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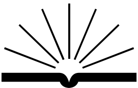
The Chinese State at the Borders



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Ming China and Its Border with Annam

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Some time during the Chenghua reign (1465-87) of the Ming dynasty, a young man named Wu Rui was on his way from Hainan Island to the Chinese mainland when his boat was blown terribly off course. Found adrift near the shore of Annam (present-day northern Vietnam),[1] Wu Rui and his twelve companions were promptly captured by the coastal patrol and brought to the Annamese capital at Thang Long (now Hanoi). For their alleged transgression, Wu's fellow travellers were sentenced to set up agrarian colonies, while Wu Rui himself was ordered to be castrated. How Wu survived his years in the Annamese palace we can only guess, but his service was evidently deemed valuable. After the death of the king of Annam in 1497, Wu Rui was even offered a chance to serve as a military superintendent in the northern region. But just as he was finally in a position of power, Wu learned from one of his soldiers a way back to China. Determined to return home, Wu Rui trekked for nine days, often through mountainous terrain, and arrived in the native domain (*tu si*) of Long Zhou in the southern province of Guangxi. But Wu's ordeals would not end just yet. While Wu Rui was eager to make contact with Ming officials, Wei Chen, the native chief who had offered Wu shelter, was scheming to trade him back to Annam. Fortunately for Wu Rui, before Wei had a chance to strike a deal with the agents sent by the Annamese court, a chieftain from a nearby domain decided to seize Wu and turn him over to the local authorities. As a result, Wei Chen was ordered to be punished, and Wu Rui was brought to the Ming capital at Beijing where he was given a post in one of the eunuch offices in the palace.[2]

This intriguing if somewhat cryptic account found in the *Veritable Records of the Ming* (*Ming shi lu*) – the most important official record of the period we are concerned with – certainly raises more questions than it answers. What, for instance, prompted Wu Rui and his fellow Hainan natives to cross the south China strait? Did they indeed intend, as Wu claimed, to travel to Qin Zhou at the western end of the province of Guangdong to engage in

regular trade? Or were they in fact involved, as in the cases of many who lived along China's southern coast, in prohibited dealings with foreign countries? How typical, or atypical, was Wu Rui's experience? Most mainland-bound travellers from Hainan, one suspects, would not consider the risk of being castrated as high (otherwise, most would probably stay home). But just as clearly, Wu and his companions were not the only ones who had ever been caught on the wrong side of the drift. To cite one example, not long before Wu Rui was captured by the Annamese patrol, according to another report in the *Veritable Records*, more than a hundred men from China who were suspected of having engaged in illicit trade had also been detained by Annam. Apart from questions related directly to Wu's ordeals, what types of strategic information was Wu Rui able to pass on to the Ming and how valuable were they? No doubt, it had been the practice of both the Ming and Annamese courts to dispatch agents to spy on each other. But how intensive were such cross-border activities? And how had such efforts shaped the relationships between the two states?[3]

For the purpose of this chapter, the most interesting set of questions raised by the experience of Wu Rui has to do with both the idea and the reality of the border. As it is well recognized, borders are almost never natural but, rather, are "constructed" in the broadest sense of the word. In northern China, as Arthur Waldron has demonstrated, even as seemingly timeless and permanent an edifice of border division as the Great Wall was, as it turned out, largely a product of political compromises of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But if the construction of the northern border must be understood within the broader contexts of Ming-Mongol relations as well as of the internal dynamics of the Ming polity, how should one begin to tell the story of the making of China's southern boundary? This chapter does not attempt to offer a comprehensive answer; what it does attempt to do is to explain how Ming rulers and their agents defined and defended a particular southern border. To be sure, the boundary between China and Annam was never as serious a military concern for the Ming court as was that between the centralizing state and the Mongols. But though the border between China and Annam would continue to be permeable (in the early fifteenth century, the Ming sought but failed to colonize the southern kingdom), over time, as we will see, Ming emperors and their officials did try hard to demarcate China's southern boundary.[4]

Imagining the Border

Even though, almost right from the start, the Ming court had recognized Annam as a self-governing kingdom, Ming rulers did not at first appear to be especially concerned about demarcating and defending China's southern border. This neglect is not surprising for at least three reasons. First, although the Ming forces had managed to bring down the Yuan dynasty

and beat the Mongol remnants back to the steppes, early Ming rulers such as the Hongwu (r. 1368-98) and Yongle (r. 1403-24) emperors were clearly far more concerned about the continual military threats from the north than about the potential troubles in the south. Second, even though Ming authorities would eventually extend to the southern border region their administrative and military apparatuses, given the inherent limits of the centralizing state, it actually took the Ming court some time before it could establish a semblance of order in its southern provinces. Third, in border areas where the Ming authorities were unable or unwilling to assert direct control, Ming rulers would come to rely on native domains – and the chieftains who ruled them – to maintain order. Not only would the Ming authorities increasingly depend on such *tu si* to provide soldiers for its military campaigns, but it would also come to regard such native domains as buffers between the centralizing state and its neighbouring kingdoms.[5]

