East
Asian
History

史 CONTENTS

Cover calligraphy   Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover illustration   Detail from Chinese *Anti-opium poster, c. 1895. "Quan shi jieshi dayan wen"* [Essay Urging the World to Give Up Opium]

West Lake from Wang Villa (*Wang Zhuang*), *Lois Conner, 2008*

Sometimes words flow easily
    As soon as he grasps the brush;
    Sometimes he sits vacantly,
    Nibbling at it.

Lu Ji, from *Literature: A Rhapsody*

或操觚以率爾或含毫而邈然

陸機文賦

Translated by Achilles Fang, "Rhymeprose on Literature: The Wen-Fu of Lu Chi (A.D. 261–303)", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 14, 3/4 (Dec., 1951): 527–66, p.534

Imperial Summer Retreat, Chengde, *Lois Conner, 2000*

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA AND ITS CORAL REEFS DURING THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES: LEVELS OF GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICAL CONTROL

业 *Ulises Granados*

In the conflict over the sovereignty of the four South China Sea archipelagos —primarily the Paracel Islands (Xisha Qundao 西沙群島) and the Spratly Islands (Nansha Qundao 南沙群島), but also the Pratas Islands (Dongsha Qundao 東沙群島) and the Macclesfield Bank (Zhongsha Qundao 中沙群島)—China relies heavily on historical sources to claim that the islands were both known and under imperial authority from ancient times.[1] Before the first Manchu 滿族 naval circuit was ordered to the Paracels in 1909, Chinese sources included geographical descriptions and sailing routes, as well as maps.[2] Some of the references in these sources are to Admiral Zheng He's 鄭和 seven famous voyages (1405–33) during the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644), while others date to the Song 宋 (960–1279) and Yuan 元 (1277–1367) periods or even earlier.

Classical legal concepts of territorial sovereignty, jurisdiction and suzerainty, should be used with caution when analyzing the claims over the South China Sea Islands during the last two dynasties.[3] Som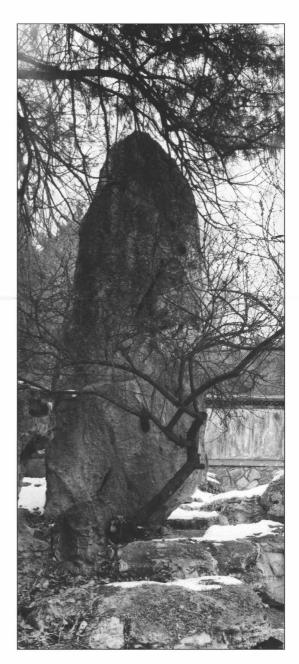e concepts acquire meaning when applied to territorial units *populated* by subjects under some sort of authority. Such territory can either be owned and under the direct control—that is, the exclusive, sovereign power of governmental institutions or other political agents; or be the land of a separate polity that recognizes a relationship of suzerainty. In the framework of tributary relations with the Chinese empire, a recognition of suzerainty was chosen by some polities in order to enjoy peaceful coexistence and trade prerogatives within the Chinese world order.[4]

When there are conflicting claims over regularly inhabited or completely deserted islands, international law specialists often rely on well-established doctrine—international legal principles that govern the acqui-

1 The literature on this topic is extensive, but the following Chinese-language sources should be mentioned: Deng Ciyu, "Nan zhongguo hai zhudaoyu de zhuquan wenti" [The Sovereignty Problem of the South China Sea Islands], in *Minghao Yuekan* [Mingbao Monthly] May 1974: 1–8; Zhang and Fang, *Zhongguo haijiang tongshi* [A Complete History of Chinese Coastal Areas and Territorial Seas] (Hangzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 2003); Lu Yiran, ed., *Nanhai zhudao, dili, lishi, zhuquan* [The Southern Sea Islands—Their Geography, History and Sovereignty] (Harbin: Heilongjian jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992); Lu Yiran, ed., *Zhongguo haijiang lishi yu xianzhuang yanjiu* [Research on the Current Situation and History of China's Maritime Frontier] (Harbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995); Han Zhenhua, *Woguo nanhaizhudao shiliao huibian* [Historical Sources on Our Country's Southern Sea Islands] (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1988); Han Zhenhua, *Nanhai zhudao shidi yanjiu* [Research on the Historical Geography of the Southern Sea] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1996); Cheng Keqin, ed., /OVER

109

/*Zhongguo nanhai zhudao* [China's South-ern Sea Islands] (Haikou: Hainan guojixin-wen chubanshe, 1996); Guoli zhongyang tushuguan Taiwan fenguan, *Hainan ji nanhai xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* [Proceedings of an Academic Conference on Hainan Island and the Southern Sea] (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1996).

Sources in English include: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *China's Indisputable Sovereignty Over the Xisha and Nansha Islands* (Bei-jing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980); Ji Guoxing, *The Spratlys Disputes and Prospect for Settlement* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Strategic and International Studies, 1992); Yang Tzou-Chow, *Storm Over the South China Sea* (New York: Center of Asian Studies, St. John's University, 1995); Steven Kuan-Tsuh Yu, "Who Owns the Paracels and Spratlys? An Evaluation of the Nature and Legal Basis of the Conflicting Territorial Claims," in *Fishing in Troubled Waters. Pro-ceedings of an Academic Conference on Territorial Claims in the South China Sea*, eds R.D. Hill, Norman G. Owen, and E.V. Roberts (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1991); The-Kuang Chang, "China's Claim of Sovereignty Over Spratly and Paracel Islands: A Historical and Legal Perspective," in *Case Western Reserve Journal of Intern-ational Law*, 23.3 (Summer 1991): 399-420.

[2]   Since the beginning of the twentieth century Chinese claims have been framed differently due to the documentation of their more direct intervention. Note however that some authors mention 1902, rather than 1909, as date of the first circuit.

[3]   Sovereignty is defined here as "the supreme authority within a territory"; jurisdiction as "the geographical area over which a govern-ment body has the power and right to exercise authority"; and suzerainty as "the position or authority of a suzerain—a dominant state that controls the foreign relations of a vassal state, but allows it to have sovereign authority in its internal affairs".

[4]   The concept of suzerainty is applied in China to both trade relations with the "barbarians" and to diplomatic contacts with them. See John K. Fairbank, "Introduction: The Old Order," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), Vol.10, pp.29-34.

sition of sovereignty—in order to identify which country has title rights over certain land.[5] International law even stipulates the possibility of a territory over which there is (or was) no sovereign at a particular time, employing the term *terra nullius*. Needless to say, such legal analyses (which are not the focus of this article) depend on historical research on the case at hand.

This study mainly covers the period from the founding of the Ming dynasty to the last decades of the Qing 清 (1644–1911). As will be shown below, while a certain degree of political authority seems to have existed over the maritime regions of the northern sector of this sea with proximity to the coast (that is, the "maritime frontier" *haijiang* 海疆 or "littoral territory" *yanhai jiangyu* 沿海疆域), Chinese authorities did not carry out any act that incorporated any of the four archipelagos into the empire. In fact, discussion has continued in academic circles as to whether:

1.   simply recording the presence of islands in written sources (portrayed as "dots" in several maps), meant sovereignty authority, or exclusive power over lands, and

2.   the presence of Chinese fishermen living on the islands or exploiting the seas around them was enough to invoke rights.

Numerous Chinese authors dealing with this aspect of the claim have repeatedly affirmed this position, implicitly or explicitly.[6]

Chinese arguments on the South China Sea conflict are consistent in insisting that *knowledge* of the sea—its trading routes and islands—repre-sented in written sources should carry the burden of legitimating claims, no matter how official records, private maps, or charts of private sailing routes portrayed the area. That is, simply identifying the existence of the ancient names of islands in the sources is enough to prove that those far lands were ruled by the Ming and Qing. However, the analysis of some representative sources from the Ming up to the First Opium War (1839–42)

[5]   On title, Malcolm Shaw says: "This term relates to both the factual and legal conditions under which territory is deemed to belong to one particular authority or another". Malcolm N. Shaw, *International Law*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.279.

[6]   Numerous Chinese works deal with this point. A selection would include: *Zhongguo nanhai zhudao*, pp.266–87; Guangdong sheng diming weiyuanhui bianji, *Nan-haizhudao diming ziliao huibian* [Sources on the Names of the South China Sea Islands] (Guangzhou: Guangdong ditu chubanshe, 1987), pp.62–139; Han, *Woguo nanhaizhudao*, pp.366, 400–42; Han, *Nanhai zhudao shidi yanjiu*, p.81; Lin Jinzhi, "Zhongguo zuizao faxian, jingying he guangxia nanhai zhudao

/de lishi," [History of the Chinese First Discov-ery, Administration and Control of the Southern Sea Islands] in Lu, *Nanhai shudao, dili, lishi, zhuquan*, pp.27-40; Lu Yiran, "Rishang Xize jici qiangzhan dongsha qundao yu zhongri jiaoshe" [The Occupation of the Pratas Islands by the Japanese Tradesman Yoshiji Nishizawa and the Sino–Japanese Negotiations] in Lu, *Zhongguo haijiang lishi*, pp.90–4; Tao Cheng, "The Disputes over the South China Sea Islands," *Texas International Law Journal* 10 (1975): pp. 265–277. Guo Zhengan, "Nan-haizhudao de kaifazhe" [The Developers of the Southern Sea Islands], in Guoli zhong-yang tushuguan taiwan fenguan, *Hainan ji nanhai*, pp.471–510.

reveals diverse levels of knowledge of these seas and islands. Moreover, some Qing sources repeated, almost word for word, earlier Ming names and descriptions of these distant and dangerous regions which were not considered safe for navigation.

