

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

John E. Wills, Jr.

The essays in this volume seek to give connected and reliable accounts of the relations of China with Europeans who came by sea (thus not the Russians and their occasional foreign associates), from the arrival of the Portuguese early in the sixteenth century to about 1800. There is no strong historiographical rationale for breaking off the narratives at this point; the main late-eighteenth-century themes of trade in tea and opium and the clandestine Roman Catholic presence could be carried right down to the Opium War (1839–1842). But two of these essays were originally prepared for publication in the volumes on the Qing before 1800 of *The Cambridge History of China*; the first of the nineteenth-century volumes of that series, with excellent chapters on the Canton trade and on Christian missions, was published in 1978.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, by breaking off around 1800, we end our summaries at a period when the basic policies of the Qing state toward maritime Europeans still seemed reasonably functional and successful, and thus undercut to a degree the teleological narrative of dysfunction and cultural arrogance leading straight to the Opium War that has afflicted many summaries of these topics. Recent scholarship on Qing China, emphasizing the sophisticated achievements of “High Qing” state and society and the contingency of the nineteenth-century “great divergence” between China and the West, strengthens our interest in seeing the eighteenth century for itself. New accounts

<sup>1</sup> Frederic Wakeman, Jr., “The Canton Trade and the Opium War,” and Paul A. Cohen, “Christian Missions and Their Impact to 1900,” in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Cambridge History of China* (hereafter cited as *CHOC*), Vol. 10: *Late Ch’ing, Part 1* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 163–212 and 543–590, respectively.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)

of “strange parallels” among Eurasian polities down to the nineteenth century and of the “transformation of the world” in that century offer riches of citation and interpretation that will keep all of us busy with long thoughts in both directions from 1800 for years to come.<sup>2</sup>

In any case, we feel no shortage of challenges in our assignments for this volume. The developments and events discussed here once were over-emphasized in the Eurocentric histories of Henri Cordier, H. B. Morse, and others, but in recent decades they have received only erratic scholarly attention, so that we have not always been able to draw on scholarship that meets current standards of interpretation and documentation and sometimes have had to piece our summaries together from primary sources and a scattered and multilingual secondary literature. Moreover, we have found it immensely exciting and challenging to try to keep up with the dramatic recent changes in the historiography of early modern China and of the European presence in maritime Asia. Some summary of the latter may be helpful for China scholars not familiar with these literatures. A background sketch of current understandings of “late imperial” or “early modern” China is called for, not only for the benefit of readers who are not China scholars, but also because our expositions and interpretations frequently require complex contextualizations of foreign encounters in aspects of Ming–Qing China not ordinarily discussed in accounts of its foreign relations.

#### CONTINUITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN MING–QING CHINA

In these essays we give full accounts of a number of occasions when envoys of European rulers were received at the Ming or Qing court as ambassadors bearing tribute from rulers of lower rank. The handling of the Portuguese embassy under Tomé Pires as a tribute embassy, the unilateral decision in 1656 that the Dutch might send an embassy only every eight years, at a time when trade in Chinese ports was allowed only in connection with tribute embassies, and the clash with Lord Macartney over the protocol of his reception by the Qianlong emperor all seem to point toward a mode of management of foreign relations in which everything was governed by a single set of hierarchical concepts and bureaucratic precedents, a “tribute system” in the full sense of the word.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2003, 2009); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 2009).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

But we also make note of many important facets of Chinese relations with maritime Europeans that had little or nothing to do with this tribute system: Macao, the eighteenth-century trade at Canton, policy toward Catholic missionaries, and the regulation of the trade of Chinese merchants to European-ruled ports like Manila and Batavia. If we take a longer view of the history of Chinese foreign relations, we find that the Ming–early Qing tribute system reflected persistent tendencies toward the unilateral and bureaucratized control of relations with foreigners and toward the assertion of the ceremonial superiority of the Son of Heaven over all other sovereigns, but that the years from about 1425 to 1550 were the *only* time in all of Chinese history when a unified tribute system embodying these tendencies was the matrix for policy decisions concerning all foreigners. I have argued elsewhere that it would help to clarify our thinking if we would reserve the term “tribute system” for this Ming system and not use it loosely to refer to the less systematic and more varied diplomatic practices of other times.<sup>3</sup> Even for the Ming, a study of the chapters on other foreign relations in volume 8 of the *Cambridge History* and of a growing but still inadequate scholarly literature reminds us that there was considerable variation; the Jurchen chieftains of the northeast presented tribute and were given military command titles formally within the Ming hierarchy, and the rulers of Burma and from 1520 the Mac rulers of Annam were given titles, such as “pacification commissioner,” comparable to those of tribal chieftains within the empire.<sup>4</sup>