To begin to understand how early Ming rulers conceived the southern border, let us consider the case of Siming and its territorial disputes with Annam. As was true for the institution of native chieftaincy in general, relations between the centralizing state and the Siming domain had, from the start, been founded on mutual benefits. In exchange for a degree of order in China's border regions, Ming emperors were willing to continue the Yuan dynasty practices of offering native chieftains official titles and letting them rule their domains with relative autonomy. The arrangement of native chieftaincy was no doubt a double-edged sword. When Huang Guangping (d. 1393), the teenage chieftain of Siming in southwest Guangxi (just across from Annam), was accused by Ming officials in 1392 of having first ordered and then covered up the killing of another chieftain, apparently the most the Hongwu emperor could do was to grant the young chief a pardon. Meanwhile, the institution of chieftaincy did allow Ming rulers to buffer themselves from the immediate problems of border control. As we will see, the Ming court would still be called upon to resolve disputes, but early Ming emperors were clearly willing to let native chieftains handle the task of defending the southern border.[6]

The case of Siming is interesting, in part, because it helps us understand what early Ming rulers and their agents saw as the major sources of tension in the southern border region. Consider the 1396 memorial submitted by the chieftain Huang Guangcheng (d. 1413), brother of Guangping, concerning the latest territorial disputes between Siming and Annam. Here, two main problems are laid out. The first and more immediate one, said the chieftain, had to do with the practice of the people of Annam to encroach on areas once under the control of Siming. In particular, by seizing control of the counties of Qiuwen, Ruao, Qingyuan, Yuan, and Tuo (all located in present-day northern Vietnam), not only had the people of Annam brought terror to Siming, but they had also deprived the Ming court of its tax

revenues. The second and more general problem, according to Huang Guangcheng, had to do with the propensity of the people of Annam to disregard the boundary between China and the southern kingdom. To be sure, few people in the Ming period could actually say for certain where the "bronze pillar" that had long been thought to mark China's southern border had once lain. But if the physical pillar allegedly erected by the Han dynasty general Ma Yuan (14 BCE-49) could no longer be found, according to Huang, the people of Annam should still observe the boundary that had long been established in the southern region.[7]

The case of Siming is also interesting because it shows how Ming and Annamese rulers had rather distinct views about where the border between the two countries should lie. Despite his reluctance to intervene, by the winter of 1396-97, the Hongwu emperor did decide that it would be useful to dispatch two envoys – Chen Cheng (*jin shi* 1394) and Lü Rang (*jin shi* 1391) – to the southern kingdom to order its ruler to return the disputed territory to the Siming domain. The embassy would produce no concrete results, but the correspondence between Chen Cheng and the king of Annam (who was then in fact dominated by the regent Le Quy Ly) does offer us a glimpse of how each side approached the problem of border demarcation. From the Ming perspective, the basis for arbitration should be the vast corpus of Chinese historical records. According to Chen Cheng, not only was it evident that as early as the Han dynasty the general Ma Yuan had marked the southern border of China by erecting a bronze pillar, but it was also apparent that, over the course of the Tang, Song, and Yuan periods, the territory that would come under dispute had already been incorporated into the centralizing state. From the point of view of Annam, however, the basis for determination should not be the inconsistent historical records but the actual practices on the ground. From the Annamese perspective, not only was it impossible, given the distant and often faulty memories, to determine the location of the bronze pillar purportedly erected by Ma Yuan, but it was also disingenuous for Siming (and the Ming) to claim jurisdiction over the contested territory, especially when the five counties under dispute had long been submitting taxes to Annam.[8]

But from our perspective, what is most noteworthy about the case of Siming is clearly the reluctance of early Ming rulers to use force to defend and demarcate China's southern border. After the failed embassy of 1396-97, some court officials did suggest to the Ming ruler that he launch a military campaign against Annam. But the Hongwu emperor, following his own advice that the Ming should not expend its resources in exchange for "the military glories of the moment," decided in the end not to pursue the matter. As we have seen, this reluctance on the part of early Ming rulers to use force in the south must be understood within the broader context of Ming border relations. But this cautious approach, I argue, must also be set against

the background of the often convoluted politics of native chieftaincy. In 1404, the chieftain of Siming would complain to the Ming court that the people of Annam had seized control of yet other areas of the native domain. For his part, the newly enthroned Yongle emperor would again order the ruler of Annam to return to Siming areas that did not belong to the kingdom. But while the Ming ruler would in his various pronouncements side with the domain of Siming, it is unclear to me that he was entirely convinced by the claims made by the native chieftain.[9]