Therefore, to address many of China's historical core arguments, it is important to show why no Chinese official presence in the islands was documented before the late Qing. The central argument of this study is that "knowing about" the South China Sea Islands, is not the same as "ruling" or owning rights to them. It will examine the history (and Chinese historiography) of the South China Sea by dealing with important Ming and Qing records, as well as secondary sources. First, it places geographical knowledge of the South China Sea region as represented in Ming and Qing sources within the Chinese "Western Ocean (*xiyang* 西洋) – Eastern Ocean (*dongyang* 東洋)" division and discussions about where these two oceans met. This division refers to a rather diffuse frontier between "Chinese" and "non-Chinese" spheres of influence, and as an area of regular Chinese navigational activity. In this context it should be noted that, as opposed to the rich geographical descriptions of the far reaches of the "Southern Sea", references to its islands and reefs remained imprecise and quite vague. This article, then, deals with the Chinese absence from, and lack of control over, these waters after the famous voyages of Zheng He, as a result of internal and external factors. This detachment from the maritime realm was the main reason for the lack of official, or officially sanctioned, activities on the islands, and for the reiteration of imprecise references in later geographical descriptions, even in local historical records. Finally, this study opens the possibility of viewing the South China Sea as an area used for different activities by Chinese, Southeast Asians, Arabs and Europeans. This reconceptualisation itself allows notable absences in the Chinese narrative to be filled. Finally, this article stresses the need to maintain the dichotomy between "knowing the area" and "ruling the area" in the analysis of historical sources involved in this issue, a dichotomy that appears to have been smoothly "erased" in Chinese historiography in their national interest.

The South China Sea and the Division between the Western Ocean and the Eastern Ocean

Long before the beginning of the Ming dynasty, the South China Sea was already identified in Chinese sources. In some cases this was as a vaguely separate area, in others as a part of a broader ocean encompassing East Asian, Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean waters. The identification of this maritime space was conceptualized through the "Western Ocean – Eastern Ocean" division first during the Song dynasty in a general, abstract way, and later, with more detail, during the Yuan dynasty.

[7] Zhou Qufei, *Lingwai daida* [Information on What is Beyond the Passes] (*Baihu congshu jicheng* ed., Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1966), 1:13b-14a. Roderich Ptak points out that Zhou must have confused this huge area with the so-called Southeastern Sea (*Dongnan Hai* 東南海), see, "Quanzhou: at the Northern Edge of a Southeast Asian 'Mediterranean'," in Ptak, *China, the Portuguese, and the Nanyang: Oceans and Routes, Regions and Trade (c. 1000–1600)* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), pp.408–9.

[8] Zhao Rugua, *Zufan zhi* [Treatise on Foreigners] (*Congshu jicheng ed.*, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan chubian, 1937), 2:1.

[9] Zhao, *Zufan zhi*, 2:7.

[10] Ptak, "Quanzhou," p.415.

In order to introduce the main features discussed in these debates, and understand their evolution, this analysis will start with a few representative pre-Ming sources:

Song

- Zhou Qufei 周去非, *Information on What is Beyond the Passes* (Lingwai daida 嶺外代答), 1178
- Zhao Rugua 趙汝适, *Treatise on Foreigners* (Zhufan zhi 諸藩志) 1225

Yuan

- Chen Dazhen 陳大震, *Treatise on the Southern Ocean of Great Virtue* (Dade Nanhai zhi 大德南海志), 1304
- Wang Dayuan 汪大淵, *Synoptic Treatise on Islands and Barbarians* (Daoyi zhilüe 島夷志略), 1349

Zhou Qufei's *Information on What is Beyond the Passes* records that the Gulf of Tonking (Jiaozhi yang 交趾洋) lay southwest of Hainan (Qiongya 瓊崖) Island. This was from where three important sailing routes found their way into the South China Sea. The first of these routes led to the countries of the south; the second route, the northern, linked the Jiaozhi yang with the coastal areas of Guangdong 廣東, Fujian 福建 and Zhejiang 浙江; and the third led to the "Great Eastern Ocean" (Dongda Yanghai 東大洋海). Within this "Great Eastern Ocean"—which can be identified as the South China Sea—Zhou identified "Changsha 長砂" and "Shitang 石塘", probably referring to the Paracel and Spratly Islands respectively.[7]

Later, in the *Treatise on Foreigners*, the term "Eastern Sea" (Donghai 東海) appears. In this text, Zhao Rugua referred to the northern section of the South China Sea as an area linking trading routes between Champa (Zhancheng 占城) and Guangzhou 廣州.[8] Further south, Java (Shepo 闍婆) appears as the starting point of some trade routes, one to the east, and one to the north to the island of Con Dao or Pulau Condore (Kunlun崑崙) off the mouths of the Mekong River, traversing the southern section of the South China Sea.[9] From Con Dao, the route divided: one western sub-route leading to the Chinese ports of Guangdong and Fujian. However, the limits of the South China Sea itself were not clearly depicted in this source.[10]

By the time of the Yuan dynasty, the idea that seas were limited in extent seems to have evolved. This led to maritime regions being more clearly delineated. Chen Dazhen's *Treatise on the Southern Ocean of Great Virtue* is one example. In this work, nine polities are recorded: Jiaozhi, Champa, Cambodia (Zhengla 真臘), Siam, Tambralinga (probably on the eastern side of peninsular Thailand, Danmaling 單馬令), Palembang (Srivijaya, 三佛齊國), Brunei, Tanjongpura (in southern Borneo, Danzhongbulan 單重布羅), and Java. Two of them, Tambralinga and Palembang, were "in charge of" (*guan* 管) a "Small Western Ocean"; Brunei was in

charge of a "Small Eastern Ocean"; and two polities (Tanjongpura and Java) were in charge of the "Great Eastern Ocean".[11] As Roderich Ptak has shown, some maritime areas were clearly differentiated: a "Small Western Ocean", covering the Gulf of Siam and the Malayan east coast; a "Great Western Ocean" (not explicitly mentioned) from Sumatra to Sri Lanka—the Indian Ocean, a "Small Eastern Ocean" covering the Sulu Sea, the Sarawak coast, and the Mindoro-Mindanao area in the Philippines, and a "Great Eastern Ocean", conceived as a linking ocean, which comprised the Java Sea, east and south of Borneo, and eastern Indonesia.[12] This Yuan source does not mention the South China Sea coral islands.

By 1349, when Wang Dayuan wrote the *Synoptic Treatise on Islands and Barbarians*, the "Western Ocean" was already clearly distinguished from the "Eastern Ocean". According to this source, the point where the Western and Eastern Oceans divided was at Longyamen 龍牙門 (today's Keppel Harbour Straits, southern Singapore) and at the island of Con Dao. Both places were considered "gates" to the "Western Ocean", through which ships en route to the Indian Ocean passed.[13] Moreover, this source also mentions the Wanli Shitang 萬里石塘 (the Paracels) as a place where several undersea "arteries" converged from three zones, and which was related to the trading port of Chaozhou 潮州 in mainland China.[14]

It is interesting to compare these sources with contemporary Arabic ones, since Muslim traders had a rich knowledge of Chinese and Southeast Asian maritime routes. Arabic sources are less specific in identifying a "Western Ocean – Eastern Ocean" division but some of them place such a division in a similar area. By the tenth century, and until the end of the Yuan dynasty, a place called "Kalah" in Arabic on the western side of the Malay Peninsula, somewhere near present-day Kedah and the Lingkawi Islands together with the eastern side of Sumatra, where most of the Arab trade flourished, was considered as the zone that divided the oceans. It is also thought that this area represented the limit of Chinese junk navigation. Gerald R. Tibbets agrees that it was recognized as a dividing line in merchant routes from China to India and Arabia.[15] However, some Arab sources classify the Indian Ocean and the China seas into other sub-regions (like the "seven seas" of the ninth-century Ahmad ibn Abi Ya´qub) by considering different criteria, such as the languages spoken by the inhabitants of respective polities they visited. It should be noted, however, that some sources use the name "Sea of Cankhay", the ancient

/probably the Paracels, are placed in section 81, a number that might imply some subtle or esoteric meanings. 81 is sometimes associated in Chinese tradition with the number of male scales of the (sea?) dragon—this may have indicated that these were dangerous lands for navigators. Ptak questions whether this number imagery might refer to a gigantic dragon. For an analysis on the possible implications of the numerical arrangement of this Yuan source, see Ptak, "Quanzhou," p.418. See also Roderich Ptak, "Glosses on Wang Dayuan's *Daoyi zhilüe* (1349/50)," in *Récits de voyage des Asiatiques. Genres, mentalités de l'espace*, ed. Claudine Salmon (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1996), pp.127–141.

[15] According to tenth-century Muslim chroniclers Abu Zaid Hassan al Sirafi and Abu Dulaf, and to the fourteenth-century Abu al-Fida Isma'il ibn Ali (1273–1331), the place *Kalab* (the *Qadah* and *Keda* of Ibn al-Majid and Sulaiman al-Mahri, respectively) was considered the mid-point of the Arab route between China and Ceylon that ultimately led to Oman. G.R. Tibbetts, "The Malay Peninsula as Known to the Arab Geographers," *Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography* 9 (1956): 21-60, pp. 24, 27, 31. It is this western Malay peninsula city (or island?) where the route to India really began for Arab sailors, particularly after their direct trading activities moved westward from south China to the eastern side of the Malay peninsula. This happened during the tenth century, after the rebel Huang Chao 黃巢 purportedly massacred up to 200,000 Arabs, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians during the capture of Guangzhou in 879. Paul Lunde, "The Seas of Sindbad," *Saudi Aramco World* 56.4 (July/August 2005): 20–29, <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200504/the.seas.of.sindbad.htm>, accessed June 2008. Islam in Southeast Asia and its implications for interregional trade, however, largely fall outside the topic of this essay, and Arab geographers are mentioned here for completeness. For a general introduction see H.J. De Graff, "South-East Asian Islam to the Eighteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, eds P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), Vol.2a, pp.123–54.

