver in the early 17th century. Brook argued that Zheng He's voyages aimed to establish a framework of tribute system among the various political entities surrounding the Ming Empire. Once the tribute relationships with Indochina and Nusantara were established and functioning well, the voyages were no longer necessary and were discontinued. Despite the end of the expeditions, the maritime and diplomatic knowledge acquired by travellers continued to circulate within Ming society. Chinese travel logs, the Laud rutter, Selden map, and popular late-Ming encyclopaedias transmitted this knowledge to the coastal population who may have ventured to maritime travel. Due to the limited volume of state-monopolised trade, fake diplomatic missions, private foreign trade (or smuggling from the state's perspective) emerged to meet market demands, thereby exerting pressure on the tribute trade but continued the maritime tradition of the coastal society. Brook interpreted Emperor Hongwu's (1328–1398) maritime ban policy as an attempt to "clear the coast" by relocating coastal residents of Zhejiang to inland, aiming to starve Japanese smugglers and pirates. However, this policy also inflicted significant harm on coastal society [Brook 2010, *221–225*].

This brings to mind the insightful discussion contributed by Wang Gungwu 王賡武 almost three decades ago. He explored the competitive dynamics of the Hokkien (Fujian) sojourning communities, whom he called "merchants without empire", in Manila and Nagasaki during the 15th and 16th centuries. Since 1371, Chinese communities engaged in trade between the south-eastern coastal regions of China and Nusantara found themselves unable to return home. Consequently, they settled in the Nusantara archipelago and assimilated with the locals. Due to the "illegal" nature of their trade activities, very few among the overseas Chinese communities, including the rare literate individuals, were willing to record their own culture. The connection between the overseas Chinese and commercial communities within China proper remained enduring and symbiotic, but their relationship with the imperial government was antagonistic and with continuous rivalry, and at times even enmity. Wang concluded that the overseas Chinese, through the cases of early modern Manila and Nagasaki, were a consequence of maritime traders seeking refuge from the Ming Empire's century-long, brutal maritime ban policy [Wang Gungwu

1990, *400–422*]. Probably building upon Wang's insights in 1990, Brook hinted in his 2010 book that the stability of the coast under Ming governance came at the expense of the livelihoods of the coastal population who had participated in maritime trade prior to the establishment of Ming rule.

This article, inspired by the works of Wang and Brook, aims to provide a clearer understanding from the perspective of illicit activities. We argue that traders, operating under the Ming sea-ban policy, were often depicted as smugglers and pirates, and by studying piracy, we can gain insights into the roles of imperial China and the non-state actors, such as the overseas Chinese, in the early stages of globalisation. Ueda Makoto 上田 信 explained the sense of sea-ban as follows, "The sea-ban is different from total retreat from international trade. It refers to the state monopolisation of interactions with foreign countries" [Ueda Makoto 2005, *101*]. In his understanding, "sakoku" (鎖国; total retreat from international trade) and "kaikin" (海禁; state-controlled or monopolised trade) are distinct concepts. Therefore, the state and the non-state players were in a competitive relationship, both seeking to profit from maritime trade and recognising its societal influence [Ueda Makoto 2005, *101–103*]. This article, while acknowledging the violence perpetrated by illicit traders, which usually included robbery, kidnapping, murder, rape, and sedition, views piracy not solely as criminal activity but also as a competition with the state, having survived the economic monopolisation since the 15th century. We argue that historians of globalisation should distinguish the roles of the imperial government within China proper and the non-state actors, such as the overseas Chinese communities, beyond its borders. Without making such distinctions, we run the risk of falling into the same blind spots that led economic historians to believe that the Chinese became less influential on the ocean after the 1430s [Chuan Han-Sheng 2019, *12*]. Our discussion in this article is also a remark for the emerging initiative of New Nanyang History (新南洋史). This historiographical project, advocated by scholars such as Pek Weichuan 白偉權 and Bak Jiahow 莫家浩, seeks to move beyond a narrative of the overseas Chinese defined merely by suffering and contribution, and instead to reconstruct a more plural, entangled history of maritime Asia. In this sense, the present study participates in the same endeavour: by foregrounding piracy, illicit trade, and the agency of the overseas Chinese before 1684, it questions the applicability of modern nation-state concepts – such as non-state actors, sovereignty, boundaries, and nationalism – when retroactively imposed on earlier centuries. As Charles Tilly has reminded us in his classic essay *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime* (1985), the distinction between licit state power and illicit enterprise is often blurred; states frequently criminalised activities that nonetheless sustained transregional exchange, while pirates and smugglers sometimes assumed functions of governance. Situating our cases in this framework underscores that both "state" and "non-state" actors embodied elements of order and disorder simultaneously. By drawing attention to these ambiguities, this article argues that national historiographies – whether of China or Southeast Asian polities – have too often obscured the role of Chinese maritime activities in the making of global connections. To join the conversation of New Nanyang History is therefore to insist on a more decentered and relational perspective: one that recovers the shadow networks of the overseas Chinese as indispensable in the creation of early globalisation [Pek Weechuen 2024; Bak 2024; Tilly 1985, *169–191*].

Before delving into further discussion, let us first clarify the usage of the concept of "non-state actor", the terminology of "piracy" and its meaning within the context of 15th to 17th century Asia. Although this article, for the ease of communication, used terminology like "non-state actor", we recognise the fundamental challenge to the framework: the perspective of legitimacy. For a rebel or pirate group in early modern history, and even nowadays, that controls territory and populations, their identity hinges on who is telling the story. The framework of non-state actors works by contrasting the rebel group