The Yongle emperor did eventually decide in late 1406 to launch a war against Annam. But while the Ming ruler would cite the Annamese encroachment on Siming as one major reason for the attack, the war against Annam in the early fifteenth century was ultimately *not* about demarcating and defending China's southern border. For the Yongle emperor, who himself had usurped the Ming throne a few years earlier and who was no doubt particularly sensitive to any challenges to Ming authority, the war was about the continual deception of the Annamese regime. It was about how Ho (Le) Quy Ly – the one-time regent to the king of Annam – had deceived the Ming court by claiming that the original ruling house had died out, and it was about how the rulers of Annam had, despite periodic warnings from Ming rulers, repeatedly attacked the neighbouring kingdom of Champa. The war against Annam was no doubt about borders and boundaries. But in the early fifteenth century, the Yongle emperor was clearly less concerned about defending the physical boundary between China and Annam than about reinforcing the political hierarchy that had long characterized the relations between the centralizing state and its neighbours.[10]

Demarcating the Border

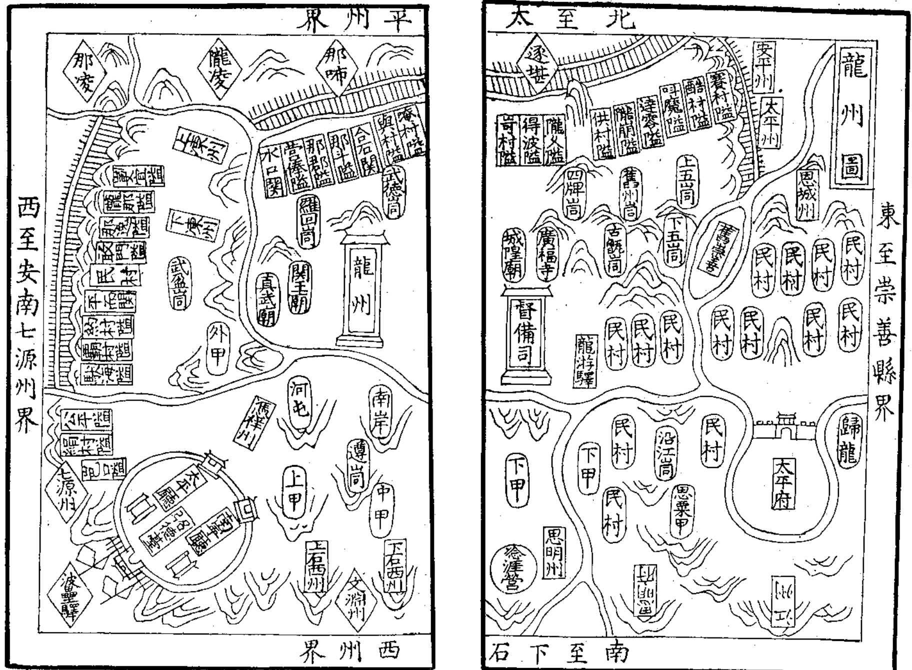
If the Hongwu and Yongle emperors had not been especially concerned about defending and demarcating the southern border, following the retreat of the Ming state from Annam in 1427-28, their successors were clearly much more conscious of doing so. This can be observed from the designation by the Ming court of the native domains of Pingxiang and Long Zhou (located just north of Siming) as the official contact zone between China and the southern kingdom, and it can also be noted in the increased efforts by Ming rulers and officials in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to resolve territorial disputes in the southern borderland.

To understand how later Ming rulers and officials sought to demarcate and defend the southern border, consider their efforts to control cross-border traffic. In time, not only would the Ming court require all Annamese envoys who wished to travel to the imperial capital to first pass through the domains of Pingxiang and Long Zhou – and not through other potential points of entry in the provinces of Yunnan and Guangdong – but it would also designate the Pass of Subduing the South (Zhennan Guan, now known

as the Friendship Pass) in southwest Pingxiang as the official gateway. In 1539, for instance, when the Annamese ruler Mac Dang Doanh (r. 1530-40), son of Mac Dang Dung (1483-1541), who had overthrown the Le dynasty in 1527, decided to seek formal recognition from the centralizing state, it was at the Zhennan Pass that Ming officials would receive his envoys. Likewise, in 1563, when it was time for the Ming court to recognize a new Annamese ruler, it was made clear to the Mac ruling house that an official patent would only be issued if the new king would receive it in person at the Pass. And on occasions when Ming officials were required to accompany envoys from Annam back to the southern kingdom, it was at the Zhennan Pass that members of the travelling party would part ways.[11]