---

[11] Chen Dazhen, *Dade nanhaizhi* [Treatise on the Southern Ocean of Great Virtue] (*Song-yuan fangzhi congkan* ed., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), Vol.8, 7:18b–20b.

[12] Ptak, "Südostasiens Meere nach chinesischen Quellen (Song und Yuan)," and

/"Quanzhou," both in Ptak, *China, the Portuguese, and the Nanyang*, pp.17–21, 413–14.

[13] Wang Dayuan, *Daoyi zhilüe* [Synoptic Treatise on Islands and Barbarians] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), pp.214, 218.

[14] Ibid., p.318. These coral islands, most

Chinese Zhanghai 漲海, to refer to the South China Sea as well as, in all likelihood, the East China Sea.[16]

In Ming-dynasty records, the geographical limits of the South China Sea are not clearly shown; yet this sea, as a section of the "Eastern Ocean", continued to be conceptualized as part of a diffuse frontier between the Chinese and non-Chinese worlds of navigation and trade, one of those maritime spaces where the civilized world encountered the barbarian world. Some of those records mention coral islands (the Paracels, the Spratlys, the Pratas Reef or the Macclesfield Bank) by their ancient names, even though the use of these names remained rather imprecise.

Without trying to present an exhaustive survey, the following sources are representative:

- Ma Huan 馬歡, *Overall Survey of the Oceans' Shores* (Yingya shenglan 瀛涯勝覽),1451[17]
- Fei Xin 費信, *Overall Survey of the Star Raft* (Xingcha shenglan 星槎勝覽), 1436
- Huang Zhong 黃衷, *Language of the Sea* (Haiyu 海語), 1536
- Huang Shengceng 黃省曾, *Records of Western Ocean Tribute* (Xiyang chaogong dianlu 西洋朝貢典錄), 1520
- Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (comp.), *Navigational Chart of Zheng He* (Zheng He hanghai tu 鄭和航海圖) in the *Treatise on Military Preparedness* (Wubei Zhi 武備志), 1621
- Zhang Xie 張燮, *Studies on the Ocean East and West* (Dongxi yang kao 東西洋考), preface, 1617–18
- Anon., *Favorable Winds to Escort* (Shunfeng xiangsong 順風相送), sixteenth century
- *Hainan Gazetteer of the Zhengde reign* (Zhengde qiongtai zhi 正德瓊臺志), around 1521

By the Yuan dynasty, the division into a "Western Ocean" and an "Eastern Ocean" of the huge maritime area from the western Pacific to the Indian Ocean became increasingly accepted. By the early Ming this divide was clear, and from it, the idea of a "Southern Sea" also slowly emerged. Thirty-six years into the dynasty, huge fleets under the command of Admiral Zheng He were dispatched to places along the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Peninsula by the Yongle 永樂 emperor. Between 1405 and 1433, the seven voyages into the "Western Ocean" naturally increased knowledge of maritime regions. Terminology distinguishing different "oceans" was already present before the Ming and during the early Ming several sources show that these Yuan conceptions of space continued: a "Western Ocean" was identified as distinct from the "Eastern Ocean" plied by Chinese, Arabs, and Malay sailors and merchant ships.[18]

[16] For the Ya'qub translation, see Gabriel Ferrand, *Relations de voyages et textes géographiques arabes, persans et turks, relatifs à l'Extrême-Orient du VIIIe au XVIIIe siècles* (Frankfurt am Main: J.W. Goethe Universität, Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften, 1986), p.50.

[17] It was long considered that the *Overall Survey of the Oceans' Shores* was from 1433. However, it is now accepted by many scholars that the definitive form of this work is from 1451, seven years after the first draft was finished in 1444. See Wan Ming, "Ming chaoben *Yingya shenglan* yu Zheng He baochuan chidu" [The Ming Dynasty *'Yingya shenglan'* and the Measurement of Zheng He's Treasure Ships] in *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan bao* [Bulletin of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences], 7 July 2005, <http://www.guoxue.com/ws/html/zuixinfabu/20050708/238.html>, accessed July 2008. See also Paul Pelliot, "Les grands voyages maritimes Chinois au début du XVe siècle," Chinese version in *Zheng He xia xiyangkao /Jiao Guang Yindu liang dao kao*, [On Zheng He's Navigation to the Western Ocean/Study on the Vietnam-China and India Sea Routes] trans. Bo Xihe and Feng Chengjun (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), pp.15–32.

[18] According to the Ming, Arab geographers acknowledged the whole eastern side of the Malay peninsula, including the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea, as belonging to a Chinese area of influence, or "Greater China" (al Sin wa Ma'l Sin; a term that comes from the Sanskrit Cina Mahacina, and from the Persian Chin Machin). A reference from the 1511 text by Sulaiman b. Ahmad al-Mahri, *Al-'Umdat al-Mahriyah fi Dabt al-'Ulum al-Najmiyah* (MSS file 2559), which identifies such a macro region, is found in Tibbets, "The Malay Peninsula," p.48. See note 75 in this paper.

For instance, Ma Huan's *Overall Survey of the Oceans' Shores* mentions Lambri (Nanboli 南渤里) in Aceh and Samudra-Pasai (Sumendala 蘇門答剌) on the northern edge of Sumatra as the most eastern point of the "Western Ocean". Java (Shepo) was also recognized in general as the place where the "Western Ocean" began.[19] These three places were probably recognized as the starting point of the "Western Ocean" as they were the final destinations of long trade routes, geographically privileged on the Straits of Malacca and the Sunda Strait. There, merchants stopped and resupplied before continuing west to the Indian Ocean or east to China, Borneo, the Philippines or the Moluccas.

The *Overall Survey of the Oceans' Shores*, as well as Fei Xin's *Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, included geographical descriptions of places stretching from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean. In particular, the South China Sea was recognized as stretching from Wuhumen 五虎門 on the Fujian coast in the Taiwan Strait in the northeast, to Champa and Quy Nhon (Xinzhougang 新州港), on the central Vietnamese coast in the east. Its southwestern section stretched from Con Dao (Kunlunshan 崑崙山) in the southwest[20] to Brunei (Poluo 婆羅) in the south.[21] In the east it went from the Philippine archipelago to the island of Formosa. Importantly, neither of these two sources mentioned coral islands in the South China Sea.

However, another important source from the Ming, Huang Zhong's *Language of the Sea*, does mention these islands. According to Huang, the Wanli Shitang—in this case a loose denomination for the Paracel and Pratas Islands, as well as the Macclesfield Bank—and the Wanli Changsha 萬里長沙—the Spratly Islands, a belt of islets and coral reefs feared as an extremely dangerous place for navigation—were all found in the "Southern Sea".[22] Moreover, the *Navigational Chart of Zheng He*, the so-called "Mao Kun Map" (Mao Kun tu 茅坤圖), compiled from surviving navigational charts in 1621, identified some coral islands in the South China Sea. These included the Shitang 石塘, that is, the Wanli Shitang, and the so-called Wansheng Shitangyu 萬生石塘嶼, both names for the Paracels. The map also marks the Shixing Shitang 石星石塘 (possibly also equivalent to the Wanli Shitang), identifying an extended area covering the Macclesfield Bank, the Pratas and Paracel Islands, a belt of rock and coral formations beginning near the port of Chaozhou (echoing Wang Dayuan in his 1349's *Synoptic Account of Islands and Barbarians*).[23]

The division between the "Western Ocean" and the "Eastern Ocean" is not obvious on the Mao Kun map but only a few mid-sixteenth century sources clearly stated where it lay. Huang Shengceng's *Records of Western Ocean Tribute* (1520) considers the "Western Ocean" as starting east of Kunlun Yang 崑崙洋 and Lambri and mentions Sulu as belonging to the "Eastern Ocean".[24] By the early seventeenth century, however, this division is clearly marked in *Studies on the Ocean East and West*. Zhang Xie

[19] There is a record in *Yingya Shenglan* of Nanboli (23a) indicating a point of division at Maoshan 帽山, nowadays Pulau Weh, Indonesia (approx. 5'54 latitude north, 95'13 longitude east), of Samudra-Pasai (19b), of Shepo (3a) and the commemorative poem (2a). See also, Zhang Sheng, *Gaizheng Yingya Shenglan* [Changes and Corrections to the Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores] (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1969), p.191, and Feng Chengjun, *Yingya Shenglan jiaozhu, Ma Huan zhuan* [Overall Survey of the Oceans' Shores by Ma Huan] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), p.74.

[20] *Xingcha Shenglan*, 1:5a, 7a; *Yingya Shenglan*, 4a. Kunlunshan can, however, be identified in other sources as Kalimantan. For an analysis of island names in this region and variations, see Chen Jiarong, *Gudai nanhai diming huishi* [Sources on Ancient Toponyms of the Southern Sea] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1986).

[21] On the division of the "Eastern Ocean" and the "Western Ocean" at Brunei (an different position from other records) see *Mingshi* [History of the Ming Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 323:8378.

[22] Huang Zhong, *Haiyu* [Language of the Sea] (*Zhongguo nanhai zhuqundao wenxian huibian* ed., Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1975), 3:1b-2a.