We have tended to make the tribute system a master concept for the interpretation of premodern Chinese foreign relations in part because some of the first great studies of Chinese foreign relations to use Chinese sources focused on the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when bookish statecraft scholars were restudying the regulations of the Ming–early Qing tribute system and statesmen in the capital were frequently citing such precedents and were worrying a great deal about how to

<sup>3</sup> John E. Wills, Jr., “Tribute, Defensiveness, and Dependency: Uses and Limits of Some Basic Ideas about Mid-Ch’ing Foreign Relations,” *Annals of the Southeast Conference of the Association for Asian Studies*, Vol. 8 (1986), pp. 84–90, reprinted in *American Neptune*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Fall 1988), pp. 225–229; Wills, “Did China Have a Tribute System?” *Asian Studies Newsletter*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 12–13. For a sketch of the history of the tribute system see Wills, *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K’ang-hsi, 1666–1687* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), pp. 14–23.

<sup>4</sup> Morris Rossabi, “The Ming and Inner Asia,” and Wang Gungwu, “Ming Foreign Relations: Southeast Asia,” in Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, eds., *CHOC*, Vol. 8: *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 2* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 221–271 and 301–332, respectively.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)

defend the ceremonial supremacy of the emperor against the intrusive Western order that had been announced by Macartney. The magisterial early works of John King Fairbank focused on this period; he directed a major conference and volume on “the Chinese world order”; and his views remained somewhat colored by his deep knowledge of early-nineteenth-century sources.<sup>5</sup>

In the hands of writers less steeped in the sources and less wary of generalization than Fairbank, the tribute system concept has helped to sustain a simplified, essentialized picture of a very late “late imperial China,” “traditionalist,” unable to change, and arrogant in its attitudes toward the outside world, that is incompatible with our present understanding of the internal history and foreign relations of Qing China. The focus on the tribute system might also be seen as one of many examples of the tendency of students of Chinese history inside and outside China to privilege the view from the imperial center or from the studies of scholars and vicarious officials, with their focuses on official values and bureaucratic systems, and underemphasize the immense variety of regional developments and pragmatic arrangements throughout the empire. In many of these arrangements, both at the capital and in the provinces, we see a tendency toward *defensive* and restrictive policies regarding foreign contact; this defensiveness is a much more satisfactory master concept for the interpretation of these relations and can be related in rich ways to our rapidly evolving sense of Ming–Qing China as an arena of immense and restless economic and cultural energies, in which political order was highly valued but perceived as fragile and constantly at risk, and the dangers of foreign linkages to these restless energies were especially feared.

From about 1000 CE on, China passed through a series of “economic revolutions” in grain production, iron production, water transport, and currency that immensely increased productivity, shifted the center of economic gravity to the rice lands of the center and south, and made possible the steady commercialization of the economy and the continued push of Chinese settlement into the far south and southwest.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars

<sup>5</sup> John K. Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), Ch. 2; Fairbank and S. Y. Teng, “On the Ch’ing Tribute System,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 4 (1939), pp. 12–46, reprinted in Fairbank and Teng, *Ch’ing Administration: Three Studies* (Cambridge, MA, 1960); Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford, CA, 1973); Mark Edward Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), esp. Chs. 3, 6; Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, Vol. 2, Ch. 5.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

would see in various regions and features of Song China a very early “early modernity.” A much broader elite emerged, its energies directed to modes of status seeking controlled by the imperial center – validation of local social domination by examination success and talented provincials rising to high office through the examination system. This new elite was dedicated to the realization, through local organization and education even more than through imperial fiat, of a harmonious, hierarchical, agrarian society rooted in Confucian texts and values and cleansed of the foreign influence of Buddhism. But the economic shifts made the kinds of total control of trade and agriculture attempted by the Tang impossible, and led to tacit and sometimes overt positive evaluations of commerce and consumption, including foreign trade, trends that continued in Ming and Qing times.<sup>7</sup>