To see how Ming rulers and officials went about demarcating and defending the southern border, consider also some of the contemporary visual representations. No doubt, early Ming dynasty maps are in general relatively generic. For example, in the illustration of Guangxi found in the imperially sponsored *Union Gazetteer of the Great Ming* (*Da Ming yi tong zhi*, 1461), the border with Annam is simply indicated at the lower-left margin by the words "southwest to the border of Annam" (*xi nan di Annan jie*). Even in the 1531 edition of the *General Gazetteer of Guangxi*, the border with Annam (Jiaozhi) is identified in the provincial map simply by a small rectangular box labelled "border of Jiaozhi." By contrast, illustrations included in later Ming sources are often more detailed. In the map of Long Zhou (which covers Pingxiang as well) in the *Essential Information for Governing Guangxi* (see figure), not only do the compilers of the early seventeenth-century military handbook identify many of the strategic passes that marked the border between Guangxi and Annam (see the rows of rectangles at the top and left-hand parts of the illustration), but they also indicate, in the lower left-hand corner, the official gateway between the centralizing state and the southern kingdom (an earlier version of the map found in a sixteenth-century handbook would clearly identify the gateway as the Pass of Subduing the South). The illustration of Long Zhou in question is of course far from "accurate," but it does demonstrate the level of attention late Ming officials paid to demarcating the southern border.[12]

In addition to more consciously demarcating the southern border, rulers and officials in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries evidently also found it necessary to pay more attention to the territorial disputes at the borderlands. Consider the case concerning the native domains of Ha Tu Lang (Chinese: Xiasilang) and Anping. According to reports found in the *Veritable Records*, by 1438, not only had people from the domain of Ha Tu Lang (in northern Annam) snatched a good number of men, women, and livestock from the Anping domain (just north of Long Zhou in Guangxi), but they had also taken control of part of the Anping territory. The initial response of the Zhengtong emperor (r. 1436-49) was predictable: in an edict delivered by



The Ming border with Annam

Source: Yang Fang (*jin shi* 1577) et al., eds., *Dian Yue yao zuan* [Essential information for governing Guangxi] (1602) (reprint; Beijing: Shu mu wen xian chu ban she, [1988]), *juan* 4, before *ye* 19. Annamese areas are identified by diamonds.

two special envoys, the Ming ruler demanded that the ruler of Annam order the chieftain of Ha Tu Lang to immediately return to Anping all the ill-gotten gains. But two aspects of the way the Ming approached the case are worth noting. First, the Ming emperor made it clear – albeit in the subtlest of language – that this time the fight was not between the centralizing state and the southern kingdom but between two borderland native domains. This distinction was significant because the focus now was less on punishing Annam than it was on restoring order on the southern border. Second, despite their rhetoric, Ming rulers and officials seemed to realize that the faults might not have lain entirely with the native domain in Annam. For the Ming court, what was important was to have the chieftains of Ha Tu Lang and Anping agree again on a common border.[13]

Consider also the case involving Ha Tu Lang and Long Zhou. According to reports found in the *Veritable Records*, disputes between the two native domains could be traced to at least 1448. That year, the king of Annam, no doubt in response to the troubles at the border as well as to the pressure from the Ming court, reported that he had succeeded in restoring order in the region by handing back eleven villages to Long Zhou and six to Ha Tu

Lang. But territorial disputes between the two domains would apparently persist. At issue, by 1472, was the alleged continual occupation of part of Long Zhou by the people of Ha Tu Lang. But while the Ming court would again order the ruler of Annam to rein in the chieftains at the border, as in the case concerning Anping, what seemed important to the Ming emperor was to have officials from both the centralizing state and the southern kingdom determine anew the proper boundary between the two native domains.[14]

Consider, as our last example, the case involving the native domains of Xialei and Guishun just to the northwest of Anping in southwest Guangxi. According to the records, by the early 1580s, frequent complaints had been filed by the ruler of Annam, Mac Hau Hop (r. 1562-92), concerning the alleged periodic encroachment on Annamese territory by the people of Xialei and Guishun. While such claims are impossible for us to verify, what is noteworthy are the responses by the Longqing (r. 1567-72) and Wanli (r. 1573-1620) emperors. To restore order in the southern border region, the Ming rulers and their officials decided it would be better for the centralizing state to "cede" to Annam more than 120 villages from the domains of Xialei and Guishun. Thus, if in the fifteenth century Ming rulers and officials still found it beneficial and credible to adopt the rhetoric – if not the practice – of an omnipotent state, by the late-sixteenth century, the Ming court would seem almost eager to rid itself of unnecessary troubles by redrawing the boundary between China and the southern kingdom.[15]

As we have seen, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ming rulers and officials could be quite practical in how they demarcated the southern border. But just as the Ming court was willing to let native domains serve as buffers between the centralizing state and Annam, it could also be markedly uncompromising, especially when the population or territory under dispute was, in theory, under the direct control of the Ming authorities. For instance, in the early 1440s, when it was brought to the attention of the court that nearly three hundred households from the area of Qin Zhou in western Guangdong had, since the start of the Xuande reign (1426-35), submitted themselves to Annam, it was decided that the Ming must insist that all such households be brought back under the control of the centralizing state. Similarly, in the early 1540s, when the Mac ruling house was seeking formal recognition from the Ming court, it was made explicit to the Annamese ruler that he must first return to Ming control four particular settlements that were deemed to have long been part of the Qin Zhou area.[16]