[23] See the map entitled "Xinanhai yi tu" and the Mao Kun map in Mao Yuanyi, *Wubei Zhi* [Treatise on Military Preparedness] (*Zhongguo Bingshu jicheng* ed., Beijing: Jiefang chubanshe, 1989), 222:11b, 240:10b–11a. Identification of the names of coral reefs and the changes they underwent can be found in Han, *Nanhai zhudao shidi yanjiu*, pp.1–51.

[24] Huang Shengceng, *Xiyang chaogong dianlu* [Records of Western Ocean Tribute] (*Congshu jicheng* ed., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), pp.3, 13, 21.

[25] Zhang Xie, *Dongxi yangkao* [Studies on the Ocean East and West] (Wang Qizong ed., 1618).

[26] *Ibid.* 5:16a, 3:18b.

[27] The *Dongxi nanhai yizhuguo zongtu* [General Map of all Barbarian Countries of the Eastern, Western and Southern Oceans] and the *Dongnan haiyang zhuyiguo tu* [General Map of all Barbarian Countries of the Southeast Ocean]—both from the *Dongxi yangkao*—show a huge blank space in the centre of the South China Sea, where the Paracels and the Spratlys should be.

[28] Xiang Da, *Liangzhong haidao zhenjing: Xunfeng xiangsong, Zhinan zhengfa* [Two Classics on Navigation by Compass: The Favorable Winds to Escort and Directions of the South] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), pp.27–8.

[29] Tang Zhou, *Zhengde qiongtai zhi* [Hainan Gazetteer of the Zhengde reign] (*Tianyige cang Mingdai fangzhi xuankan* ed., Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian, 1964), 21:8b–9a.

nominated polities from East and Southeast Asia as belonging either to the "Western Ocean" or "Eastern Ocean". Japan was recorded in a separate section. Among the polities included within the "Western Ocean" were Jiaozhi, Champa, Siam and even Palembang, while those belonging to the "Eastern Ocean" included Luzon, Sulu, and Brunei.[25] Zhang also recorded Palembang as belonging to the "Southeast Ocean", and placed Brunei as the point where the "Western Ocean" began.[26] Compared with early- and mid-Ming sources, it is also worth noting that in maps, the Eastern–Western divide had moved slightly to the east by the end of the dynasty. In Zhang's text, the South China Sea Islands are absent, which likely confirms that the central section of the South China Sea was largely avoided by sailors and lay outside the main trading routes.[27]

Another important source from the Ming is *Favorable Winds to Escort*, a navigational handbook probably from the sixteenth century whose authorship and precise date remain unclear. In this text, detailed descriptions of sea routes linking Fujian, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Brunei and the Philippines, among other places, are recorded. It also has less detailed references to the South China Sea coral islands: the Wanli Shitang and its adjacent waters (Qizhou Yang 七州洋), and the Wanli Changsha are briefly mentioned.[28]

The last source from the Ming is a local geographical treatise on Hainan. In the *Hainan Gazetteer of the Zhengde Reign* a maritime area south of the Chinese mainland that stretched from northern Vietnam (Jiaozhi), Champa, and Cambodia to Guangzhou and Fujian is recorded. It mentions two formations within this maritime zone, the Wanli Shitang and the Changsha (here, the Pratas). According to this record, sailing from the island of Hainan to the Fujian and Zhejiang coasts need take only four to nine days. It contains no direct reference to the Eastern and Western oceans.[29]

Knowledge of the South China Sea and its insular features is generally considered to have grown by the beginning of the Qing dynasty, but many sources from this period simply repeat previous records. The following sources are reviewed here:

- Chen Lunjiong 陳倫炯, *Record of Things Heard and Seen in the Maritime Countries* (Haiguo wenjianlu 海國聞見錄), 1730
- Anon., *Directions to the South* (Zhinan zhengfa 指南正法), probably early-eighteenth century
- Xie Qinggao 謝清高, transcribed by Yang Bingnan 楊炳南, *Maritime Records* (Hailu 海錄), 1820–21
- Xu Jiyu 徐繼畬, *Synoptic Treatise on the Maritime Circuit* (Yinghuan Zhilüe 瀛環志略), 1844–48
- Wei Yuan 魏源, *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries* (Haiguo tuzhi 海國圖志), 60 vols., 1847
- *Records of Qiong Prefecture in Guangdong* (Guangdong sheng Qiongzhoufu zhi 廣東省瓊州府志), 1841

Discussions on the division between the "Western Ocean" and the "Eastern Ocean" continued into the Qing dynasty. After the recovery of Formosa in 1684, the Kangxi 康熙 emperor ordered several maritime expeditions to the Southern Seas. More than forty years later, in the eighth year of the Yongzheng 雍正 era (1730), the *Record of Things Heard and Seen in the Maritime Countries* appeared. This source presents descriptions of places across the world from Japan to the United Kingdom, including the geography of the South China Sea. It makes distinctions between the Eastern Ocean, Southeastern Ocean, Southern Ocean, Small Western Ocean, Great Western Ocean, the Kunlun area, and the Nan'aoqi 南澳氣 region. Chen Lunjiong points out that there were several lands in the Southern Ocean south of Taiwan (which was considered as belonging to the Southeastern Ocean) and north of Indonesia. Champa, Xinzhougang, Zhenla and Jiaozhi formed the Southern Ocean's western perimeter. Within this huge "lake" he identified the Qizhou 七州 and its Qizhou Great Sea 七州大洋, as well as Wanli Changsha and West Changsha 西長沙, all referring here to the Paracels. He also recorded the Qianli Shitang 千里石塘 or Shitang (the cluster of islands and reefs of the Spratlys group), the East Changsha 東長沙, also called Shatou 沙頭 (the Macclesfield Bank), and the Nan'aoqi region (the Pratas Islands and surrounds).[30]

Similar names are included in the *Directions of the South*, a manuscript whose authorship and date are unclear but was probably written during the early eighteenth century. As in the case of the *Favorable Winds to Escort*, there are detailed descriptions of sea routes and some mention of the archipelagos. In both texts, the Paracels and surrounding waters, the Pratas (identified here as Changshawei 長沙尾, part of the Nan'ao region) and the Spratlys are recorded.[31]

With the European powers' advance into Asian waters, as well as to deepen knowledge about ocean-going foreign trade (and as a direct result of the Qianlong emperor's military campaigns in Burma and against the Miao in Southwest China), the Manchu rulers showed increasing interest in the South China Sea. The *Maritime Records*, written during the transition between the Jiaqing 嘉慶 and Daoguang 道光 reigns (1820–21), says that there were two trading routes in the South China Sea running from Guangdong to Batavia in the Dutch Indies—an "inner route" and an "outer route".[32] In this text Xie Qinggao also records the Wanli Changsha (the Paracels) and the Qianli Shitang (the Spratlys),[33] where the Paracels act as a reference point in the coastal, relatively secure but long inner route, and the Spratlys group as a reference point on the shorter, but more dangerous, outer route.

Around one hundred years after the *Record of Things Heard and Seen in the Maritime Countries*, the illustrious Wei Yuan recorded similar places in his famous work, the *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries*. Once again, maritime regions were classified into oceans in different directions: the Western Ocean, Great Western Ocean, Southwestern Ocean,

[30] Chen Lunjiong, *Haiguo wenjianlu* [Record of Things Heard and Seen in the Maritime Countries] (*Zhongguo nanhai zhuqundao wenxian huibian* ed.), 1:13a–18a, 19a–27b, 38a–40b. See also Han, *Nanhai zhudao shidi yanjiu*, pp.1–50 and the map *Sihai zongtu* 四海總圖 [Complete Map of the Four Seas] reproduced in Go Bon Juan and Joaquin Sy, eds, *The Philippines in Ancient Chinese Maps* (Makati City: Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran Inc., 2000), p.65.

[31] Xiang, *Liangzhong haidao zhenjing*, p.117. On the Pratas group, see p.155.

[32] Xie Qinggao, *Hailu* [Maritime Records] (*Zhongguo nanhai zhuqundao wenxian huibian* ed.).

[33] Xie, *Hailu*, 35a.

[34] See his world map and the *Dongnanyang geguo yange tu* [Revised Map of Southeast Ocean Countries] in Wei Yuan, *Haiguo Tuzhi* [Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries] 60 vols. (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1967).

[35] See the map *Nanyang gedao tu* [Map of All Islands in the Southern Sea] in Xu Jiyu, *Yinghuan Zhilüe* [Outline of the Maritime Circuit], reprinted in Quanguo gonggong tushuguan guji wenxian bianweihui, *Yinghuan zhilüe. Hanghai suoji* [Outline of the Maritime Circuit, Petty Records on Navigation] (Beijing: Zhonghua quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2000), 2:32. See also, the *Dongnanyang geguo yange tu* in Go and Sy, *The Philippines in Ancient Chinese Maps*, p.56.

[36] See also the 1841 *Hainan Local Gazetteer* (Qiongzhou fuzhi 瓊州府志) in Ming Yi and Zhang Yuesong, *Guangdong sheng qiongzhou fuzhi (1)*, 1841 (1890) [Hainan gazetteer, Guangdong province] (*Zhongguo fangzhi congshu* ed., Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1967), 3:1a.

[37] References to the Paracels remained vague in Guangdong local history as late as the Tongzhi 同治 period (1862–1874). See Mao Hongbin, *Guangdong sheng Guangdong tushuo* [Illustrated Descriptions of Guangdong Province] (*Zhongguo fangzhi congshu* ed., Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1967), 17:3b.