For foreign relations, the consequences of the long and gradual victory of the scholar-officials and their Neo-Confucian cultural program were contradictory. Since Han times scholar-officials frequently had opposed military expansionism and state efforts to increase revenue as offenses against the paternal care the ruler should show toward his people; of course, the power and prestige of military officers and revenue-enhancement specialists also threatened the political dominance of the scholar-officials. The ruling house of the Tang (618–907) and many close associates had combined a love of horses, hunting, and war with patronage of Confucian scholarship, profound allegiance to Buddhism, and fascination with foreign peoples and their exotic goods. Only in the 800s did segments of the elite begin to elaborate linked attacks on Buddhism as an antisocial teaching of foreign origin and on military influence in politics.<sup>8</sup> Buddhism became much more deeply indigenized in East Asia, with its own texts and holy sites owing nothing to India, so that the traffic in monks, texts, and relics that had sustained earlier maritime trade between China and India was replaced by a complex trade in spices, incense woods, and other consumer goods.<sup>9</sup> Under the Song (960–1279), despite a huge and expensive military establishment, military officials and organization were more thoroughly marginalized politically. Chinese models of rulership and bureaucratic organization helped to catalyze

<sup>7</sup> See especially the sweeping survey of this trend in Gang Zhao, *Geopolitical Integration and Domestic Harmony: Foreign Trade Policy in Qing China, 1684–1757* (typescript, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the Tang Search for Unity* (Princeton, NJ, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu, 2003).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the formation of powerful states of mixed ethnicity and culture around the Song frontiers, in which Buddhism, under Neo-Confucian attack in the Song realm, remained very powerful. Song resistance to the military threats of these powerful neighbors was awkward and expensive. All of north China was lost to the Jurchen invaders in the 1120s. Thereafter, scholar-officials would neither give military men enough power to have a chance of success against the Jurchen Jin Dynasty nor accept the diplomatic parity forced on the Southern Song state (1125–1279) by the Jin. These contradictions were resolved, after a fashion, by the unification of East Asia under the Mongol Yuan (1279–1368). Commercial prosperity, urbanization, and local elite cultural activism continued. Neo-Confucian orthodoxy gained some government favor. But the ruling elite of Mongols and their Khitan, Jurchen, and Central Asian associates was conspicuously alien, and Chinese scholars in office were far less numerous and influential than under the Song.<sup>10</sup>

The collapse of the Yuan and of the pan-Asian *Pax Mongolica* after about 1345 led to decades of civil war. By 1368 the Ming founder had defeated his rivals in the Yangzi valley and driven the Mongols out of the north China plain. Commerce and agriculture were badly disrupted and took decades to recover. Later Ming scholars and statesmen looked back and saw in the first reigns of the dynasty the creation of a magnificent systematic bureaucratic order, the work of sagely rulers and of scholar-officials at last able to put into practice their Confucian ideals. Some of the innovations of the founders, like the integration of an empire-wide system of Confucian schools into the first level of the examinations leading to eligibility for office, did prove amazingly durable and effective props of political stability and cultural unity. But modern scholarship sees in these first reigns not so much rulers and ministers with common ideals and goals as a series of conflicts and contingent changes in which the scholar-officials won occasional and incomplete victories when it suited the needs of two formidable warrior-despots, the Hongwu (r. 1368–1398) and Yongle (r. 1402–1424) emperors.<sup>11</sup> Thereafter, scholar-official dominance of policy

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, eds., *CHOC*, Vol. 6: *Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> This summary is under the spell of the innovative views presented in Richard Von Glahn and Paul Jakov Smith, eds., *The Song–Yuan–Ming Conjunction in Chinese History: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA, 2003). Excellent summaries of these reigns are to be found in Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett, eds., *CHOC*, Vol. 7: *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 1* (Cambridge, 1988); in Edward J. Dreyer, *Early Ming China: A Political History, 1355–1435* (Stanford, CA, 1982); and in Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

7

making was more often the norm, broken by revivals of imperial military adventurism and the associated power of the court eunuchs, which in their turn were likely to last until the death of a willful emperor allowed the literati to regain control. The Portuguese were baffled witnesses and victims of such a political reversal after an imperial demise in 1522.