Crossing the Border

Despite attempts by later Ming rulers and officials to demarcate and defend the border with Annam, efforts to deter unauthorized traffic had only limited success. To be sure, not all unofficial border crossings were deemed

undesirable. Especially after the retreat of the Ming forces from the southern kingdom in 1427-28, chieftains who chose to cross the border to pledge allegiance to the centralizing state were particularly welcome. In 1434, in response to the news that two Annamese native officials, along with more than three hundred of their family members and followers, had crossed into the Ming territory to submit to the state, the Xuande emperor was notably accommodating. Not only should the chieftains and their followers be allowed to settle where they desired, the Ming ruler decreed, but they should also be supplied with whatever provisions they might need. Similarly, in 1437, in response to a recommendation that yet other newly arrived chieftains from Annam be given land to cultivate, the Xuande emperor was careful to note that such chieftains should be exempted from corvée labour and taxes and that, to help them settle down, they should be provided with two years' worth of food grain.[17]

Most unauthorized border crossings, of course, were not only undesirable but were also seen as threats to the Ming order. As can be seen from the cases concerning Siming and other domains in Guangxi discussed earlier, the threats were most apparent when people from Annam decided to cross the border to attack or seize control of Ming settlements. But the threats were evident also, from the perspective of the centralizing state, when people from the Ming ventured illegally into Annam. The troubles associated with the domain of Long Zhou in the 1470s are a case in point. Even though people from Long Zhou had complained to the Ming court about being encroached upon by their Annamese neighbours, according to a memorial submitted by the minister of war, Yu Zijun (1429-89), it was the residents of Long Zhou who had in fact first travelled across the river to take up farming in the Annamese territory. It was only after they had been forced by the villagers on the other side of the border to give up their newly acquired land, Yu claimed, that the people of Long Zhou began to accuse their Annamese neighbours for encroachment. From the point of view of the Ming authorities, the threats associated with unauthorized border crossings were not limited to encroachment. To judge from the records, what Ming rulers and their officials were most concerned about was actually the prospect of collaboration between unscrupulous elements from both sides of the border. Though the Ming court would issue repeated warnings against unauthorized border crossings, such frequent exhortations only serve to remind us how ineffective the injunctions must have been.[18]

One reason the Ming court had difficulties deterring unauthorized border traffic had to do with the lure of profits. Although Ming rulers had from early on forbidden their subjects to deal privately with foreign countries, cross-border trade, whether overland or maritime, would continue to thrive throughout the period. In the case of south China, a major source of illicit

trade, especially in the fifteenth century, were the pearl-beds located off the coast of Guangdong province. While the records offer only a glimpse of the goings-on, it is evident from the reports by officials that a complex trading network had evolved over time. And though it is hard to gauge the scale of the illicit pearl trade – a report dated to 1457 notes that pirates sailing in ships with masts could be seen daily plundering areas where pearl-beds could be found – it is clear that people from both Annam and China were involved in this network. To be sure, Ming rulers and officials did try to put a halt to the cross-border traffic. But as the king of Annam acknowledged in 1471 in a rare moment of candour, given the need for people along the coast to go out to the sea to make a living, it was simply impossible for government authorities to impose firm control.[19]

Another reason the Ming court had difficulties securing its border with Annam had to do with the institution of chieftaincy. The *tu si* system (here I will leave aside the institution as it was practised in Annam), as we have seen, was a double-edged sword. Just as it allowed the Ming authorities to claim a degree of order in the southern border region without having to expend the limited military resources of the state, it also helped undermine that very stability by fostering both inter-domain and cross-border rivalries. As a result, even though the native domains did in general serve as buffers between the centralizing state and the southern kingdom, over time the desire of chieftains and their subjects to extend the boundaries of their domains had clearly led to much tension and violence in the border region.

To understand the dynamics and extent of such tension and violence, especially in the late-Ming period, let us examine a few episodes of cross-border turmoil as they were reported by the indefatigable traveller Xu Hongzu (Xu Xiake, 1586-1641). Consider first the case of the native domain of Guishun not far northwest of Pingxiang and Long Zhou. According to Xu Hongzu, troubles linked to the domain of Guishun could be traced to as early as the 1620s. At the time, in Annam, the Le ruling house had been back in power and the Mac clan had, as a result, been pushed further and further up the highlands of Cao Bang (Chinese: Gao Ping) just across the border from Guishun. Troubles for the domain of Guishun began when its chieftain decided to offer a refuge for the leader of the Mac clan in exchange for a handsome payment. The plan backfired, however, when troops sent by the Le ruling house descended upon Guishun and forced its chieftain to hand over the wife of the Mac leader (the leader himself had fled earlier). Angered by the perceived betrayal, the Mac leader returned and launched an attack against Guishun. The chieftain of Guishun was eventually killed. At the end, according to Xu Hongzu, even though the Ming authorities would decide to intervene on behalf of the native domain, half of the territory of Guishun would fall under the control of the Mac leader.[20]