[38] *Guangdong sheng qiongzhou fuzhi*, 17:5b–6a.

Small Western Ocean and Greater Southern Sea, among others. In Wei Yuan's work, the Eastern Ocean, comprising the current South China Sea, East China Sea and the Yellow and Bohai Seas, was considered as a single entity, differentiated from the Great Eastern Ocean on the eastern side of the Japanese archipelago and the Philippines.[34] It is clear, then, that both the *Record of Things Heard and Seen in the Maritime Countries* and the *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries* reiterated the idea of a Western–Eastern division, which was introduced in pre-Ming sources.

During the Qing period, the two main archipelagos in the South China Sea were also marked on several maps. Even though names of these groups of islands were not completely consistent, the Paracels group was still identified as Wanli Changsha in most eighteenth-century maps, while the Spratlys were named either Qianli Shitang or simply Shitang. However, it is clear from an examination of many maps that exactly where both archipelagos were placed frequently changed, and that descriptions of the islands and reefs were surprisingly abstract. For instance, in the world map in the *Maritime Records*, both the Paracels and the Spratlys were depicted as running perpendicular to the Chinese coastline. However, maps in other works, such as the *Record of Things Heard and Seen in the Maritime Countries*, the *Synoptic Treatise on the Maritime Circuit* and the *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries*, show the islands parallel to the mainland.[35]

In Qing-period regional sources, geographical knowledge of the northern section of the South China Sea is rather detailed, but descriptions of more distant places, such as the Paracels and Spratlys, are not clear at all. The "Southern Sea" was typically conceptualized as a coastal sea in these works. Coastal areas were described extensively, but records of deeper waters were vague. In fact, Guangdong local histories seem merely to repeat pre-Qing records of the names and locations of the Paracels and the Spratlys and their distance from the mainland.[36] When they discuss sea routes sailed by junks and European merchants, they are most concerned with noting coastal points that are relevant to littoral navigation. They include no substantial insights into blue-water routes and their references to the islands, which were considered extremely dangerous places for those who ventured to sail far from the coast, were vague.[37]

However, an analysis of some local sources shows an interesting conceptualization of maritime areas. The 1841 *Hainan Local Gazetteer* divides the huge "Southern Sea" into a coastal sea belt where vessels engaged in inter-port activities; a contiguous belt of shallow waters; a deeper area, called an inner ocean; and a vast outer ocean, or huge open sea. This division is clearly made in order to inform sailors about routes for safe passage and to facilitate marine transportation and fishery activities.[38] In sum, these representative Qing sources depicted the South China Sea and its limits

with relative clarity, often repeating earlier works. They did not, however, discuss its islands and archipelagos in any detail. Local records, on the other hand, subdivided the sea into regions close and far offshore, in order to guide sailors on where to navigate and where not to venture.[39]

Maritime Knowledge and Political Control

It is important to keep in mind that there is a considerable difference between having geographical knowledge of maritime areas, and controlling and administrating resources and subjects living in those areas. After the famous Ming voyages and throughout the entire Qing dynasty, central and Guangdong authorities had some control over a relatively narrow coastal maritime zone with its adjacent islands in the "Southern Sea", but not blue-water regions. After the voyages of Zheng He, several social, economic and military changes eventually brought the Chinese maritime enterprise to a halt, beginning with the end of its naval strength.[40] In fact, while the voyages of Zheng He are considered the zenith of the Chinese mastery over sea routes,[41] these voyages are also regarded as the end of China's oceanic navigation history.

During the Ming, two factors are important to understand the coastal frontier policy implemented by the government, which eventually moved attention from the maritime realm. One factor was that Chinese private merchants continued to engage in economic activities outside the scope of traditional tributary trade. By the time of Zheng He's voyages, it is believed that Chinese private merchants were using the trading routes of the South China Sea, while Javanese, Malay, Gujarati and Arab traders also regularly sailed the north and southwest trading routes.[42] The other factors were bandit activities and piracy, both domestic and Japanese (and, during the Qing, Dutch) in China's littoral zones. These two factors, part of the same overall problem of illegal trade, eventually forced the government to implement strict frontier-defense policies along the coastlines.

Three types of maritime frontier control were implemented by the early Ming: the strengthening of military posts, the coordination of these posts with civilian authorities, and the setting up of naval detachments. This maritime defense policy was mainly aimed at the Japanese *Wako* (*Wokou* 倭寇) pirates, whose activities became rampant all along the Eastern Sea and South China Sea coastlines, even affecting Hainan Island.[43] To cope with this problem, the government implemented security measures (that first included threats to Japanese rulers) by ordering a maritime ban on private trade.[44]

During the Hongwu reign (1368–1398), the government set up the so-called *weisuo* 衛所 system, military garrisons manned by a hereditary

[39] This classification was also related to control and taxation over junk activities by Guangdong and Fujian authorities. On this see Jennifer Wayne Cushman, *Fields From the Sea: Chinese Junk Trade with Siam During the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asian Program, 1993), pp.45–7.

[40] Lo Jung-pang, "The Decline of the Early Ming Navy," *Oriens Extremus* 5 (1958): 149–68.

[41] Ni Jianmin, *Haiyang zhongguo* [Oceanic China] (Beijing: Guoji guangbo chubanshe, 1997), p.632.

[42] Roderich Ptak, "The Northern Trade Route to the Spice Islands: South China Sea – Sulu Zone – North Moluccas, (14th to early 16th Century)," *Archipel* 43 (1992), reproduced in Roderich Ptak, *China's Seaborne Trade with South and Southeast Asia (1200-1750)* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999), p.36.

[43] For Fujian, see the *Ming shilu* [Veritable Records of the Ming] at Hongwu 洪武 21, Month 2, Day 4 (12 March 1388). For Guangdong at Xuande 宣德 7, Month 2, Day 1 (2 March 1432); Jiajing 43, Month 6, Day 8 (15 July 1564). For policies against Southeast Asian pirates see Hong Zhi 弘治 1, Month 3, Day 6 (17 April 1488). All records from the *Ming shilu* come from Geoff Wade, trans., *Southeast Asia in the* Ming Shi-lu: *An Open Access Resource* (Singapore: Asia Research Institute and the Singapore E-Press, National University of Singapore) <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl>, accessed June 2008. For a detailed account of *Wako* attacks in the Hainan region during the early Ming, see *Guangdongshengqiongzhoufuzhi (1)*, 19:1a–38a

[44] Zhang and Fang, *Zhongguo haijiang tongshi*, pp.262, 284.

[45] An Jing, *Zhongguo gudai haijiang shigang* [An Essential History of Ancient Sea Frontier of China] (Harbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), p.206. Charles O. Hucker, "Ming Government," in *The Cambridge History of China*, eds Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Vol.8, pp.54–70. Wan Rigen, *Ming qing haijiang zhengce yu zhongguo shehui fazhan* [Ming, Qing Dynasties Maritime Frontier Policy and the Social Development of China] (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2006), p.42.

[46] Zhang and Fang, *Zhongguo haijiang tongshi*, p.288.

[47] Zhang and Fang, *Zhongguo haijiang tongshi*, p.277.

[48] *Ming shilu*, Xuande 10, Month 7, Day 20 (13 August 1435).

[49] *Ming shilu*, Jiajing 15, Month 7, Day 29 (15 August 1536).

[50] Zhang and Fang, *Zhongguo haijiang tongshi*, p.265. This process had begun when the first Ming emperor's government ordered the relocation of residents from coastal zones. See Lo Jung-pang, "The Decline of the Early Ming Navy," p.163.

[51] As a concept, the region encompassing the Nanyang was considered an area where several Chinese activities developed, such as migrant movements and trade, mainly across the South China Sea. Accordingly, and following Wang Gungwu's opinion, the Nanyang did not include the whole of Southeast Asia, but rather the South China coast to neighboring coastal territories, including what was, when Wang wrote, Indonesia, British Borneo, the Malay states (and Singapore) and the Philippines. See Wang Gungwu, "The Chinese in Search of a Base in the Nanyang," *Journal of the South Seas Society* XIV.1–2 (December 1958), p. 88.

[52] Geoff Wade, *Ming China and Southeast Asia in the 15th Century: A Reappraisal*, Singapore Asia Research Institute Working Paper No.28 (Singapore: Asia Research Institute, 2004), <http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps04_028.pdf>, accessed June 2007, p.6. See also Stephen Chang Tseng-Hsin, *Mingli dongnan zhongguo de haishang huodong* [Maritime Activities on the South-East Coast of China in the Latter Part of the Ming /●VER

soldiery, for patrolling coastal regions. Central authorities also set up different military garrisons (*zhai* 寨) and naval bases (*shuizhai* 水寨). During the early Ming, eleven military districts in Fujian and nine in Guangdong were set up in coastal areas, while three military circuits for both Fujian and Guangdong were also established. The government thus tried to organize coastal defense along a belt stretching from the north of the Taiwan Strait to the island of Hainan.[45] From the 1420s, the state of the *weisuo* system began to crumble and had to be rearranged in the mid-Ming in order to cope effectively with continuous *Wako* attacks. The government introduced several changes, including the abolition of the policy of sending soldiers to serve on farmlands (*tuntian* 屯田) while on duty.[46]

The first time the government implemented a maritime ban was in 1374, when the closing of the Superintendency of Maritime Shipping (*shiboshi* 市舶司) at Ningpo 寧波, Chaozhou and Guangzhou was ordered.[47] The Ming prohibited fishing in the littorals,[48] limited marine transportation enterprises, set up a maritime protection and naval supervision system,[49] and ordered the removal of local populations from coastal lands and islands (*qian hai* 遷海).[50]

