

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/19069> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Cheng, Weichung

**Title:** War, trade and piracy in the China Seas (1622-1683)

Date: 2012-06-12

## SUMMARY

## SUMMARY

The objective of this research is to examine the rise and fall of a prominent 17<sup>th</sup> century Chinese maritime power: the Cheng lineage. It elucidates how, due to the consequences of specific historical circumstances at a crucial moment in time, the Ming imperial administration initially tolerated a group of Chinese smugglers as a nominal coastal defense detachment. With the help of the local gentry, a substantial number of these mercenaries gradually transformed into the backbone of the defense force of Fu-chien province and became the main protectors of Chinese commercial interests in the East and South China Seas. Wrestling with other maritime competitors, the Cheng clan and their followers were dragged into a whirlpool of power struggles with the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and English in the China Sea region during the early stages of globalization. The fall of the Ming Empire allowed the Cheng lineage to create an independent, but short-lived seaborne regime in China's southeastern coastal provinces.

The rise of the first leader of the Cheng clan, Cheng Chih-lung, otherwise known as Nicolaes Iquan, can be attributed to the split between the Chinese and Japanese world orders and the convergence of the silver flows from Japan and Mexico in China by the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Ming China was already in decline when the armies of Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded Korea, weakening the dynasty further. The Ming court was then forced to concentrate its financial resources on thwarting another threat: the southward expansion of the Manchu's at the North border. The silver flows from Japan and North America that entered China via its southeastern coastal ports were soon completely expended in order to pay for the defense efforts in the north. It was from the shady world of the overseas bullion trade that the residing head of the Cheng regime, Cheng Chih-lung, alias Nicholas Iquan, emerged.

Chapter One traces the institutional origins of the Chinese privateers (or maritime auxiliary force) in the later phase of the *Wo-k'ou* (Japanese

## SUMMARY

pirates) raids on the southeast coast of China during the latter half of 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Chinese Court initially hired mercenaries to resist these raids, but this infantry was not able to fight the pirates on the water. The Grand Coordinators (*hsün-fu*) of Fu-chien province discovered that the sea-faring smugglers and traders provided better troops than the officially recruited mercenaries. In 1617, when the Japanese traders requested that the Chinese authorities legalize trade with Japan, the Grand Coordinator of Fu-chien recruited a group of maritime mercenaries from local sea-faring traders and equipped them with war ships and weaponry strong enough to prevent possible Japanese aggression.

Chapter Two illustrates that the revival of the maritime mercenary system in Fu-chien and the prohibition of overseas trade was the Grand Coordinators' response to the Dutch occupation of the Pescadores in 1622. This chapter then explains how Cheng Chih-lung, a trader in the illegal Sino-Japanese transit trade, was recruited by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to participate in privateering against the Spaniards in Manila. Even after the Dutch moved to Taiwan, the deadlock between the provincial Fu-chien authorities and the Dutch continued. However, when a drought hit Fuchien in 1626 and maritime prohibitions put a stop to the seasonal succor of Ch'ao-chou rice, Cheng Chih-lung sailed to the Chinese coast and took the lead in breaking through the maritime prohibitions with the tacit aid of the VOC in Taiwan.

Chapter Three examines how, after Cheng Chih-lung surrendered to the Chinese authorities, he obtained a position in the coastal defense force, and was able to finance his troops by smuggling goods from his local base at An-hai. The shallow waters of the An-hai harbor prevented rival junks from approaching. By 1631, Cheng Chih-lung had eliminated all Chinese competition in overseas trade.

Chapter Four examines the overseas trade of An-hai from an international perspective and shows how Cheng Chih-lung benefited from the sudden changes in the Sino-Japanese trade. Since the Japanese court ceased

## SUMMARY

trading with the Portuguese in Macao, the An-hai smugglers under Cheng Chih-lung's leadership could monopolize the Sino-Japanese trade and accumulate their capital while expanding their trade with the VOC in Taiwan.

Chapter Five examines the conflicts of interest between Cheng Chih-lung and the VOC, which resulted in the naval battle of Liao-lo near the island of Quemoy in the summer of 1633. The Dutch suffered a decisive defeat, and in his new influential position, Cheng Chih-lung urged the Ming court to legalize Chinese trade with the Dutch in Taiwan.

Chapter Six demonstrates how the An-hai merchants rebuffed challenges from other Chinese traders after Chih-lung defeated his rival Liu Hsiang from Kuangtung province. The victory enabled Chih-lung to expand his influence as far as the mouth of the Pearl River. After obtaining access to large supplies of tropical commodities in Kuangtung, the An-hai merchants intended to extend their networks to all Southeast Asian ports bordering on the South China Sea.