Consider also the case of the domain of Longying, which was located not far north of Pingxiang and Long Zhou. Unlike the case of Guishun, the troubles in Longying began not from outside but, rather, from inside the native domain. According to Xu Hongzu, it was in 1634, three years before he began his travel in Guangxi, that a power struggle erupted in Longying. It happened that Zhao Zhengjin, brother of the chieftain Zhao Zhengli, had long had his eyes set on the chieftaincy. When Zhengli finally died without a son of his own, Zhengjin took it as his cue to seize power. Not only did he conspire with the widow of Zhengli to conceal the truth from the Ming court, he also brought in military reinforcements from the Mac clan of Cao Bang to help suppress any dissent. Even though Zhengjin's deed would eventually be exposed and punished by the Ming authorities, the domain of Longying, according to Xu, was devastated as a result.[21]

Finally, consider the case concerning Guishun and the domain of Tianzhou. The problem in this case, according to Xu Hongzu, had to do with the desire of the chieftains of both Guishun and Tianzhou to seize control of yet another domain whose chieftain had just died without leaving an heir. But since neither Guishun nor Tianzhou had a clear military advantage over the other, both decided to seek help from the Mac clan of Cao Bang. What this and other cases discussed show is not only how wide the gap had become between the theory and the reality of the "chieftain system" but also how fluid boundaries in the southern border region had become in the late Ming.[22]

Borders Hard and Soft

After all, how "hard" or "soft" was China's southern border? To answer this question, it is worth remembering that, as early as 1373, the Hongwu emperor had already included in the original version of his *Ancestral Injunctions* an explicit instruction forbidding future rulers from invading Annam or other similar countries. Although the wording of the injunction would be modified in subsequent editions, it is evident that, right from the start, the Ming founder had recognized Annam as a politically and territorially distinct entity. It is also worth noting that, in addition to the perceived physical boundary between China and Annam, it was also part of the official discourse, especially from the mid-fifteenth century on, to emphasize the inherent or "natural" distinctions between "Chinese" (*hua*) and "non-Chinese" (*yi*). In a memorial submitted in 1537 by Vice-Minister Tang Zhou (*jin shi* 1502), for instance, while Tang, a Hainan native, offers a list of seven reasons the Ming should not again go to war against Annam, one of the most compelling ones, according to the vice minister, is the fact that, as in the case of heaven and earth, there exists a "natural boundary" (*zi ran zhi xian*) between hua and yi. Although Tang Zhou does not find it necessary to

explain further in his memorial the idea of "natural boundary," it is clear from other writings of the time that he had in mind not just the physical separation between "Chinese" and "non-Chinese" people but also the distinct "nature" of hua and yi.[23]

At the same time, one may consider the southern border "soft" for at least two reasons. First, even though Ming officials would emphasize the distinctions between hua and yi, most would never retreat from the rhetoric of the civilizing influence of the centralizing state. To many an observer, given the right conditions, it was possible for any "non-Chinese" to adopt the practices of the "Chinese." Second, although well-meaning Ming officials would, from time to time, recommend strengthening the border defence in the south, having long depended on native chieftains and their domains to serve as buffers, the Ming court was simply unprepared to commit its own regular military forces to defending the southern border. What this study of the Ming construction of its border with Annam shows is that, even though Chinese rulers and their agents had a fairly firm notion of a political-cum-cultural boundary, it was not always possible for them to define it clearly or to defend it effectively.

Notes

1 Since my primary concern here is the Ming construction of the southern border, I have, for the sake of consistency, followed the Ming convention of referring to the southern kingdom as Annam (or Jiaozhi) rather than as Dai Viet. To avoid cluttering the text, I have left out the diacritical marks in my transliteration of Vietnamese names. Research for this chapter has been greatly facilitated by 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, 2005), available from http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/. Although specialists should always check the translations against the original texts, Wade's impressive undertaking has made the most important official record of the Ming period much more accessible and useful.

2 For the ordeals of Wu Rui, see *Ming shi lu* [Veritable records of the Ming] (1418 to mid-17th century) (Taipei: Zhong yang yan jiu yuan li shi yu yan yan jiu suo, 1961-66), *Xiaozong shi lu*, 153:1b-2a (10 September 1499).

3 For the report on the Chinese detainees in Annam, see *Ming shi lu*, *Xianzong shi lu*, 106:7-8a (1 September 1472). For the use of spies, see, for example, *Ming shi lu*, *Xianzong shi lu*, 138:3b (9 March 1479).