In late Ming compilations, which provided precedents to guide early Qing practice and continued to influence the thinking of Qing statesmen, the Ming founders were portrayed as having established a uniform matrix for the management of all the empire's foreign relations. All rulers who wished to communicate formally with the imperial court had to acknowledge that they were subordinates of the Son of Heaven, dependent on his appointment or confirmation as a successor, received at the imperial capital as tributaries, their ambassadors as *pei chen*, ministers of ministers. The early Ming state brought together in singularly systematic union long-standing tendencies toward the assertion of the supremacy of the Son of Heaven over all other rulers and the unilateral, bureaucratic control of foreign relations. Active efforts to extend Ming hegemony were especially conspicuous under the Yongle emperor – the famous maritime expeditions of Zheng He (described later), major military expeditions into the Mongol homeland, an abortive conquest of Annam (modern Vietnam), and diplomatic initiatives to the northeast, to the northwest, and to Tibet and Nepal.<sup>12</sup> After 1425 the ceremonial supremacy of the Son of Heaven was carefully guarded, but the impulse to assert hegemony by force appeared only rarely, despite much bellicose rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> Foreign relations were more and more exhaustively bureaucratized – trade only in connection with embassies, strict rules on the frequency of embassies, the size of their suites, the presents they were to bring, and those they would receive. This system, the tribute system in the full sense of the word, had some successes in limiting contacts with smaller neighbors and giving them incentives to stay on good terms with the Ming. Unlike the situation under Song and Yuan, there was no legal residence or travel of foreigners within the empire except in connection with tribute embassies. This was defensive policy at its apogee.

(Cambridge, MA, 2010). One can open up an immense range of new perspectives on these and later periods of Ming history by browsing and following “q.v.” citations in L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds. *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 2 vols. (New York, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Hok-lam Chan, “The Chien-wen, Yung-lo, Hung-hsi, and Hsüan-te Reigns, 1399–1435,” in *CHOC*, Vol. 7, pp. 182–304, pp. 221–236; Wills, *Embassies and Illusions*, pp. 16–17.

<sup>13</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ, 1995).



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)

For two especially important and dangerous relations, the fundamentals of the tribute system could be maintained only when supplemented by other defensive measures, and the results were mixed or counterproductive. With respect to the Mongols, scholar-officials tended to oppose any step toward permitted trade and stable relations with “insincere” savages, so that there seemed to be no alternative to the vast expenses of border garrisons and the construction of the present Great Wall.<sup>14</sup> The threat of “Japanese pirates,” many of them renegade Chinese, was partially contained not by effective diplomacy or by naval action but by drastic prohibitions of all maritime trade except that in connection with tribute embassies.

The most notable phenomenon of the foreign relations of the Yongle period has special relevance to our study of maritime relations. Almost all of the ports where the Portuguese made their connections and attempted their conquests in the early 1500s had been visited about eighty years previously by one or another of the seven great fleets the Ming sent into the Indian Ocean under the command of the eunuch Zheng He.<sup>15</sup> The largest of them had more than sixty large ships, some of them six-masted “treasure ships” over 100 meters long; more than 200 lesser craft; and 28,000 men. If such forces had still been on the Malabar coast in 1498, Dom Vasco da Gama and his three little ships would have been very lucky to avoid annihilation until the shift of the monsoon allowed them to flee to East Africa. But the Zheng He expeditions were fundamentally limited and defensive in purpose. In the wake of the nearly total prohibition of maritime trade by Chinese, it was advisable to encourage its replacement

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> In addition to Hok-lam Chan’s excellent survey, see Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleets of the Dragon Throne, 1405–33* (New York, 1994), and Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433* (New York, 2006). Still important are the pages on this theme in one of the great intellectual monuments of the twentieth century, Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 4: *Physics and Physical Technology, Part 3: Civil Engineering and Nautics* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 379–699. One of the most useful of the more specialized studies is Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan: ‘The Overall Survey of the Ocean’s Shores,’* ed. and trans. by J. V. G. Mills (London, 1970; reprint, Bangkok, 1997). See also Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, pp. 194–200, 355–365, 440–441, 522–523, 531–534, 661–665, 804–805, 958–962, 1026–1027, 1198–1202, 1364–1366. The study of Zheng He has been set back some years by the confusion generated by the amateur speculations of Gavin Menzies, *1421: The Year China Discovered the World* (London, 2002). An excellent exposé is provided by Quentin McDermott, “Junk History,” broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on July 31, 2006, transcript available at <http://www.abc.au/4corners/content/2006/s1702333.htm>.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

9

by trade brought to China in ships based abroad, in connection with tribute embassies from foreign rulers.

The expeditions also gave crucial decades of employment to thousands of shipwrights, suppliers, and sailors who otherwise might have been extremely restive as the prohibitions of maritime trade began to bite. They were hugely successful in bringing tribute envoys and their exotic gifts, including ostriches, zebras, and giraffes, to enhance the mystique of the Son of Heaven. They followed trade routes more or less well known to Chinese mariners of Song and Yuan times.<sup>16</sup> At Palembang on Sumatra they crushed a nest of Chinese pirates and left a substantial garrison behind. They intervened rather haphazardly but effectively in the politics of Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka) and of Samudera on Sumatra. When part of a fleet settled down to wait for a change of monsoon, the Chinese built big stockades and buildings, but apparently always of wood, and they always left – a stunning contrast to the Portuguese, who from the beginning intended to stay and built fortifications out of hard coral rock that have withstood five hundred years of tropical heat and rain.

