

Rupture, Evolution and Continuity: The Shandong Peninsula in East Asian Maritime History During the Yuan-Ming Transition

East Asian Maritime History 16. By Ma Guang. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. xii + 230 pp. €68.00; \$92.00

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Studies of Chinese maritime history have overwhelmingly focused on the southeastern coast, an area roughly comprising the provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong. Some works have extended the focus to the diaspora from this area in Southeast Asia and beyond. In contrast, the extensive northern coastline has occupied a much smaller position in historiography. Yet, its importance to China's maritime development has been severely underestimated. Ma Guang has written the first serious English-language study of this littoral space. In doing so, he seeks to correct the "Southeast China centrism" of historiography on the maritime zone (162). Centering his narrative upon the Shandong and Liaodong Peninsulas, which are situated next to the Yellow Sea in close proximity to one another, and containing the inner sea of Bo Hai, he traces their extensive connections with Northeast Asia and the rest of the Chinese coast. He further examines the area's evolution from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, shedding light on both continuities and ruptures in the policies of the terrestrial state under the Yuan and Ming Dynasties.

The book contains three distinct but interrelated components. The first section deals with trade and tribute missions. Ma shows that commercial exchange constituted an important component of Shandong's maritime connections during the Yuan period. Domestic coastal routes flourished, as products such as ceramics from kilns in Hebei traveled from Dengzhou, Penglai, and elsewhere in coastal Shandong to southern ports, such as Quanzhou, for re-export to overseas markets. There was also a lively trade with Korea, which supplied cloth, horses, gold, and porcelain in exchange for Chinese commodities, such as silk and cotton.

For Ma, the Ming court's ban on overseas trade and travel represents a major historical rupture. Following the ban, commercially oriented vessels disappeared from the maritime routes around Shandong and Liaodong. What replaced them during the early decades of the Ming were official tribute missions from Korea, which traveled by ship on the Yellow and Bohai Seas. Besides the officially sanctioned exchange of goods at the capital in Nanjing, individual envoys carried cargoes of their own on board to engage in private trade along the way. Because of the risk of shipwreck in storms, the tribute missions decreased the distances and amounts of time involved in sea travel. After the Ming moved the capital to Beijing in the early fifteenth century, Korean tribute missions, with very few exceptions, opted to travel entirely by land through Liaodong.

The second part of the book turns to the role of maritime Northeast Asia in the development of Sino-Japanese relations. Piracy constituted the key impediment to the

normalization of bilateral ties. Here, Ma perhaps makes the most valuable contribution of the entire study. He offers a necessary and long-overdue corrective to two misconceptions common to southeast China-centric narratives. One is that the Ming maritime prohibitions caused the outbreak of piracy. The second is that the majority of the predators, known commonly as “Japanese pirates” (C: *wokou* J: *wakō*), consisted of armed Chinese smugglers unable to find legitimate avenues of trade, and had to take up arms to defend their interests. Indeed, the Ming sea ban greatly exacerbated piracy, which reached the peak of its violence and the sophistication of armed bands during the sixteenth century.

As Ma shows, however, the cause and effect should actually be inverted. The origins of piracy in maritime East Asian waters can be traced to a much earlier period, and there was a greater degree of continuity between the Yuan and Ming than is generally thought. Through meticulous investigation into the primary records, Ma discovers that the first instance of the term *wokou* to refer specifically to pirates occurs in a Korean text and dates to the early thirteenth century. The earliest known Chinese source picked it up a century later. Both sources reveal that Japanese people overwhelmingly made up the main portion of these *wokou* bands. Their activities were often coordinated under the sponsorship of warlords based in Kyushu. The Japanese pirates initially ravaged the Korean coastline before expanding their area of operations to China: hence the order of their warfare in the records. Ma argues that the outbreak of predation resulted from that warfare and chaos that resulted in turn from long-term political divisions and natural disasters in Japan, climatic cooling, and weak coastal defenses in China and Korea.