against the established, recognized sovereign power. The sovereign labels the rebel group as a non-state actor – a criminal, a pirate, or a bandit – to deny its legitimacy, regardless of the rebels' de facto control [Krieger 2018, *563–583*; Green 1961, *25–45*]. Piracy, among other stigmatised labels, is exactly one of the most misleading concepts. Historians exploring piracy beyond the Occidental context have reminded us that the term "piracy" can carry diverse meanings in different contexts. The English word "pirate" derives from the Latin word "pirata" (meaning "pirate, corsair, sea robber"), which stems from the Greek word "πειρατής" (peiratēs), literally signifying "anyone who attempts something". Over time, it evolved to encompass individuals engaged in robbery or brigandry, regardless of whether it occurred on land or at sea [Gabbert 1986, *156–163*]. Such ambiguity in defining piracy caused further problem when our attention shifted to Asia's waters. Michael Pearson, from cases in South and Southeast Asia finds piracy could be trader, fisherman, naval employee simultaneously. Particularly, after the arrival of Europeans, "piracy" was more similar to a label for the narrator's seaborne enemy: Asian vessels against monopoly of the European colonial reign were usually being accused as pirates; Europeans vessels of the Portuguese Empire, the VOC, or the British East India Company were also, with similar reason, being accused of piracy by Asian sovereignties. Drawing an objective definition for "piracy" for our analytical framework from historical use of the terminology is technically impossible [Pearson 2010, *15–28*]. Coincidentally, Robert J. Anthony notes that late imperial Chinese governments, like the Greeks, did not legally distinguish between land and sea-bandits, nor smuggling. During the Ming reign, private maritime trade was restricted, and merchants who violated these regulations were treated as criminals, similar to pirates. In contrast to European rulers, who made legal distinctions between these phenomena, in China, piracy and smuggling were often regarded as synonymous, while privateering remained unrecognised. European countries authorised privateers to attack enemy ships, but in China, any form of private maritime raiding was seen as piracy, except towards the end of Ming when they closely collaborated with pirates and maritime traders. These pirates even became the last Ming loyalists. The 17th century transition from Ming to Qing witnessed confusion between piracy and warfare, with pirates assuming the role of soldiers and vice versa [Antony 2022, *4*].

Differentiating between piracy and warfare is also challenging in other parts of East Asia. Ahmad Jelani Halimi, in his study of the Orang Laut in Johor, proposes distinguishing between the terms "perompak" (robber) and "lanun" (pirate) in the Malay language. His main argument suggests that the prevalence of Malay "piracy" was a consequence of European colonisers monopolising trade activities in the region, barring Malays from trade and forcing them to turn to piracy. Consequently, Malay piracy was seen as part of resistance against colonisation, with the aim of reclaiming their rightful rights. Ibrahim Ahmad, Faris Ahmad, and Shariff bin Harun also express similar views, opposing the labelling of Malays as "pirates" by Western colonisers. They argue that Western colonisers used the excuse of "piracy" to intervene the affairs of the Malay Peninsula. These discussions urge us not to fall into the trap of "Western colonial concepts" and label the past struggles of Malays against Western colonisers as "pirate activities". Toh Chen Chun 杜振尊 from Malaysia also expresses concerns regarding the strong criticism in this historiography. Toh reminded us that the peak period of piracy in the Malay Archipelago occurred before 1850, and the fundamental reason for Britain to combat "piracy" was the Malay traders' infringement on British and other ethnic communities' commercial and political interests, which compelled Britain, or the East India Company, to allocate funds for naval operations against them. As reminded by Halimi and Ahmad, this article is also mindful of the hegemony imposed by Imperial China on the coastal Chinese residents when the Ming Empire attempted to monopolise maritime activities from the 15th century onwards. The article perceives violence as a means of acquiring resources,

with individuals involved in such activities serving as non-state players in the early globalisation of Asia. Although they were frequently labelled as "pirates" in written records, their primary identity may have actually been "traders" [Halimi 2001; Ibrahim et al. 2016; Toh Chen Chun 2022a, *36–48*; 2022b, *11–20*]. In the following section, we would first look into how the Ming tribute trade system contributed to the making of piracy in the 15th century. The majority of the smugglers and pirates discussed in the subsequent sections belonged to families engaged in trade between China and other East Asian countries. Their involvement in illicit trade did not arise from a shift in their actions, but rather from a shift in the definition of what was deemed right or wrong under the new empire.

Tribute Trade System and the Making of Piracy

In 1357, eleven years prior to the establishment of the Ming Empire, the renowned international port-city of Quanzhou 泉州 witnessed the Ispah rebellion, marking the end of free trade along China's coastline. During the 13th and early 14th centuries Fujian prospered through overseas trade under Mongol-Yuan and emerged as the largest international port in South China. The city boasted a population exceeding 2 million, attracting a diverse range of people including Arabs, Persians, Europeans, Jews, Tamils, Armenians, and others. However, governing such a multicultural environment presented challenges due to religious and ethnic diversity. Quanzhou witnessed a substantial presence of Arab and Persian Muslims, while the dominant Sunni Muslims in Quanzhou excluded the Shiites due to their political favour from the Mongol rulers, resulting in resentment among the latter group. In 1282, however, the Mongol court dispatched 3000 Shiite Persian troops to defend the city, gradually becoming one of the most influential military forces in Fujian. As Fujian grew increasingly unstable in the 14th century due to continuous rebellions, various pro-institution political entities sought to gain the allegiance of the Muslim forces.

Seizing the opportunity a predominantly Persian Shiite army led by Sayf ad-Din (?–?) and Amir ad-Din (?–1362) declared independence and revolted against Mongol authority in 1357. They seized Quanzhou, Putian 蒲田, and even reached the provincial capital, Fuzhou 福州. The Shiite forces engaged in a decade-long conflict with armies comprised of Sunni Muslims, Han Chinese, and Mongols, with the latter three groups also battling amongst themselves. Following the eventual suppression of the rebellion, in 1366, Yuan imperial soldiers carried out atrocities, massacring the majority of merchants in Quanzhou, particularly targeting Persians. The repercussions of the Ispah rebellion were profound and signified the conclusion of free trade and cultural diversity in Quanzhou. In 1368, Fujian came under the control of the newly established Ming Empire, which was primarily consisting of Han Chinese who did not exhibit a welcoming attitude towards maritime traders. As xenophobia escalated, the surviving few fled to other ports in southern Fujian, assimilating into the Hokkien community. Many other international traders sought refuge in Nusantara, becoming the earliest group of the overseas Chinese and contributing to the Islamisation of the Java archipelago[1].

The apprehension of the Ming was not unfounded. While it gained control of Fujian, the new government suppressed of the rebellion in Mount Xiulan 秀蘭山, situated along the coast of Zhejiang 浙江. The rebels were former adversaries of competitive rebel leaders Fang Guozhen 方國珍 (1319–1374) and Zhang Shicheng 張士誠 (1321–1367), both originating from Zhejiang and representing the interests of maritime traders, receiving considerable support from urban residents along the coast. Following their defeat, the sea-faring supporters of Fang and Zhang occupied Mount Xiulan and other islands off the Zhejiang coast in 1368. The Ming Empire dispatched armies to suppress the rebels and implemented a series of stringent policies to "pacify" the coast within a year. In 1370, the court compelled 111,730 former rebels from Fang's army and the coastal residents around Mount Xiulan to be registered as chuanhu 船戶 (boat households), an inferior hereditary

occupation. It also, for the first time, prohibited commoners from venturing out to sea [Chen Bo 2009a, *44–58*; 2009b, *124–150*; Hansson 1996, *29–31*]. Over the ensuing years, as the Ming Empire sought to establish a new international order based on a Confucian worldview, it encountered diplomatic setbacks with ambassadors from Siam and Japan. Notably, Ashikaga bakufu 室町幕府 refused to cooperate with the Sino-centric global order enforced by the Ming court and persistently challenged the Ming tribute system from 1374 to 1393. In response, the Ming Empire ceased private commercial activities, and henceforth engaged solely with political entities that adhered to Confucian rituals for tributary visits to Nanjing [Iwai Shigeki 2022, *110*, *146–152*].