This decision to remove populations, a policy largely continued during the Qing dynasty to contain the influence of Koxinga (Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功) from Taiwan, had devastating effects on the coastal population and was indeed one of the main factors contributing to the Chinese emigration to the Nanyang.[51] This maritime ban was later complemented by several other prohibitions in 1381, 1384, 1390, 1394 and 1397.[52] In the mid-Ming, new prohibitions came into force in 1524 and 1533. These were only partially lifted in 1567 for Fujian, as a compensation to the people of that province for helping to fight piracy, leaving Yuegang 月港 as an open port.[53]

A new ban was proclaimed in 1656, soon after the Manchu rulers assumed power. This policy ultimately backfired and turned many people into bandits (even into seasonal bandit-farmers), smugglers and pirates, and again fueled emigration to the Nanyang, a trend already well established by the mid-Ming.[54] However, this and subsequent prohibitions did not mean, as Wang Gungwu has pointed out, that trading was impossible, but rather made it "illegal, secret, and largely unrecorded".[55]

During the early Qing, illegal trade, piracy, and the mid-sixteenth century violent incursions of Europeans into Chinese coastal areas, all led the central government to follow a similar maritime defense policy to the one pursued by the previous dynasty. Twenty-one coastal military posts were set up in Jiangsu 江蘇, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong, and elsewhere, as well as minor military garrisons on the coast, including at Chongming 崇明, Dinghai 定海, Jinmen 金門, Haitan 海壇, Qiongzhou 瓊州 and Nan'ao, all of which aimed at suppressing rampant piracy in

the East China Sea and the South China Sea.[56] In Guangdong, from the beginning of the dynasty, the government set up maritime frontier circuits and a marine force in charge of supervising of a total of five garrisons to patrol the Southern seas,[57] even though, most probably, such circuits did not reach the coral islands.

As for the maritime ban, from the thirteenth year of the Shunzhi 順治 era (1656) to the recovery of Formosa in the twenty-third year of the Kangxi era (1684), private merchant enterprises and the maritime transport of people were banned from Shandong 山東 to Guangdong.[58] However, this renewed closed-door policy had the opposite effect to what had happened before: it encouraged overseas movements of goods and Chinese people across the South China Sea.[59] After a period of relaxation, the maritime ban was again imposed in 1717, in particular to all trading activities to the Nanyang.[60]

Ming policies of transferring people from coastal to inland regions also continued during the Qing. After the government decreed a new ban on private maritime activities in 1656, huge sectors of the coastal population were moved inland or to other provinces. According to 1661 regulations applied to Hebei 河北, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong provinces, people living in coastal areas had to move from 30 to 50 *li* inland, thus creating a buffer zone between naval garrisons and the coastal population. This decision, again, was one of the factors that accelerated the overseas migration of Chinese to the Nanyang.[61]

Moreover, by the time the Manchu sovereigns ruled the Chinese empire, the Western powers had already been consolidating their presence in Southeast and East Asia. It became more obvious that the Chinese coastal authorities did not have the leverage to patrol the South China Sea waters. Since the beginning of the European "discoveries" during the late fifteenth century, the South China Sea caught the attention of Europe, starting with the Portuguese incursion into Macau in 1557, later with the Dutch occupation of Amoy (Xiamen 廈門), Tainan 臺南 and the Pescadores at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and also by the Spaniards, who set foot on Manila in 1570, and Formosa in 1626. By the twenty-second year of the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1757), the Qing government decided to limit all foreign trade activities to the port of Guangzhou, in order to regulate commercial exchange with European merchants as much as possible. Other open ports were also closed during the Kangxi rule.[62]

/Chia-Ching Reign, 1522–1566," in Mote, *The Cambridge History of China,* Vol.7, pp.466–505. For the mid-Ming Japanese piracy problem, see also So Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1975).

[55] Wang Gungwu, "Ming Foreign Relations: Southeast Asia," in Mote and Twichett, *The Cambridge History of China,* Vol.8, p.307.

[56] An, *Zhongguo gudai haijiang shigang,* p.246.

[57] Wang, *Ming qing haijiang zhengce,* p.197.

[58] Jane Kate Leonard, *Wei Yuan and China's Rediscovery of the Maritime World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.69.

[59] Ibid., pp.212, 225. In spite of this policy, even well before the late Ming at the mid-seventeenth century, Chinese junks continued to sail between Fujian and Guangdong and Southeast Asia, engaging in trade and migration movements with Vietnam, Indonesia, the whole Malay Peninsula and the Philippines. See Akira Matsuura, "Shindai no kaiyoken to kaigai imin" [Qing Dynasty Maritime Realm and Overseas Migration], *Ajia kara kangaeru-3: Shuen kara no rekishi* [Reflexions From Asia No.3: History From the Periphery], eds Yuzo Mizoguchi, Takeshi Hamashita et al. (Tokyo: Tokyo digaku shuppansha kai, 1994), p.166. On the Chinese junk trade to Thailand, see Cushman, *Fields From the Sea*.

[60] Wang, *Ming Qing haijiang zhengce,* pp.155, 435.

[61] Zhang, *Zhongguo haijiang,* p.311. Wang, *Ming Qing haijiang zhengce,* pp.144–49, 153. By the mid-seventeenth century, emigration was also fueled by the increased taxation imposed on the population of the littorals. In general, during the Ming and Qing, migration to the Nanyang was done by those that either opposed the government or by merchants seeking better opportunities outside the realm of Chinese official control. It is estimated that by the end of the Ming, around 70,000–80,000 Chinese were already permanent residents in East and Southeast Asia. See Wang, *Ming Qing haijiang zhengce,* pp.401, 408, 414.

[62] Ibid., p.195.

/Dynasty] (Taipei: Silidongwu daxue zhongguo xueshu zhuzuo jiangzhu weiyuanhui, 1988), pp.8–11.

[53] Zhang, *Mingli dongnan zhongguo,* pp.12–16. Ray Huang, "The Lung-ch'ing and Wan-li reigns, 1567–1620," in Frederick W. Mote and

/Denis Twitchett, eds, *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Vol.7, p.559. Wang, *Ming Qing haijiang zhengce,* p.85.

[54] Wang, *Ming Qing haijiang zhengce,* pp.99, 390, 398. See also James Geiss, "The

[63] For a classic study for those two periods, see Jung Pang Lo, "The Emergence of China As a Sea Power During the Late Sung and Early Yuan Periods," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 14.4 (August 1955): 489–503.

[64] Marwyn Samuels, *Contest for the South China Sea* (New York: Methuen, 1982), pp.22–5.

In the end, after 400 years of Chinese naval strength, from the Song, Yuan[63] and early Ming, the advance of foreigners into oceans nearby, and a closed-door domestic policy (also fueled by increasing worries about the northern frontier during the mid-fifteenth century), turned the South China Sea from being a huge "Chinese lake" into being an "open sea"[64] beyond the reach of government. For the entire Ming until the late Qing, records of government-sanctioned activities at the archipelagos are absent in Chinese sources, representing a consistent silence in Chinese historiography.

Levels of Knowledge of the "Southern Sea"

[65] By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, private maritime trade flourished in Northern Vietnam at the Gulf of Tonkin, thanks to Chinese, Vietnamese and Muslims merchants who used the western trading route of the South China Sea, that connected the Jiaozhi yang and the Nanhai. See Li Tana, "A View From the Sea: Perspectives on the Northern and Central Vietnamese Coast," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37.1 (February 2006): 83–102.

[66] Ptak, "The Northern Trade Route," p.39. Recent archeological findings have revealed the existence of a hybrid Chinese–Southeast Asian shipping tradition in the southern sector of the South China Sea. See Pierre-Yves Manguin, "Trading Ships of the South China Sea," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* XXXVI (1993): 253–80. See also Geoff Wade, *Pre-Modern East Asian Maritime Realm: An Overview of European-Language Studies*, Asia Research Institute Working Paper No.16, (Singapore: Asia Research Institute, 2003) <http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps03_016.pdf>, accessed June 2008, pp.7, 17–20.

[67] On these concepts—*Renkai chiiki* 連海地域, *Kankai chiiki* 環海地域 and *Enkai chiiki* 沿海地域—see Takeshi Hamashita, "Chisei-ron, tochishi kara mita chiiki to kaiiki," [On Geopolitics: Land and Sea Areas Viewed From the History of Governance], in *Shihai no chiiki shi* [History of Areas of Control] eds Takeshi Hamashita and Minoru Kawakita (Tokyo: Yamagawa shuppansha, 2000), p.113.

In order to analyze sources and judge arguments regarding the history of the South China Sea, it is useful to conceptualize this maritime area in various ways. As with other oceans and open or semi-enclosed seas, the South China Sea must be first considered as an area subject to partial state administration, as well as a space for economic development, human interaction, and exchanges of goods. By the fourteenth century, most sectors of this sea were sailed regularly not only by Chinese junks, but also by Muslim and Southeast Asian traders in the East-West spice trade, or inter-Asian trade of other commodities. During the Ming and Qing periods, the South China Sea, which shared similar geopolitical and economic relevance with other seas, could well be conceptualized as having been simultaneously:

1) a maritime space connecting other seas marked by Samudra-Pasai, Lambri and Shepo

2) an area connecting coastal tributary states and the Chinese mainland, and later European colonies through the traditional east and west trade arteries around the South China Sea,[65] and

3) an area where economic interaction took place along a coastal cities linked in a network, as in the trade route between The Philippines, northern Borneo and Malacca, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[66]

Based on this multi-level approach to the subject,[67] how do we analyze the "knowing the area – ruling the area" problem for the South China Sea islands? How do we judge Chinese sovereignty claims over the Paracels, Sparatlys, Macclesfield Bank and Pratas groups while acknowledging the history of the period from the early Ming to the First Opium War? What is the link between the geographic knowledge that Chinese navigators possessed of this huge maritime space and the assumption of the "Southern Sea" as having been part of the empire? In other words, by analyzing written sources and maps, how can the historical claims that are central in the Chinese narrative in the South China Sea conflict be validated?