The Zheng He expeditions certainly reinforced local rulers' sense of the power of China and the political and commercial advantages of the tribute relationship. A substantial number of Chinese merchants and sailors accompanying the expeditions must have settled in Southeast Asian ports, contributing to the expansion of local trade and providing much of the expertise and manpower for tribute voyages to Chinese ports. Thereafter, there were numerous cases of tribute embassies from Melaka and from Siam staffed and even headed by Chinese.<sup>17</sup> The Portuguese would seize a key point in this Chinese diaspora, Melaka, with the aid of

<sup>16</sup> Some of the latest contributions to a complex literature on Song–Yuan maritime history are Billy K. L. So, *Prosperity, Region, and Institutions in Maritime China: The South Fukien Pattern, 946–1368* (Cambridge, MA, 2000); Angela Schottenhammer, ed., *The Emporium of the World: Maritime Quanzhou, 1000–1400* (Leiden, 2001); Schottenhammer, *Das songzeitliche Quanzhou im Spannungsfeld zwischen Zentralregierung und maritimem Handel* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002); Sen, Chs. 4, 5; Derek Heng, *Sino-Malay Trade and Diplomacy from the Tenth through the Fourteenth Century*, Ohio University Research in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series, No. 121 (Athens, OH, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Chang Pin-ts'un, "The First Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century", in Roderick Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund, eds., *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400–1750*, Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung, Südasiens-Institut, Universität Heidelberg, No. 141 (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 13–28; Sun Laichen and Geoff Wade, ed., *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor* (Singapore, 2010). A key set of references on tribute embassies from Southeast Asia is available in Geoff Wade, "Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-lu," electronic resource, 2005, <http://www.epress.nus.edu.sg/msl>.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-17945-4 - China and Maritime Europe, 1500-1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions

Edited by John E. Wills

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the local Chinese and then would ride the network of Chinese shipping on their first probes to Siam and the China coast.

Why, then, did the Ming abandon this remarkable projection of its wealth and power into the Indian Ocean? Scholar-officials pursuing Neo-Confucian agendas of cultural orthodoxy, limited government, and noncommercial agrarian stability had opposed most of the diplomatic and military initiatives of the Yongle reign, including the expeditions in Mongolia and Vietnam and the Zheng He expeditions. After the death of the Yongle emperor, efforts to hold on in Vietnam, where Ming forces were being trounced, soon were abandoned. Hardly anyone disagreed with the need for massive troop deployment and fortification against the Mongols, highly mobile warriors who had been driven out of China just fifty years before. Yongle had come to the throne as the victor in a revolt against his nephew and had moved the capital from Nanjing in the Yangzi valley to Beijing, his old base and the old Mongol imperial capital, reinforcing the centrality of the confrontation with the Mongols in Ming foreign relations and marginalizing the nexus of Nanjing shipyards, lower Yangzi commercial interests, and Fujian seafarers that supported the Zheng He expeditions. Xia Yuanji, one of the most eminent of the scholar-officials punished by Yongle and returned to power after the great despot's death, had vehemently opposed the vanity and waste of resources of the Zheng He expeditions. It is a bit surprising that even one more was sent, in 1432–1434. There are stories, not altogether reliable, that in the 1470s a scholar-official successfully aborted consideration of a renewal of the voyages by destroying many of the records of the earlier ones.<sup>18</sup>

The Zheng He voyages had integrated the attractions of China as an economic and political center, the skills of Chinese seafarers and merchants, and even a promising connection with the world of Islam; Zheng and several of his key commanders were Muslims, some with a good knowledge of Arabic. After 1435 small Muslim communities in Chinese ports were involved in trade, and some Chinese settled abroad became Muslim, especially on Java, but on the maritime Silk Road as on the continental one mutual ignorance and suspicion were the rule in relations between the Chinese and Islamic worlds. All Chinese who settled abroad had gotten there in violation of Ming prohibitions of maritime trade and could expect no acknowledgment or support from the Ming state. This strengthened their tendency to assimilate to local cultures and serve local

<sup>18</sup> Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, pp. 958–962.