The new international order enforced by the Ming Empire aimed to monopolise, or at the very least, strictly regulate international activities. The volume of legal trade was insufficient compared to the growing demand, and the political rituals were exclusively reserved for state players recognised by the Empire. As Muslim traders from Quanzhou and rebels from Mount Xiulan may have anticipated, the state's monopolised maritime system also deprived the coastal population and international trading community of their livelihood during the Mongol-Yuan era. Almost immediately after the sea-ban was reintroduced in 1381, multiple riots erupted. One notable example occurred in Fuan 福安, where 8,000 local residents rebelled against the policy, which caused them severe economic hardships. Even after the main rebel force was defeated after several weeks of fighting, over 2,500 rebels managed to escape. The incident demonstrated the strength of local societies and underscored the challenges Ming government faced in enforcing sea-ban.

In Guangzhou, maritime residents also uprose against the new policy and were known to be "piracy". Led by Cao Zhen 曹真 and Su Wenqing 蘇文卿, who established strongholds in various locations such as Zhancai 湛菜, Dabu 大步 (埔), Xiaoheng 小亨, Lutang 鹿塘, and Qingyuan 清遠, the pirates attacked and plundered towns in Dongguan 東莞, Nanhai 南海, and Zhaoqing 肇慶. The government dispatched a force of 15,000 soldiers, led by Zhao Yong 趙庸, to confront the pirates. However, the mountainous terrain and fierce resistance resulted in numerous casualties on both sides. The pirates eventually retreated to Lutang but were pursued and defeated by the government forces. Over 1,700 pirates were captured, and thousands were killed. The government also seized more than 5,000 weapons, 19,000 ships, and 1,200 livestock. The final confrontation resulted in the deaths of another 20,000 pirates [Ming Shi-lu 1966, *2206–2207*].

Poverty caused by imperial policies was one of the core factors contributing to piracy throughout the Ming era. Another case, occurring in Guangdong around seven decades after the revolt of Cao Zhen, provides further evidence. Similar to his Guangdong predecessors, Huang Xiaoyang 黃蕭養 (?–1450) became a pirate after being released from prison and enduring deep poverty. He was later imprisoned again for salt smuggling. In 1449, with the assistance of a fellow inmate, he escaped from prison and stole weapons and armour from the armoury before fleeing on a vessel. Huang Xiao defeated the government persecution force and then crowned himself as the "King of Shuntian" (shuntian wang 順天王), commanding over 100,000 followers and 2,000 warships. In 1450, Huang Xiao attacked the strategic fortress of Foshan 佛山, but he was defeated by the "22 Elders" (ershier lao 二十二老), a group of local militia. Huang Xiao continued to assault various towns and cities, but he was eventually executed by Grand Coordinator of Guangdong 廣東巡撫 in 1450 [Li Lanli 2013, *156–158*].

To "pacify" continuous smuggling and piracy, and perhaps to prepare for potential invasion from the Ashikaga Bakufu, the Ming Empire maintained its forced conscription to create a coastal defence army. The government introduced the "military household" 軍戶 and "garrison" 衛所 systems, which reshaped the ecology of coastal China in the following centuries. From the perspective of the coastal population, the militarisation of the region caused considerable suffering. From 1384 to 1387, when the Ming court establish

garrisons in Fujian, it also implemented a scorched-earth policy to clear the inhabitants of the outer rim islands of Fujian. This policy involved forcibly relocating residents from the islands to achieve stricter control by cutting off the islanders from providing supplies and information to pirates and foreign invaders. However, the policy was executed in an extremely violent manner. Local gentry reported that officials vacate villages within three days, and those who couldn't comply were forcibly removed, with their properties burned and destroyed. Due to the haste of the evacuation, many possessions and livestock were abandoned. Islanders suffered great losses, and more than half perished due to harsh weather and treacherous sea conditions while being removed. For the government, the policy successfully curbed piracy for several decades. General Zhou Dexing 周德興 was being commended for raising an army of over 100,000 men and constructing 16 city-castles for the defensive system. However, Zhou was severely criticised by the coastal population for showing no concern for the people and solely focusing on enforcing the state's will. In some accounts, he was even accused of corruption [Zhang Tingyu 1980, *3861–3862*; Lin Yang 1967, *2*; Ho Meng-hsing 2010, *1–20*].

Corruption did not cease after Zhou, the garrison army gradually deteriorated due to the growing demands of international commerce and eventually became another source of piracy. When they could not resist the allure of the sea, military households might incorporate with local gentries and involved in smuggling, or free private trading, depending on one's perspective. These representatives of state apparatus could even become pirates as the garrison force were also from maritime communities: When the residents along the 32,000-kilometer-long coastline of the Ming Empire were responsible for the empire's security since 1384, any one of them faced the possibility of being drafted or selected to join the guard. Once assigned as a military household, they had to serve in the military for generations to come. When the Ming Empire executed the sea-ban and garrison system, the commoners of the southern coast had to experiment with various survival strategies for centuries. Many military households optimised their situation through different "contractual arrangements" based on their reality, allowing them to align more closely with the social reality, rather than conforming to uniform requirements enacted by the government that ignored the actual situation.

The strategies of these military households were not just about passively avoiding their duty to serve but also about utilising the system for their advantage. In the 15th and 16th centuries, military households exploited their special status to engage in illicit economic activities such as international trade, and even piracy on the high seas. These profit-making behaviours can be understood as the gains of military households resulting from the disparities between the law and reality, differences in the regulatory system, and variations among individuals affected. Even after the empire was overthrown, individuals who seemingly benefited from the Ming Empire attempted to maintain their privileges under the new Manchu conqueror [Szonyi 2017]. In this context, one of the objectives of maintaining the tribute system was to tame the natural inclination of Chinese coastal residents, including both commoners and military households, to acquire more resources and improve their own livelihoods through generations of active participation in international maritime trade.