Certainly, interpretation of surviving records and maps has to take into account the particular political and social context in which they were prepared. Moreover, any certainty in the geographical record concerning islands and the extent of the sea reflected the rich maritime experience of sailors. It is equally true, however, that in most cases, such portrayals were limited to *real* geographic knowledge of those features, as well as to the prevailing practices of the cartographers who depicted such accounts. This is particularly important in Chinese cartography, because many authors before the twentieth century were not professional technicians, or trained cartographers, but scholars who were equally interested in the natural sciences, the social sciences, history, etc. In fact, many maps were useless for real navigation, being drawn rather to illustrate or communicate other messages or ideologies such as China's central position in the world.

It was at the time of the voyages of Zheng He from 1405–33 that the "Southern Sea", as part of the division between the "Chinese" and "non-Chinese" area of regular navigational activities, witnessed the power of a strong China within the framework of tributary relations with rulers from Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the eastern African coast. The South China Sea had thus become for China an integral part of an extended geopolitical order, a *Pax Sinica* enforced by coercion when needed. This is illustrated by the case of King Alagonakkara of Ceylon, who was taken prisoner and sent to Nanjing in 1409.

In this historical framework, one of the main values of the South China Sea was undoubtedly its geopolitical significance as a maritime space connecting other seas. This is clearly understood and depicted in the *Overall Survey of the Oceans' Shores, Overall Survey of the Star Raft* and the *Treatise on Military Preparedness*. However, references to the four archipelagos in the South China Sea are non-existent in the works of Ma Huan and Fei Xin—unlike the coastal regions of Southeast Asia and of several vassal states.[68] In Mao Yuanyi's *Navigational Chart of Zheng He*, the Paracel and Spratly Islands are merely depicted as dots or mountains located beyond Zheng He's naval route to the Indian Ocean. Therefore, it can be assumed that Ming authorities considered these islands as belonging to a zone of secondary importance. In fact, judging by these representative Ming sources, it seems very difficult to believe that the Chinese authorities had incorporated any of the four archipelagos into the empire at all.

From the time of Zheng He's voyages until around the First Opium War (some years before the publication of Wei Yuan's *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries* in 1847), the South China Sea was not simply relevant for military or geopolitical reasons. Rather, it remained important for being the intermediate stage in trading activities between southern Chinese and Southeast Asian ports, and among Southeast Asian ports. It was an area for junk sailing and overseas migration activities among

[68] In Ma Huan's *Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shore*there is a reference to a place called *fuqingluo* 浮青螺 (see commemorative poem, 2a). According to general Chinese academic opinion, this place might be the same as the *jiuruluozhou* 九乳螺洲 or *jiuruluoshi* 九乳螺石, in a Northern Song work called the *Collection of the Most Important Military Techniques* (Wujing zongyao 武經總要), referring to an old name for the Paracels. However, according to Ptak, it is also possible that such a reference does not correspond to those islands at all. On this debate, see Guangdongsheng diming wei-yuanhuibianji, *Nanhaizhudao diming ziliao huibian,* pp.154–155. For Ptak, see, "The Coral Islands in the South China Sea According to Chinese Sources (Song to Ming)," in Avelino de Freitas de Meneses, ed. *Portos, Escalas e Ilhéus no Relacionamento entre o Ocidente e o Oriente. Actas do Congresso Internacional Comemorativo do Regresso de Vasco da Gama a Portugal, Ilhas Terceira e S. Miguel (Açores)* (Lisboa: 2 vols., sl, Universidade dos Açores/Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 2001, University of the Azores/ National Commission for the Commemoration of the Portuguese Discoveries, 2001), Vol.II, pp.337–58; and "Die Paracel- und Spratly-Inseln in Sung-, Yuan- und frühen Ming-Texten: Ein maritimes Grenzgebiet?" in *China and Her Neighbors: Borders, Visions of the Other, Foreign Policy, 10th to 19th Century*, eds Sabine Dabringhaus and Roderich Ptak, South China and Maritime Asia series Vol.4, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Veralg, 1997), pp.159–81.

[69] On this issue, see *Nanhaizhudao diming ziliao huibian,* as well as Han, *Woguo nanhaizhudao,* pp.795.

[70] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerraneé et le Monde Méditerranéen à L'époque de Philippe II,* 2nd ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), Vol.1, pp.94–152.

[71] An analysis of European maps corresponding to the Ming and early and mid-Qing will not be attempted in this paper. For an introduction to some representative maps portraying the South China Sea area, see Tatsuo Urano, *Nankai shoto kokusai funso shi* [International Conflict Over the South China Sea: History, Analysis and Documents] (Tokyo: Tosui shobo, 1997), pp.135–46.

economic and social networks. Geographic knowledge of trading ports, not only in the South China Sea, but also of tributary states and territories all along the Chinese Nanyang was of utmost importance for both official tributary and private trade activities. Therefore, there was a need for documentary sources, maps and sailing routes.

Why, then, is it that in Ming sources, such as the *Navigational Chart of Zheng He,* or in early-Qing works such as *Favorable Winds to Escort, Directions to the South,* or late-Qing sources such as *Outline of the Maritime Circuit* and the *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries,* descriptions of the South China Sea archipelagos were so brief and imprecise? Also, why was the naming of islands and archipelagos so irregular? Chinese historians have certainly recognized this particular feature in the historical sources on the South China Sea in several studies.[69]

Blue-water navigation was, and still is, a dangerous endeavor in these waters where the ports and cities of South China were connected to Southeast Asian ports across an area connecting coastal vassal states, European colonies and the Chinese mainland. In addition, from the early sixteenth century, European powers maintained their links between European centres and their colonies, as well as with southern Chinese ports in this area. In both cases, the South China Sea remained as a region of *coastal* activities. Navigation in this region, first by Asians and Arabs, and later by European sailors, is thought to have remained cabotage, resembling the maritime routes that circumnavigated the Mediterranean Sea routes during the sixteenth century studied by Fernand Braudel.[70] The Arabs, who dominated the spice trade, were experienced seafarers and were able to sail the open seas because of their high level of astronomical knowledge. Littoral sailing was, however, always safer and probably more profitable for small fleets.

However, junks sailing between Chinese ports and European ships en route to and from South and Southeast Asia, did not appear to use the middle section of the South China Sea, particularly where the Spratlys are located. Most likely, crossing the sea was deemed unsafe, when compared with port-to-port cabotage. Some of those who ventured into the shallow coral areas were shipwrecked because the whole area is scattered with dangerous reefs and barren rocky islands. Most of this area was not even properly mapped until the British edited their first sea pilot charts. Understandably, European, Arab, Chinese, and Southeast Asian merchant ships avoided this area. As a result, information on the extent, geography and exact position of these dangerous sailing grounds, particularly around the Spratlys, remained obscure. Thus, Chinese geographical records from the Ming and Qing, *and* European maps (particularly made by Portuguese and British sailors),[71] show the Paracels, Pratas, Macclesfield Bank and the

Spratlys as mere dots or lines. As noted above, there seems to have been a lack of detailed knowledge of the geography of these islands and reefs, as they were regarded as having low importance.

At this point, we must acknowledge that locals had a better knowledge of the islands, even though this has not being given appropriate weight in recent non-Chinese studies of the South China Sea. Apart from the tributary trade, private trade and migration movements that flourished in the South China Sea, coastal and blue-water fishing activities must have been important for local communities. Philippino and Malay fishermen most likely extended their coastal activities to pelagic fishing. However, judging from the available sources (or the lack of them from other claimant countries), it could be stated that those who sailed into the dangerous zones of the South China Sea islands were mainly, if not exclusively, Chinese fishermen.

It is known that the Arabs mastered the sea routes of the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and some of their pilot directions still exist, in particular those of Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Majid and Sulaiman b. Ahmad al-Mahri from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By the nineteenth century, Vietnamese sailing directions also appeared, even though they appear to have limited themselves to the Vietnamese littorals as far as the western coast of the Malay Peninsula.[72] Yet, by far the most detailed studies on sailing routes along the South China Sea islands came from Chinese fishermen themselves.

Chinese navigational guides of the South China Sea islands were transmitted orally between Hainanese fishermen from the mid-Qing, but it is possible that they came from a much earlier period, even the mid-Ming.[73] Chinese sailing directions, as already noted, may also have been significantly influenced by Arab traditions, as it is known that by the mid-fifteenth century some Arab charts and navigational works were already in use for the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.[74]

During the first years of the twentieth century, this Chinese "minor tradition" came to light in the form of a total of eleven navigational guides known now as the *Road Maps* (*Genglu bu* 更路簿 or *Shuilu bu* 水路簿).[75] The authorship of the guides remains unclear, even though some manuscript titles follow the name of their compiler, or that of the individual that possessed the manuscript by the time the main research on the topic was carried out in China during the mid-1970s (see Figure 1 overleaf).