4 For the Great Wall, see Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For an introduction to the relations between Ming China and Annam, see Wang Gungwu, "Ming Foreign Relations: Southeast Asia," in *The Cambridge History of China*, edited by Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, vol. 8, *The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644,* pt. 2, 301-32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a Vietnamese perspective, see Keith W. Taylor, "The Early Kingdoms," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, edited by Nicholas Tarling, vol. 1, pt. 1: *From Early Times to c. 1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 149-52. For more systematic studies, see the chapters by Yamamoto Tatsurō, Fujiwara Riichirō, and Ōsawa Kazuo in Yamamoto Tatsurō, ed., *Betonamu Chūgoku Kankeishi* [History of international relations between Vietnam and China] (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1975). For a useful but far from comprehensive source book, see Xiao Dehao and Huang Zheng, eds., *Zhong Yue bian jie li shi zi liao xuan bian* [Selective documents on the border history of China and

Vietnam] (Beijing: She hui ke xue wen xian chu ban she, 1993). One of the first major studies in English of the Ming colonization of Annam is of course Alexander Woodside, "Early Ming Expansionism (1406-1427): China's Abortive Conquest of Vietnam," *Papers on China* 17 (1963): 1-37. For a recent study of the history of Sino-Vietnamese relations, see Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

5 For the official recognition of the kingdom of Annam, see *Ming shi lu*, *Taizu shi lu*, 43:3 (23 July 1369). For the Ming-Mongol relations, see Morris Rossabi, "The Ming and Inner Asia," in Twitchett and Mote, *The Cambridge History of China*, 224-41.

6 For Siming and the institution of native chieftaincy, see Leo K. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chap. 3. For Huang Guangping, see *Ming shi lu*, *Taizu shi lu*, 221:3 (12 October 1392).

7 For the disputes between Siming and Annam, see *Ming shi lu*, *Taizu shi lu*, 137:5b-6a (24 June 1381), 249:2b-3a (31 December 1396). For the myths surrounding the "bronze pillar," see Edward H. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird: T'ang Images of the South* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 98. For Ma Yuan and his cult, see Donald S. Sutton, "A Case of Literati Piety: The Ma Yuan Cult from High-Tang to High-Qing," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 11 (1989): 79-114. For an early reference to the pillar by the Ming founding emperor, see *Ming shi lu*, *Taizu shi lu*, 51:8b-9a (10 May 1370). For confusions over the location of the pillar(s), see, for example, Li Xian (1408-66), *Da Ming yi tong zhi* [Union gazetteer of the Great Ming] (Taipei: Wen hai chu ban she, 1965 [1461]), 85:23b, 90:6a; Wei Jun (*jin shi* 1604), *Qiao nan suo ji* [Miscellaneous notes on Guangxi] (pref. 1612), Bai bu cong shu ji cheng ed. (Taipei: Yi wen yin shu guan, 1966 [reprint]), *shang*:15-16a.

8 For the Ming embassy, see *Ming shi lu*, *Taizu shi lu*, 250:3b-7a (20 March 1397). For Chen Cheng (Ch'en Ch'eng), see L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 144-45. For his correspondence with the king of Annam, see Chen Cheng, *Chen Zhushan xian sheng wen ji* [Collected writings of Chen Cheng] (Jinan: Qi Lu shu she chu ban she, 1997 [reprint]), *juan* 1. For a transcription of the letters exchanged, see Wang Jiguang, "Hongwu san shi nian Zhong Yue ling tu jiao she de yuan shi wen jian" [Primary documents concerning the border disputes between China and Vietnam during the thirtieth year of the Hongwu reign (1397)], *Zhongguo bian jian shi di yan jiu* 14.4 (2004), 119-23.

9 For the injunction by the Hongwu emperor against invading Annam and other countries, see Zhu Guozhen (1557-1632), comp., *Huang Ming da xun ji* [Imperial instructions of the Great Ming], 1:3-4, collected in *Huang Ming shi gai* [General history of the Great Ming] (Yangzhou: Jiangsu guang ling gu ji ke yin she, 1992 [1632]). For the complaint by Siming and the reaction of the Yongle emperor, see *Ming shi lu*, *Taizong shi lu*, 30:3b (11 May 1404), 32:3a (25 July 1404). According to an official history of Dai Viet, perhaps to appease the Yongle emperor, in 1405 the southern kingdom did "cede" to the Ming a total of fifty-nine villages. See Ngo Si Lien, *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* [Complete history of the Great Viet], edited by Chen Jinghe [Ch'en Ching-ho] (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo Fuzoku Tōyōgaku Bunken Sentaa, 1984-86 [pref. 1479, 1665, 1697, 1884]), *ban ky*, 8.485.

10 For the official rationale for invading Annam, see *Ming shi lu*, *Taizong shi lu*, 60:1-4a (19 November 1406). For background, see John K. Whitmore, *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming (1371-1421)* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1985); Wang Gungwu, "Ming Foreign Relations," 307-17.

11 For the importance of the Zhennan Pass, see *Ming shi lu*, *Shizong shi lu*, 221:16-17a (14 March 1539), 521:3b (3 June 1563); *Shenzong shi lu*, 47:4a (3 March 1576); *Xizong shi lu,* 17:13a (27 January 1622). For a Vietnamese perspective, see Ngo Si Lien, *Dai Viet su ky toan shu*, *ban ky*, 17.909-10. For visual depictions of the Pass, see Feng Shiyang (fl. 1541), ed., *Annan lai wei tu ce* [Album concerning the submission of Annam] (Beijing: Shu mu wen xian chu ban she, 1988 [1571]). For Mac Dang Dung (Mac Dang-dung), see *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1029-35.