Beginning of the End of Ming International Order and the Emergence of Private Trade

The war between the Ming Empire and the private traders who were seen as pirates continued for the following decades. Robert Antony suggested that Chinese piracy entered its golden age in 1520. He correctly pointed out that these sea rebels combined commerce with piracy, and the merchant-pirates were based on China's offshore islands, in Japan, and in Southeast Asia [Antony 2022, *5–15*]. After the Ming court ceased its maritime voyages after the death of Zheng He in 1433, illicit private trade between China

and other East Asia countries did not end. In 1432, for example, the Zhangzhou 漳州 garrison issued a new ordinance to cease Hokkien merchants from trading with foreigners. Similar records could also be found in 1449, officials in Fujian prepared a memorial for the central government mentioning Hokkien people participated in maritime trade in larger scale. It was the same year the Huang Xiaoyang rebelled in Guangdong. In 1452, the court attempted to enforce the sea-ban again, in particularly naming the Hokkien people for they have been selling Chinese products for foreign traders, building weapons and vessels, and sailing to Ryukyu 琉球. The bureaucracy also believed that the rising number of illicit trades caused Huang Xiaoyang's rebellion [Ming Shi-lu 1966, *2335*, *3474–3475*, *4686*].

Some other bureaucrats were more friendly to the illicit commercial activities. From 1508 to 1509, Guangdong censor-in-chief 廣東都御史 Chen Jin 陳金 (1446–1528) proposed to collect 30% of the goods brought from Southeast Asian countries like Siam and Malacca as taxation paid to the local government. It was the first attempt to legalise private commerce. The discussion continued until the 1520s as many others of the Ming bureaucracy were hesitated to delude the tribute trade system [Huang Zuo 1557, *71*; Iwai Shigeki 2022, *254–267*, *479*]. From Chen Jin's proposal, we could tell that foreign vessels from Siam and Nusantara archipelago visited Guangdong quite frequently, as coastal Chinese, especially the Muslim, Hokkien, and Cantonese traders, fled to Nusantara in significant numbers since the 14th century. These oversea communities continued to be active in economic and political sphere.

The Ming Empire realised the existence of such oversea Chinese communities and once attempted to intervene during the era of Zheng He, and those who did not collaborate with the Empire were again categorised as piracy and being neutralised. From the perspective of pro-imperial maritime voyager and intellectual, Ma Huan 馬歡 (1380–1460), the assistant and translator of eunuch-admiral Zheng He, some maritime traders and settlers establishing their business and authority in Southeast Asia were simply considered pirates. Ma, in his book, told the following story: In 1368, Chen Zuyi 陳祖義 (?–1407) and his tribe fled to this place from Guangdong and became a chief of Palembang 舊港, who would rob any passing ships of their goods. In 1407, Emperor Yongle 永樂帝 (1360–1424) sent his eunuch-admiral Zheng He with his treasure fleet to the region. Shi Jinqing 施進卿 (1360–1423), who was also from Guangdong, reported the tyranny of Chen Zuyi. Chen was eventually captured by Zheng and was executed in Nanjing. Shi Jinqing was granted a title and returned to the Palembang as the leader of the area. The position was later inherited by his daughter Shi Erjie [Ma Huan, Feng Chengjun 1955, *15–17*]. Recent researcher pointed out that Chen Zuyi and Shi Jinqing had very limited difference in nature. In fact, 2 years before the arrival of Zheng He, Ming envoys Tan Shengshou 譚勝受 (?–?) and Yang Xin 楊信 (?–?) arrived Palembang in wish to connect with the sojourners from Guangdong and Fujian. One of the leaders among the several thousand Chinese soldiers and civilians, was known as Liang Daoming 梁道明 (?–?), he was the supervisor of Shi Jingqing according to Ma Huan. Liang Daoming and his military contingent was assuming political leadership of Palembang after the fall of Srivijaya Empire (601–1300) under the pressure of Majapahit Empire (1201–1550). In 1406, responding to the rising influence of Ming Empire in Malay archipelago, both Chen Zuyi and Liang Daoming offered tribute to the imperial court [Zhang Tingyu 1980, *8407–8409*]. Although Chen was later recognised as a pirate and was eliminated by the Ming armada, the accusation of piracy against Chen might have been fuelled by the competitive relationship between Chen and Shi, who are both local tribal leaders. It is possible that Chen was serving as a de facto government and customs officer by collecting taxes from traders passing through the region, which was not uncommon in regions where an overpowering authority did not exist. Shi might have accused Chen of piracy as a means

of discrediting him and gaining an advantage in their ongoing competition for the recognition of Ming Empire and local influence [Chen Hurng-yu 2010, *156–157*]. As historians pointed out, the Ming Empire, represented by Zheng He and his fleet, dealt with Southeast and South Asian countries that did not obey its leadership by using military force to capture and murder political leaders, install pro-Ming puppet states, and assume its right to determine the political legitimacy. In order to control the Malacca Strait and the trading route from Sumatra to India, the Ming Empire stationed troops in Malacca and Sumatra and establishing official factories to maintain its vessels. The most important measure taken by the Zheng He fleet was the intimate relationship it built with the Malacca Sultanate (1400–1511). Although the Malacca Sultanate was a vassal state of the Siamese rulers from the north, the Ming court, through a series of military and diplomatic efforts, helped to consolidate the rule of Sultanate. Several Sultans even visited the Ming capital and they relied on, or at least expected to rely on, the protection of the Ming Empire against foreign threats. It thus became one of the major hubs of commerce for Chinese traders and immigrants to settle in. By engaging with pro-Ming political entity in Southeast Asia, non-state actors like the Chinese immigrants who could not joint in the political order of tributary system were criminalised as, more often than not, piracy. It was clear that the imperial government strove to exclude anyone who were not seen proper in the tribute system from the maritime trade [Purcell 1947, *115–125*; Wade 2008, *578–638*; Sen 2016, *609–636*; Chen Hurng-yu 2010, *139–169*].

Brook accurately pointed out that Zheng He's voyages came to an end when the tribute relationships with the rest of Asia were functioning well. It was at the expense of the coastal residents of the Southeast coast who posed as an unstable factor threatening the system. However, unforeseen exogenous factors in the 15th century led to the collapse of it. After the victory in the Battle of Diu in 1509, the Portuguese arrived in Asia, capturing Goa in 1510 and Malacca in 1511. While Chen Jin argued for greater flexibility in free trade in Guangdong, the Portuguese rapidly expanded their presence in Nusantara. They eventually reached Canton in 1517 and claimed to be a new tribute country, refusing to adhere to the diplomatic rituals of the Cantonese officials. They fortified themselves in Tuen Mun, awaiting the lengthy bureaucratic procedures in Beijing. Despite several attempts to befriend the Ming court, the Portuguese invasion of the tributary country Malacca was discovered in 1520. They suffered their first significant defeat in Asia and were expelled from their fortification in 1521 and 1522. Nevertheless, the Portuguese remained a significant force in Nusantara, connecting the Asian and European markets through their activities in the coming century [Hung Tak Wai 2019, *107–136*; Disney 2009, *130*, *141–143*; Ricklefs 1991, *23*; Huang Zuo 1557, *57*; Ming Shi-lu 1966, *3630–3632*; Shi Cunlong 2005, *21–30*]. In addition to the Portuguese commercial network, the discovery and exploitation of Iwami Ginzan 石見銀山, one of Japan's largest silver mines, in 1526 also sparked a rapid increase in purchasing power and demand for Chinese products in the international market of East Asia. If the tribute system failed to meet the tremendous demand, free traders along the Chinese coast would step in to bridge the gap.