Chapter Seven examines the expansion of the Anhai trade network to Taiwan, Siam and Manila and the early stages of its close cooperation with the VOC in trading with Japan.

Chapter Eight highlights the dramatic rupture of the cooperation between the Cheng lineage and the VOC in 1640. The Dutch looked to purchase silk outside of China and found markets in Vietnam and India. Since the company's expanding commerce with India required large supplies of Chinese gold, relations with Cheng Chih-lung, who was able to provide this bullion at a favorable price, were restored.

Chapter Nine explores how the downfall of the Ming court and the change of regime in 1644 impacted the An-hai merchants' monopoly in Sino-Japanese trade. After he was taken hostage by the new Manchu rulers, Cheng Chih-lung was replaced by his son Cheng Ch'eng-kung, alias Coxinga. Cheng Ch'eng-kung gained the loyalty of the maritime mercenaries who had been previously led by his father. He then declared himself loyal to the Ming

## SUMMARY

court, which had by then moved to the south.

Chapter Ten explores the attempts of An-hai traders to expand into the Siamese market to the detriment of the VOC trading interests there. When the Siamese and Cambodian king sent envoys to Cheng Ch'eng-kung's headquarters at Amoy in 1653, the latter began to consolidate his power and restarted political negotiations with the Manchu courts and the VOC.

Chapter Eleven aims to present the consistency of the activities completed by Cheng Ch'eng-kung after he became the undisputed leader of the maritime mercenaries and protector of the sea-faring traders. The Manchus attempted to seal off the coast again in order to defeat the Ming forces in the south, but to no avail: Cheng Ch'eng-kung had gained control of all the important emporia along the coast.

Two large battles embodied Cheng Ch'eng-kung's strategic designs on the Manchu court in Peking and the Dutch in Taiwan. Firstly, by attacking Nanking on the Yangtse River in 1659, Cheng Ch'eng-kung attempted to capture Ch'ung-ming island and secure the Chiang-nan area where exported silk was produced. After the failure of this expedition Cheng Ch'eng-kung decided to invade Taiwan and lay siege on the VOC's island headquarters, Zeelandia castle, which he was eventually forced into surrender on February 1, 1662. What his further aims were – did he really plan an attack on Spanish Manila, the opening of the direct trade with India, or extend power to the Spice islands? – will never be known, because he died shortly after his conquest of Taiwan.

Chapter Twelve provides a general overview of the Chinese overseas trading network after the sudden demise of Cheng Ch'eng-kung in 1662. Cheng Ch'eng-kung's eldest son, Cheng Ching, however, soon consolidated his grip on the Cheng regime in Taiwan. Through cooperation with privateers from the Kuang-tung and Kuang-his coastal provinces he restored the trading network of his father between China, Japan, Cambodia and Philippines after 1667. The Siamese King Narai had turned his back on the

## SUMMARY

Cheng regime when it nearly collapsed after the death of Cheng Ch'eng-kung. Without that support, the Cheng Ching and his followers no longer sought to compete with the Dutch in the Siamese trade.

Chapter Thirteen analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of Cheng Ching's trading network and also explains its final decline. The network had once extended as far as the Malay-peninsula and Sumatra for the purchase of tin and pepper, and with the support of the English East India Company, it even formed a connection with Batavia's great rival on Java, the port of Bantam. When the Japanese government issued a ban on the silver export in 1667, the silver flows from abroad gradually came to a stop. Simultaneously, the Manchus issued new maritime prohibitions. Although this policy largely backfired because it caused the coastal provinces to join the so-called three feudatories' rebellion between from 1674 to 1681, these developments inevitably took their toll on the trading fortunes of the Cheng merchants in Taiwan. In 1683, the maritime power of the Cheng lineage was effectively terminated by the invasion of the Qing admiral Shih Lang, a former ally of Cheng Chih-lung. As a result, the maritime trade from Taiwan lost its competitiveness in the trading world of China's seas.

The final chapter, Chapter Fourteen, tackles the complexities of the rise and fall of Cheng rule in the coastal province of Fuchien and Taiwan. The case of the Cheng lineage may be seen as a precedent to the self-proclaimed warlords in the border regions during the Chinese Republican period. As a trade-oriented polity, Cheng-ruled Taiwan showed many features of the port principalities scattered along the coasts of the South China Sea. Whatever the case may be, the temporary secession from central imperial rule by the Cheng and their followers in Fu-chien and nearby Taiwan during the seventeenth century amounts to an exceptional moment in the history of China's coastal frontier.