Seen in this context, the sea ban enacted by Hongwu, the founding emperor of the Ming, represented a defensive reaction against the rampant piracy that had originated in Japan but was rapidly spreading beyond the islands to the waters of Northeast Asia and beyond. The policy formed part of an overall strategy aimed at placing all of China’s foreign contacts, especially trade, under state supervision. Accompanying the prohibition was the court’s dispatch, on several occasions, of envoys to Japan. As Ma shows, their primary purpose was to persuade the authorities to clamp down on piratical activities. However, a weak central government in Japan, combined with the bitter civil war between the Southern Court under Prince Kanenaga and the Ashikaga shogun, ensured the failure of these missions. Ma argues that the Ming tributary system was not so much about bolstering the conceit of China’s centrality and instilling awe into the nearby “barbarian” kingdoms. Nor was it about restricting trade *per se*. Rather, the tributary system was more about the need to forge a diplomatic framework to ensure China’s own security. Japan’s participation, the Ming rulers hoped, would hold its leaders accountable for cracking down on piracy, and thereby eliminate a perennial threat to China and its neighborhood. The failure of this initiative triggered a vicious cycle of stricter sea bans and rampant predation in the sixteenth century.

In the third part, Ma analyzes the development and structure of the coastal defense and military administration in Shandong under the Ming in response to the threat from the seas. In the final section, he turns toward an examination of maritime shipments of grain from southern ports over the course of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. Ma reveals the astonishing scale of the transport. The number of ships and sailors, and the volume of goods involved along the route from Jiangnan to Shandong and Liaodong during the early Ming, exceeded those of the Zheng He voyages from 1405 to 1433! Not surprisingly, a significant number of sailors who participated in the grain transport, or their descendants, went on to join Zheng He’s fleets.

Through the meticulous study of trade, piracy, diplomacy, and coastal administration, Ma's work opens up a valuable window into the maritime world of Shandong and Northeast Asia, which has been largely overlooked in the historiography of maritime China. It provides a necessary corrective to the overwhelming focus upon the southeastern coast. Perhaps Ma could have offered a broader view in temporal terms. Many of the examples that he raises of continuity from Yuan to Ming apply only to the early Ming. Over the long term, "Japanese" piracy did become increasingly multiethnic, with Chinese constituting at least a plurality of many predatory bands, bands which were, indeed, increasingly formed in reaction to the tightening of the sea ban. Similarly, land journeys and the Grand Canal eventually replaced the sea route for Korean and other tributary embassies, and grain shipments. In this sense, the Yuan–Ming transition appears to be a much greater rupture, characterized by an overall withdrawal of the Chinese state from the sea lanes. This excellent study would certainly be strengthened if Ma addressed these issues in greater depth.

Ghosts and Religious Life in Early China

By Mu-Chou Poo. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
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Ghosts and Religious Life in Early China by Mu-Chou Poo is a sweeping account of ghosts and the lifeworlds to which they were integral, in seven short and easy-to-read chapters. Although the book title has "Early China" in it, the time span of the book goes beyond its conventional end of the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) and covers from the earliest dynastic times of the Shang and Zhou in the late second millennium BCE to the Six Dynasties in the sixth century CE. Additionally, the book includes a brief comparison between Chinese ghosts and their counterparts in four other notable cultural traditions in the ancient world. Despite the ambitious timeline and broad comparative perspective, this book focuses on delivering one central argument: that ghosts are "the other side of humanity" (5). This argument is intended as a throughline to weave together disparate textual sources, which range from early classics such as *The Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan*), to excavated Qin and Han hemerological texts (daybooks or *rishu*), to early medieval anomaly tales (*zhiguai*), to early Daoist and Buddhist scriptures. Characterizing ghosts as "the other side of humanity" also crystallizes the book's social-cultural approach to the subject of ghosts, which Poo argues "can be examined as a social imaginary or cultural construct that complements the world of the living" (5).

Chapter 1 "Ghosts: The Other Side of Humanity" serves as an introduction to the book. Poo starts with a list of idiomatic expressions in modern Chinese language—a device that Poo uses throughout the book, easily bringing the ostensibly archaic topic of ghosts to the present—that contain the terms *gui* (ghost) and *shen* (god; spirit).