It was, therefore, not a coincidence that more notorious "pirates", as recorded in Chinese documents, began their operations in 1526 or a few years thereafter. Private traders Deng Liao (or Lao) 鄧獠 (老) (?–?) from Fujian and Lu Huang-si 盧黃四 from Zhejiang engaged in trade with Nusantara vessels at the later legendary Shuangyu port 雙嶼港 in Zhejiang, or Liampó in Portuguese in 1526. Among the Nusantara traders, some were actually Portuguese merchants. In the ensuing decades, an increasing number of European, Japanese, and Southeast Asian traders participated in private trade along the coast, in ports such as Yuegang 月港 in Fujian and Nan'ao Island 南澳島 in Guangdong. These commercial centres, which benefited from the globalised trading network, were considered lawless territories in the eyes of Ming officials. In the 1530s, private traders like Li Guangtou 李光頭 from Fujian and the Xu family 許家 from Shezhou 歙州 developed

international networks with traders of various ethnicities in Japan and Nusantara, reaching a scale vastly different from previous acts of piracy, as they were able to maintain stable connections with foreign ports. In 1533, the economic growth in the East Asia sea accelerated even further after Ōuchi Yoshitaka 大内義隆 (1507–1551) took control of Iwami Ginzan, imported cupellation, or Haifuki-hō 灰吹法 in Japanese, from Korea and significantly increased silver production [Yamane Yagyu 1932; Ishimiginzan-ten jikkō iinkai 2007, *25*; Hamashita Takeshi 1999, *158*].

During this period of economic prosperity, private traders naturally expanded their operations and some even established permanent settlements in foreign territories. In 1540, the Xu family established strong bases and forged connections with Portuguese and other international traders in Pattani 北大年 and Malacca. Wang Zhi 王直 (d. 1560), the most successful free trader in the 16th century, embarked on his first voyage to Canton, Siam, and Japan to trade sulphur and silk [Zheng Shun-gong 1937, Vol. 6; Anonymous 2011, *29–30*; Zhu Wan 1996, *93*; Anonymous 1920, Vol. 6]. Fernão Mendes Pinto (1509–1583) also documented that by 1540-1541, the Portuguese had already constructed over 1,000 houses in Shuangyu port, some of which were luxuriously appointed. This settlement housed more than 3,000 residents, including 1,200 Portuguese and a diverse group of Christians from various countries. Two years prior, they had established significant trading connections with Japan, with an annual trade volume surpassing three million taels, predominantly sourced from silver bars obtained from Japan. The settlement operated with its own government, comprising an accountant, several judges, senators, a supervisor for deaths and orphans, police representatives, a municipal hall official, several administrative inspectors, lessees, and other officials in a quasi-republican system. Additionally, four notaries and six registrars were responsible for drafting contracts and agreements. The settlement provided two hospitals and a prayer hall for its residents, with an annual allocation exceeding 30,000 taels. The rent alone for the municipal hall was highly lucrative, contributing to its sustainability. Therefore, it is often regarded as the wealthiest and most prosperous Portuguese settlement among all the colonies in the East [Chang Tien-Tse 1934, *76–77*].

However, the pursuit of trade did not always lead to peaceful transactions. In cases where commercial activities failed to yield profits, sea merchants often resorted to violence and raids on coastal communities. An instance of such aggression occurred in 1543 when Deng Liao and the Xu family looted Fujian and Zhejiang. As a result, many private traders and foreign merchants sought refuge in Shuangyu port after engaging in conflict with the imperial garrison army. It was during this time that Wang Zhi established trade with Japanese merchants from Hirado 平戸, transforming the port into an international trading hub [Matsūra Historical Museum 1962, *89–90*].

In 1546, facing another setback in their business ventures, the Xu family collaborated once again with Portuguese merchants to plunder Suzhou 蘇州, Songjiang 松江, and Taicang 太倉. This caused a significant rift among private traders. Following the plunder, the Xu brothers made promises to repay the debts owed to Chinese traders who had fallen victim. However, they were coerced into joining the private merchant fleet, sailing to Kyodomari 京泊町 in Nagasaki 長崎, under the authority of the local Omura clan 大村氏. The Portuguese merchants, regarded as pirates by the Omura clan after receiving reports from the Chinese victims, met their demise through execution. The Xu family was entrusted with escorting the Chinese victims back to their homeland. However, fearing retaliation from the Portuguese, Xu and his associates, including Shenmen 沈門, Lin Jian 林剪, and Deng Liao (Lao) 許獠 (老), abandoned their legitimate trading activities and resorted to raiding in the regions of Fujian and Zhejiang once again. In addition to Chinese recruits, the piracy fleet also enlisted members from Pattani and Malacca. This audacious raid was reported to Yang Jiuzhe 楊九澤 (1498–1556), the Regional Investigating Censor of Zhejiang 浙江巡按監察御史, and Zhu Wan 朱紈, a Censor-in-chief 都御史

with a military background, was subsequently dispatched to the area to suppress piracy [Zheng Shun-gong 1937, Vol. 6; Fujita Toyohachi 1936, *400–406*]. Ultimately, ethical considerations appeared to be the only restraint preventing merchants from transforming into pirates on the high seas, as governments prohibited maritime activities without effectively regulating them.