Locals usually made a living by fishing and catching turtles in the Sulu Sea, the Strait of Kalimantan and the Natunas waters, as well as on the south and southwestern margins of the South China Sea. Fishermen from the northern section of the sea—Hainan Island and the coast of

[72] See Geoff Wade, "A Maritime Route in the Vietnamese Text 'Xiem-La Quoc-Lo-Trinh Tap-Luc'," in *Commerce et Navigation en Asie du Sud-Est, XIVe-XIXe siècle,* eds Nguyen The Anh and Yoshiaki Ishizawa (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1999), pp.137–70.

[73] Some of the Chinese sources mentioned in this essay had the two-fold aim of describing lands of the Eastern Ocean and Western Ocean, as well as being instructions, or road maps, to get to them. The *Favorable Winds to Escort*, the *Directions to the South* and the *Records of the Maritime Countries* (Haiguo guangji 海國廣記) are some examples. See Shen Moushang, *Haiguo guangji*, in Zheng Housheng and Zheng Yiyun, *Zheng He xia xiyang ziliao huibian* [Historical Sources on the Voyages of Zheng He to the Western Ocean] (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1980), pp.306-27.

[74] The Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris has two important Arab navigational manuscripts, one from Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Majid (MSS file Arabe 2292, dated 1462), the other from Sulaiman b. Ahmad al-Mahri (MSS file Arabe 2559, dated 1511). Considering that in Southern China, particularly in Hainan, there are important Muslim communities, it may well be that these and other sailing directions were used by Chinese Muslim sailors. On the manuscripts, see Gabriel Ferrand, *Instructions nautiques et routiers arabes et portugais des XVe et XVIe siècles / T. 3 : Introduction à l'astronomie nautique arabe* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1921–1928), pp.198-248. Tibbetts, "The Malay Peninsula as Known to the Arab Geographers," pp.47–57.

[75] *Nanhaizhudao diming ziliao huibian*, pp.88–140. Chinese and Vietnamese measurement of sailing distance shows an interesting similarity, both using the unit *Geng* (Chinese) and *Canh* (Vietnamese) for the equivalent of approximately 60 Chinese *li*. Cheng, *Zhongguo nanhai zhudao*, p.281, Wade, "A Maritime Route in the Vietnamese Text," p.170.

Figure 1 *The Road Map* series

Guide name	Main content	Sailing routes entered	Current depository
Shunfeng de li (*Wang Guozhang*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels, Spratlys Marine seasonal currents	Eastern Sea (Paracels): 42 Northern Sea (Spratlys): 209 Total: 251	South China Normal University
No name (*Lin Hongjin*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels and Spratlys Marine currents chart	Eastern Sea: 49 Northern Sea: 162 Total: 211	South China Normal University
Zhuming dongbei hai genglu bu	Sailing routes for the Paracels, Spratlys and Pratas Marine currents	Total: 135	South China Normal University
Donghai beihai genlu bu (*Li Genshen*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels, Spratlys and Guangzhou	Total: 151 (including 112 routes for the Spratlys)	South China Normal University
No Name (*Su Deliu*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels, Spratlys and Nanyang	Eastern Sea: 29 Northern Sea: 106 Guangdong, Hainan, Zhongnan Peninsula, Nanyang routes: 54 Total: 189	Nanyang Research Institute at Xiamen University, Guangdong Museum
No Name (*Xu Hongfu*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels and East Spratlys (Macclesfield Bank?) Wind currents	Northern Sea: 153 *dong sha tou*: 67 Total: 220	Institute of Aquatic Research, Hainan
Dingluo jingzhen wei (*Yu Yuqing*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels and Spratlys	Eastern Sea: 35 Northern Sea: 65 Total: 100	Nanyang Research Institute at Xiamen University
Xinansha gengbu (*Chen Yongqin*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels and Spratlys	Paracels: 16 Spratlys: 83 Total: 99	Nanyang Research Institute at Xiamen University
Qu xinan sha shuilubu	Sailing routes for the Paracels and Spratlys	Paracels: 13 Spratlys: 74 Total: 87	Guangdong Museum
No Name (*Lu Honglan*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels and Spratlys	Eastern Sea: 66 Northern Sea: 120 Total: 186	Guangdong Museum
No Name (*Peng Zhengka*)	Sailing routes for the Paracels and Spratlys	Eastern Sea: 17 Northern Sea: 200 Total: 217	Guangdong Museum

Source: Cheng, *Zhongguo nanhai zhudao,* pp. 562–63. Guangdong sheng diming weiyuanhui bianji, *Nanhaizhudao diming ziliao huibian,* pp.62–139

mainland Guangdong—used their largely orally transmitted navigational knowledge for regular annual incursions into the Paracels and Spratlys.[76] Those who dared to venture into these dangerous grounds could find relatively detailed information on best seasons for sailing, the position of each insular feature, sailing currents and tides in the *Road Maps*. What these guides also seem to reflect is that Chinese fishermen, mainly from Hainan, incorporated huge sectors of the South China Sea and its archipelagos as an area of sustainable economic exploitation on a regular basis.

Obviously, as navigational guides, these sources (whose authorship remains unknown) do not include information on the role played by Guangdong or Hainan authorities on Chinese fishing activities. Therefore, their value as contributions to the analysis of the history of the sovereignty problem of the islands in question must remain minimal. Although they suggest that Chinese activities took place in the area, they are not sufficient to legitimate ownership, as suggested frequently in current official and academic histories of the conflict. However, these sources open the door for approaching the discussion of "knowing the area" at a deeper level, by supporting the idea that generations of Chinese fishermen had ventured into these dangerous grounds, and even made those islands their place of ultimate rest.

Final Considerations

In the realm of international law, current Chinese (and Taiwanese) historical arguments over the sovereignty of the South China Sea islands clash directly with Vietnamese ones. Hanoi claims that this sea (Bien Dong) the Paracels (Hoang Sa) and the Spratlys (Truong Sa) have belonged to Vietnam since the seventeenth century.[77] Maps that mark the Paracels (then called Bai Cat Vang), allegedly go back to the fifteenth century.[78] Hanoi's own claim of sovereignty over the Paracels and Spratlys shows similarities with China's and Taiwan's, particularly from the early nineteenth century when, supposedly, the Vietnamese central government sanctioned activities by fishermen and survey teams at the islands.[79]

The present author believes that to start unraveling the South China Sea islands conflict, which now involves The Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei as well as China, Taiwan and Vietnam, the discussion should be framed in terms of events that have occurred since the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Examining events further into the past has the potential to enter the realm of myth—especially since the Chinese sourccs are characterized by numerous gaps and silences—where tenuous narratives can crystallize into uncompromising official national histories. For China, the formation of a renewed oceanic identity, directly related to this conflict by actions carried out by the Chinese state, can be traced to the beginning of the last century, as discussed by this author elsewhere.[80]

[76] According to the research conducted in China during the 1970s, the road map of Su Deliu is named after a fisherman from Hainan island who, around 1921 (when he was thirteen years old) obtained this otherwise unnamed text from his ancestors. The same story is repeated in the case of the road map of Lu Honglan, which was the name of another Hainan fisherman born in 1900, who received the original sailing directions from relatives. In the case of the Peng Zhengka road map, it is known that he was at the Spratlys when the French occupied nine of these insular formations in 1933, see *Nanhaizhudao diming ziliao huibian*, pp.124–125. On the 1933 French occupation, see Han, *Nanhai zhudao shidi yanjiu*, pp.104–115; Stein Tonnesson, "The South China Sea in the Age of European Decline," *Modern Asian Studies* 40, 1 (2006): 3–8; Ulises Granados, "As China Meets the Southern Sea Frontier: Ocean Identity in the Making, 1902–1937," *Pacific Affairs* 78, 3 (Fall 2005): 451–52.

[77] Republic of Vietnam. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *White Paper on the Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands* (Saigon: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1975), pp.16. Luu Van Loi, *The Sino-Vietnamese Difference on the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1996), pp.33.

[78] Thanh Thuy, "The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes Are Vietnamese Territory," in *The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes (Paracels and Spratly)* (Hanoi: Vietnam Courier, 1981), p.15

[79] *White Paper on the Hoang Sa*, pp.27–35; Luu, *The Sino-Vietnamese Difference*, pp.33–47.

[80] Ulises Granados, "As China Meets the Southern Sea Frontier".

Ulises Granados

Associate Professor
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
University of Tokyo, Japan
ug▪xiaohu@yahoo.com

The South China Sea, until the First Opium War, was an area of utmost importance, where Asians and Europeans engaged in tributary and private trade, and where fishing and migration took place. However, as shown here, the islands and coral reefs of this area remained far from subject to official Chinese control. In a maritime area where economic activities flourished, the South China Sea islands became mere reference points, far from customary navigational routes due to safety concerns. These islands also seem to have been outside the effective, real administration of the Chinese authorities: they were far away and dangerous places, avoided by large ships and trading junks. However, they continued to be fishing grounds for generations of local people who made a living there. It was not until colonial pressure peaked in the region with the British, French and Japanese presence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the South China Sea re-emerged as an area of geo-strategic importance.[81] It is only since then that the Chinese authorities have evinced a real interest in the islands, and only since the first Chinese naval circuit to the Paracels and Pratas in 1909 that the "knowing the area – ruling the area" dichotomy has gradually been blurred. Latterly, of course, this confusion has served the higher political purpose of China's national interest. Thus, international law specialists have a duty to examine the historical record in a scrupulous manner, in order to provide answers and acceptable solutions to this delicate territorial imbroglio.

[81] Marwyn Samuels points out that "by the eighteenth century, and culminating in the nineteenth century confrontations with Britain, France and Japan, Chinese interest in the South China Sea islands became less a matter of trading networks and navigational hazards, and more a function of strategic and political concern". Samuels, *Contest for the South China Sea*, p.24.