12 Li Xian, *Da Ming yi tong zhi*, *juan* 83, before page 1; Huang Zuo, ed., *Guangxi tong zhi* [General gazetteer of Guangxi] (Beijing: Shu mu wen xian chu ban she, 1988 [1531]),

1:1b-2a. For an early version of the map of Long Zhou discussed, see Ying Jia (1494-1554), Ling Yunyi (*jin shi* 1547), and Liu Yaohui (1522-85), eds., *Cangwu zong du jun men zhi* [Record of the Office of the Supreme Commander at Cangwu] (Beijing: Quan guo tu shu guan wen xian shu wei fu zhi zhong xin, 1991 [1581]), 4:57.

13 For the case of Ha Tu Lang and Anping, see *Ming shi lu*, *Yingzong shi lu*, 43:2a (25 June 1438), 54:1 (13 May, 1439), 54:3b (22 May 1439), 95:1b (7 September 1442).

14 For the case of Ha Tu Lang and Long Zhou, see *Ming shi lu*, *Yingzong shi lu*, 166:3b-4b (15 June 1448); *Xianzong shi lu*, 104:9b-10a (28 June 1472).

15 For the case of Xialei and Guishun, see *Ming shi lu*, *Shenzong shi lu*, 145:4a (22 February 1584), 162:6 (22 July 1585), 178:2 (12 October 1586); Qu Jiusi (1546-1617), *Wanli wu gong lu* [Record of the military accomplishments during the Wanli reign] (Taipei: Yi wen yin shu guan, 1980 [1612]), 4.400-26.

16 For the case of the 1440s, see *Ming shi lu*, *Yingzong shi lu*, 72:5 (9 November 1440), 90:2 (18 April 1442). For the case of the 1540s, see *Ming shi lu*, *Shizong shi lu*, 236:2-3a (11 May 1540), 248:1b-5a (29 April 1541), 268:3 (16 December 1542).

17 For the border crossings of Annamese chieftains, see *Ming shi lu*, *Xuanzong shi lu*, 109:3b-4a (17 April 1434); *Ming shi lu, Yingzong shi lu* 36:2a (3 December 1437).

18 For the memorial by Yu Zijun, see Wang Sen (1653-1726), ed., *Yuexi wen zhai* [Anthology of belle-lettres of Guangxi] (ca. 1704), Ying yin Wen yuan ge Si ku quan shu ed. (Taipei: Taiwan Shang wu yin shu guan, 1986 [reprint]), 5:23b-27a.

19 For pronouncements against private dealings, see, for example, *Ming shi lu*, *Taizu shi lu*, 205:4a (3 December 1390), 252:2b (30 April 1397); *Xuanzong shi lu*, 78:6a (2 June 1431). For reports of illicit trade between people from China and Annam, see *Ming shi lu*, *Yingzong shi lu*, 163:2a (8 March 1448), 279:7b-8a (6 July 1457), 317:4b-5a (1 August 1460); *Xianzong shi lu*, 92:1b-2a (26 June 1471). For a discussion, see Fujiwara Riichirō, "Reichō zenki no Min to no kankei (1428-1527)" [Early relations between the Le dynasty and the Ming], in Yamamoto, *Betonamu Chūgoku kankeishi*, esp. 281-85. For the pearl-beds in Guangdong, see Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi* [History of the Ming] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1974 [1739]), 82.1996-97.

20 For his travels in Guangxi, see Xu Hongzu, *Xu Xiake you ji* (ca. 1641) (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1995 [1987]), *juan* 3A-4A. For the case of Guishun, see 4A.467, 478-79, 496-97. For a recent study of Xu's travel writings, see Julian Ward, *Xu Xiake (1587-1641): The Art of Travel Writing* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001). For background on the Macs of Cao Bang, see *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1035; Wang Gungwu, "Ming Foreign Relations," 330.

21 For the case of Longying, see Xu Hongzu, *Xu Xiake you ji*, 4A.477-78.

22 For the case of Guishun and Tianzhou, see Xu Hongzu, *Xu Xiake you ji*, 4A.478-79, 485-88, 496-97.

23 For a discussion of the injunction of the Hongwu emperor, see Wang Gungwu, "Ming Foreign Relations," 311-13. For Tang Zhou's memorial, see *Ming shi lu*, *Shizong shi lu* 195:1-2a (12 January 1537). For the context, see Jung-pang Lo, "Policy Formulation and Decision-Making on Issues Respecting Peace and War," in *Chinese Government in Ming Times: Seven Studies*, edited by Charles O. Hucker, 63-66 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). For a mid-Ming perspective on the "nature" (*xing*) of hua and yi, see Leo K. Shin, "The Last Campaigns of Wang Yangming," *T'oung Pao* 92.1-3 (2006): 101-28.