Even without violence, the success of free traders highlighted the decline of the tribute system. As private trade volumes increased, some officials attempted to restore order along the coast. In 1542, Cao Gao 曹誥 (?–?), the Prefect of Ningbo 寧波知府, began arresting foreign free traders in his jurisdiction. However, his actions led to conflicts with local gentries. Zhu Wan, a staunch supporter of the tribute system, launched a campaign to eliminate private trade and piracy. Zhu seized Shuangyu port and dismantled its international settlement in 1548. The Xu family fled to the Malacca Strait, while other pirates sought refuge along the inland rivers or dispersed along the coasts of Zhejiang and Fujian in search of suitable hideouts for their trade. One group of traders discovered the favourable conditions offered by the deep-water inlet of Zoumaxi 走馬溪 near the Fujian-Guangdong border. The nearby inhabitants of Meiling 梅嶺 became actively involved in illicit trade, further attracting smugglers with local support. However, the imperial forces launched an ambush in Zoumaxi in 1549, resulting in 33 deaths and the capture of 206 smugglers. Among the captives were Li Guangtou and several Portuguese traders. The commanding officers falsely claimed that four of the Portuguese merchants were "kings" of Malacca. Concerned that the captives, with the backing of local elite families, could bribe their way to freedom, Zhu Wan executed most of the prisoners. As expected, the local gentries who were intimately working with the free traders pleaded to the court, leading to Zhu Wan's impeachment for executing without proper judicial procedure. Within a year, Zhu committed suicide in prison, and the generals under his command were also sentenced to death after investigation. The Portuguese smugglers received a relatively lenient punishment in the form of exile and returned to their home [Eldridge 1948, *142*; Liu Ting-Yu 2013, *35–58*].

Conflicts similar to those between local supporters of free trade and officials advocating for tribute trade repeated throughout the period of "Wokou" 倭寇 raids before 1560s[2]. Many of these free trade advocates received a proper Confucian education. In addition to their prominence as scholars, they were recognised as influential local leaders representing the interests of their respective regions. For example, Lin Xiyuan 林希元 (1481–1565) strongly opposed the government's military actions, which he believed were detrimental to the local economy [Lin Xiyuan 1997, *585–586*; Wu Peng-Chi 2024]. He argued for a compromise that would allow for free trade, even in the best interest of the Ming Empire. Hokkien philosopher Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602) went so far as to hail pirate leader Lin Daoqian 林道乾 (?–?) as a hero, asserting that the corrupted Ming Empire did not deserve him [Li Zhi, Vol. 20, *12b–15a*] Zhejiang historian Tan Chien 談遷 (1594–1658) also expressed sympathy for Wang Zhi, as the Ming official had deceived him with false assurances of safety upon surrender, only to perpetrate an act of treachery and ruthlessly murder him in 1560. Tan even believed that had the court been willing to collaborate with Wang, and the decade-long war between the Ming and piracy could have been avoided [Chen Wenshi 1991, *165*].

By the late 1560s, most piracy had been eradicated. In 1567, the new emperor, recognising the futility of suppressing private trade, sought to bring an end to the war against piracy and officially acknowledged the legitimacy of private trade. This shift in policy indicated a departure from the court's active enforcement of the Confucian world order in Aisa, and perhaps even a relinquishment of state-monopolised commerce. While tribute trade still persisted, the empire no longer held a monopoly on interactions with foreigners. To some extent, the prolonged struggle and persistent protests of free traders since 1368 had emerged victorious in the long-standing battle.

Exodus from Imperial China: Pirates and Oversea Chinese in Nusantara and Formosa

The legitimisation of private trade in 1567 did not mark the end of piracy, but rather transformed its nature. It also had several significant impacts on the overseas Chinese communities in Nusantara and Formosa. Firstly, it reshaped the identity of the overseas Chinese and their relationship with indigenous communities. Secondly, Formosa became a more attractive option for illicit traders as they received less support in the coastal regions. Consequently, they were among the first groups, alongside Europeans and Japanese, to explore and settle on the island. Eventually, Formosa came under the governance of these traders, ironically becoming the last significant group of Ming loyalists in 1662. While previous historiography tended to assume the inactivity of the Chinese during the early era of globalisation after 1433, we argue that historian should focus on the role played by traders who were often labelled as smugglers and pirates, in contrast to the inactive Imperial government. Both Nusantara and Formosa were important regions in the formation of a globalised market between the 16th and 17th centuries, but we can only fully recognise the Chinese presence if we emancipate the "overseas Chinese" from their association with "China".

Prior to the opening of private trade, direct relations between the merchants from Ming Empire and the Nusantara archipelago were nearly severed. During this period, coastal voyages to Champa, Ayutthaya, and Malacca seemed easier to navigate than long-distance voyages to the Philippines, Borneo, and Java, which faced increasingly stringent maritime restrictions. Maritime trade relied on intermediate ports such as Melaka, Pattani, Johor, Phnom Penh, and Ayutthaya. Since Ming-based ships struggled to break through the maritime restrictions, trade between Nusantara and the Ming Empire was carried out mainly by merchants based in Malacca. Apart from Malay, Java, Arab, and later European traders, the Chinese settlers were very much integrated into the local society and had heavily participated in the maritime trade. Most being barred from home, and some had been Muslim before leaving China, the degree of assimilation was higher than what present-day oversea Chinese would imagine. For example, João de Barros, who arrived in Asia in 1533, noted that the inhabitants of Java Island, known as the "Jawahs/Jaoas", claimed to be of Chinese descent. In 1596, during the Dutch's inaugural voyage to Nusantara led by Cornelis de Houtman (1565–1599), Willem Lodewijcksz (1595–1599) also encountered Chinese traders among the Portuguese, Arabs, Turks, Kelings, Pegus, Malays, Bengalis, Gujaratis, Malabars, and Abyssinians in Banten. They maintained close relationships, and their identities were shaped through a process of hybridity resulting from inter-ethnic marriages and religious conversions [Barros 1777, Dec. II, Livro ix, *352*; Britannica Editors 2022; Reid 2010, *307–332*; Atsushi Ota 2006, *1*]. The offspring of such inter-ethnic marriages were having a strong sense of community and found it hard to keep in touch with affairs at their ancestral "home".

It is important to highlight the distinction between the Chinese-descended "Jawahs" observed by de Barros and the later Mestizos, Peranakans, and Babas, who retained more of their Chinese heritage. This article argues that full assimilation into indigenous society occurred when the Chinese travellers' connection to China encountered obstacles. Take the example of Sunan Ampel (1401–1481), a descendant of Chinese Muslims who fled the Ming Empire in the 14th century, who had limited ties to his grandfather's ancestral homeland. As one of the Wali Songo (or the nine Muslim saints) who overthrew the Hindu Majapahit empire and Islamised Java, Sunan Ampel was believed to be of Chinese ethnicity and was named Bong Swee Hoe 彭端和. However, he was not Sinophone and had fully embraced Javanese culture. Despite his grandfather's association with Zheng He, Sunan Ampel dedicated himself to the Islamisation and Javanisation of Chinese immigrants in East Java. As an Islamic teacher, he encouraged Chinese descendants to assimilate into the Javanese community, adopt Javanese names, marry Javanese individuals,

and embrace the Javanese way of life [Lee Khoon Choy 2013, *143–144*; Johannes Hageman… n.d.; Reid 2010, *328*]. Sea-ban also played a significant role in this assimilation process. According to Gaspar da Cruz's observations (1520–1570) in 1569, two years after the lifting of the maritime ban, Chinese individuals in Malacca, Siam, and Pattani typically sailed back to China with their vessels registered under the name of a Portuguese merchant to avoid legal consequences of private voyages from China [Cruz 2005, *196–197*]. Private merchants who were previously recognised as pirates had more reasons to settle for good. In 1573, under pursuit by the Ming army, the aforementioned Lin Daoqian converted to Islam and became the harbour administrator of Pattani. With Lin's assistance in defending against the invasion of Annam, Sultan Ismail Shah of Pattani (?–?) bestowed his daughter, Bira (?–?), who later became the Queen of Pattani, as his wife [Hsu Yun Tsiao 1946, *111–121*; Reid 2013, *3–30*; Bradley 2008, *27–50*; Bougas 1990, *113–138*].

After Lin's conversion, according to oral tradition and tablets in the Pattani Temple of Lim Ko Nieo 林姑娘廟, his sister committed suicide for failing to bring Lin back to China and Chinese religion. Later Chinese worshipped her as a deity, asserting their way of life. Her temple was built no later than 1574. The contrasting paths of the Lin siblings marked a different stage in the history of the overseas Chinese. The temple reflected the desire of the overseas Chinese to preserve their identity and subtly criticised those who fully assimilated. Some versions of the Lim Ko Nieo myth even include her cursing a mosque in Pattani, preventing its completion with thunder. After 1567 opening, the overseas Chinese underwent a process of creolization. As noted by G. William Skinner, this represented an intermediate "third social system" where Chinese culture was transformed to stable cultures of Mestizos, Peranakans, or Babas [Skinner 1996, *51–93*]. In the early 1670s, another significant temple, Cheng Hoon Teng 青雲亭, was constructed by Chinese sojourners from Malacca and Ming loyalists who had fled the Manchu conquest. It became an important economic and political centre for the Malacca Babas. This mode of preserving identities continued in the following centuries and the economic ties between Nusantara Chinese and the Qing Empire grew stronger, as maritime trading no longer equated to piracy [Yon Weng Woe 2019, *58–73*].

Another important impact of the 1567 opening was the raising interest in Formosa. Among the major political entities in East Asia since the late 16th century, Japan under Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537–1598) might be the first to attempt to turn Formosa (Kōzankoku 高山国) under his influence in 1593, but as the island did not have a unified political leader, Toyotomi failed to find anyone to pay him tribute. Arima Harunobu 有馬晴信 (1567–1612) in 1609, under Edo Bakufu, conducted reconnaissance again. Japanese troop invaded the island in 1627 but was defeated by indigenous tribes [Iwao Seiichi 1927, *750–763*]. The first significant utilisation of Formosa by Chinese seafarers occurred in 1573, when pirate Lim Hong 林鳳 (or Lim A-Hong 林阿鳳) established a base there. Lim, after facing continuous failures in his expeditions and raids following the legitimisation of private trade in 1567, fled to Wankan 魍港 (present-day Tainan) and settled in Formosa. However, he was defeated by the Ming fleet in Danshui 淡水 (present-day Tamsui) a year later, after several attempts to raid Southern Fujian and Teochew 潮州. Failing to defend his base in Formosa, Lim took the opportunity to travel to Nusantara and attempted to conquer the newly built Spanish Manila city. He was once again defeated, this time by a joint force of Ming and Spanish armies but managed to escape again. Lim's example was followed by many other traders and pirates [Igawa Kenji 2010, *73–84*; Zhang Tingyu 1980, *5861–5862*; Tang Kaijian 2012, *43–65*; Ming shen zong shi lu 1996, *645*]. In 1635, Ming official He Kai 何楷 (?–?) reported that Formosa served as a base for pirates originating from Fujian and Guangdong, including Yuan Jin 袁進 (?–?), Li Zhong 李忠 (?–?), Yang Lu 楊祿 (?–1629; also written as 楊六), Yang Ce 楊策 (?–1629; also written as 楊七), Zheng Zhilong 鄭芝龍 (1604–1661), Li Kuiqi 李魁奇

(?–1629), Zhong Bin 鍾斌 (?–?), and Liu Xiang 劉香 (?–1635) since the 1610s. However, the list provided by He was not comprehensive. For example, Li Dan 李旦 (?–1625), known by his Christian name Andrea Dittis and also referred to as Captain China in European texts, was one of the closest associates of Zheng Zhilong, as was Yan Shiqi 顏思齊 (1586–1625), who also had a Christian name Pedro, supported their activities in Formosa [Zhang Tingyu 1980, *8376–8377*; Cheng Wei-chung 2013, *24–41*].

The influx of Chinese unsanctioned traders and pirates to Formosa was not solely due to the decreasing support from coastal residents. Another significant factor was the arrival of the Dutch in East Asia and their conflict with the Iberian traders. Since 1609, the war between the Dutch and the Iberian Union had spread to East Asia, impacting the Fujian-Manila trade and the Sion-Japanese trade, which were partially dominated by the Chinese. Many of these traders turned to Formosa for new trading centre and supply base, for it fell outside the Ming jurisdiction. After several failure in establishing direct commercial connections with the Ming Empire, the Dutch V.O.C. accepted the suggestion of Li Dan and retreated to the stateless Formosa in 1624 [Cheng Wei-chung 2013, *34–35*]. Within two decades, the Ming Empire succumbed to the pressures of the Little Ice Age, resulting in widespread drought and locust plagues. This severe economic disruption triggered large-scale peasant uprisings and weakened the empire's ability to resist the Manchu invaders [Brook 2010, *238–259*]. Despite these challenges, Formosa remained a hub of globalised trade. Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–1662), better known as Koxinga, carried on his father Zheng Zhilong's legacy and eventually took control of the island from the Dutch V.O.C. after his failed resistance against the Manchu in Zhejiang in 1662. Unlike the founders of Cheng Hoon Teng in Malacca, Koxinga, as both a Ming loyalist and a maritime trader, did not need to decide whether to assimilate with the local cultures. As the indigenous communities were loosely organised, Koxinga's forces encountered limited resistance from the native residents of Formosa. In 1664, two years after the death of Emperor Yongli 永曆帝 (1623–1662), Koxinga's successor, Zheng Jing 鄭經 (1662–1681), renamed the region the Kingdom of Tungning 東寧, signalling his intention to establish his dominion in Formosa as a permanent independent settlement separate from the Qing Empire, no longer serving as a temporary capital of the Ming [Cheng Wei-chung 2023, Ch. 6; Tanaka Azumi 2011, *467–482*; Denemark 2017, *48–64*].

Although the reign of Tungning eventually ended with the Manchu conquest of Formosa, it reflected, for a short period of time, that pirates, or the seaborne merchant-militants, in East Asia shared similar characteristics of their counterparts in Europe. As Robert A. Denemark argues, piracy have generated state formation and monetisation in the West as markets were deepened, consolidated, and then extended by pirate activities. At the same time, such activities advanced the development of certain military forces, either of the maritime militant, their alliance, or even their enemy, and some eventually became "state". Denemark believed that such activities contributed to the formation of the globalised commercial network at least in the Occidental world. Our cases from the world of the Orient in fact revealed similar phenomenon [Denemark 2017, *48–64*].

Conclusion

The history of the overseas Chinese in East Asia during the early stages of globalisation reveals a complex and dynamic narrative. The maritime traders, who had lost their way of life after the implementation of the sea-ban in the 14th century and the Ming Empire's retreat from far sea exploration in 1433, re-emerged as illicit traders or pirates in the eye of the state. Their resilient network in the Nusantara region, established from late 14th century to 1567, played a crucial role in fostering prosperous commerce prior to the arrival of Europeans and the opening of Ming China.

With the legitimisation of private trade in 1567, a significant number of Chinese individuals migrated to the Nusantara and formed their own settlements and cultures, giving

rise to the Mestizos in Manila, Peranakans in Java, and Babas in Malaya. Meanwhile, other illicit traders, taking advantage of the power vacuum in Formosa during the chaotic period since the 1640s, seized control of the island and established their independent political entity. While the overseas Chinese communities in the Nusantara had to navigate the complexities of local and European interactions, those in Formosa enjoyed a unique opportunity to shape their own destiny. Although Formosa was soon conquered by the Qing Empire in 1684, the paradigm of Kingdom of Tungning was still inspiring when being compared with other Chinese who fled to Nusantara. Both paradigms were important frameworks for us to conceptualise the relationship between the oversea Chinese, China proper and globalisation.

For historians of global history, this article reminds us that both overseas Chinese communities in East Asia share a historic connection with Ming piracy and individuals who were being persecuted under the sea-ban policy. The criminalisation and stigmatisation of the maritime activities explained traditional assumptions of inactivity during the early stages of globalisation, especially from 1433 to 1700. In fact, these communities demonstrated strong organisational abilities and were on par with the European companies that arrived in the region later. They played an active role in shaping the emerging globalised commercial network, contributing to the cultural, economic, and political dynamics of East Asia. The history of the overseas Chinese in East Asia during this period serves as a reminder of the complexity and agency of non-European actors in early globalisation. Their experiences and contributions, hidden under labels given by intellectuals and bureaucrats in their time, challenge traditional narratives and highlight the importance of understanding the diverse and interconnected nature of historical developments in East Asia and beyond.

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[1] The rebellion's name, "Ispah" might have derived from the Persian word "سپاه" (sepâh), meaning mercenaries. It was known in Chinese as "Yisi baxi bingluan" 亦思巴奚兵亂, but was also known as "Bosī Shùbīng zhī Luàn" 波斯戍兵之亂 by later 20th century Sinophone historians, literally "Persian Sepoy rebellion". See: Zhang Zhongjun 張忠君, Lan Chenyan 蘭陳妍 (2003), "Ye lun yuan mo yi si ba xi zhanluan de xingzhi" 也論元末亦思巴奚戰亂的性質 [Also on the Nature of the Yisi Baxi Wars at the End of the Yuan Dynasty], *Journal of Southeast Guizhou National Teachers College* 21, No. 5, pp. 22–23; Geoff Wade and Sun Laichen (eds) (2010), *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor*, National University of Singapore Press, Singapore and Hong Kong, pp. 22–23; Wang Gungwu (1990), "Merchants without Empire: the Hokkien Sojourning Communities", in James D. Tracy (ed.), *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World 1350–1750*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 402–405.

[2] Concerning the term "Wokou", which literally referred to bandit from Japan, many had agreed that most the pirate fleets were operated by multi-ethnic traders and pirates, with most of them Ming Chinese or oversea Chinese who settled in Nusantara. So Kwan-wai 蘇君偉 in his monograph first illustrated this phenomenon in 1975. See: So Kwan-wai (1975), *Japanese piracy in Ming China during the 16th century*, East Lansing.

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Хун Так Вай

Сприяння глобалізації з тіні:
піратство і заморські китайці до 1684 року

У статті переосмислюється складний взаємозв'язок між піратством, міграцією та ранньою глобалізацією шляхом акцентування ролі заморських китайців до 1684 року – року, коли династія Цін офіційно скасувала морську заборону та дозволила приватну торгівлю за кордоном. Тоді як панівні наративи глобалізації підкреслюють роль імперій і державного експансіонізму, це дослідження зміщує фокус на неформальних, часто бездержавних акторів – піратів, контрабандистів і купців-мігрантів, які діяли поза межами офіційного державного контролю. Спираючись на джерела китайською, японською, португальською та мовами Південно-Східної Азії, стаття аналізує, як китайські поселення в Малацці, Паттані, Нагасакі, Манілі та інших прибережних просторах істотно сприяли формуванню трансрегіональних зв'язків задовго до цінських реформ у сфері мореплавства. Основна теза полягає в тому, що заморські китайці не були лише жертвами імперських обмежень, а навпаки – стратегічними суб'єктами, які створювали гнучкі, мобільні та адаптивні мережі, що долали політичні кордони. Стаття пропонує переосмислення піратства не як загрози порядку, а як ефективного механізму з'єднання регіонів. Піратські та торговельні практики поєднувалися з дипломатією та релігійним обміном, сприяючи переміщенню людей, капіталу й знань у морському просторі Азії. Автор доводить, що ці взаємодії формували децентралізовану, але сталу інфраструктуру раннього глобального обміну.

Порівнюючи приклади з різних частин Східної та Південно-Східної Азії, стаття заперечує лінійне уявлення про китайську міграцію, що починається з реформ династії Цін або з діаспори XIX століття. Натомість висвітлюється довша й складніша історія, у якій китайські діячі трансформували регіональну динаміку альтернативними, часто позадержавними шляхами. Отже, дослідження закликає до перегляду уявлень про глобалізацію як процес, що виникає не лише з імперських центрів, а й із тіньових мереж, які підтримували китайські агенти в морській Азії.

Ключові слова: глобалізація; заморські китайці; міграція; морська Азія; неофіційні мережі; піратство; XVII століття

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