

Regenerating Trade Diaspora:
Supra-regional Contacts and the Role of “Hybrid Muslims”
in the South China Sea since the late 10th to mid-13th Century

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Introduction

To reconstruct the formation and transition of the “diasporic” communities of Muslims around the South China Sea including Arab-Persian immigrants and other people of various ethnicity formed by conversion and hybridization is the subject of great importance in several ways.¹ Firstly, because it concerns in the history of the people of trans-national activities that constitute an important topic not only for the Maritime Asian History and also for the Global History studies in a way by rethinking the paradigm of modern nations and nation states and paying more attention to the human’s activities crossing borderlines and discover some new features of nations, imagined communities and networks in the past.

This subject is also closely connected with the evolutionary history of the hybrid Chinese Muslims which has been an important topic in the historical research of diverse "Islamic" traditions in the East. As is partly introduced in this paper, this was not a seamless process and we can observe several sets of cycles formed by

¹ As for the definition of “trade diaspora (and diaspora),” see Cohen 1971; Curtin 1984. In order to put the specific argument of this paper into much wider context of comparative history, I am tentatively borrowing this concept in referring to "widely dispersed but mutually interconnected communities" of Islamic people including Arab-Persian descendants partly mixed with Han-Chinese and other indigenous populations and was historically formed in the region surrounding the South China sea mainly through commercial migration and voluntary conversion. I put stress not on their negative motive of persecution or specific center or homeland but on the continuity or successiveness of the wide spread Sino-Muslim cultural tradition while whether they shared a common identity as an imagined "Islamic world" is under question (see Haneda 2005). As a recent research on Maritime Muslim communities as “trade diaspora,” see John Chaffee, “Diasporic Identities in the Historical Development of the Maritime Muslim Communities of Song-Yuan China,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49, no. 4(2006): 395-420.

interruptions and regenerations of their “diasporic” community and trade network. However as a whole process, we can see it as a continuous one. The first interruption and regeneration took place during the 10th century prior to the beginning of the Sung dynasty. The second set is observed in the early Yuan period. And the third one is around mid-fourteenth century.

In this paper, I would like to show a preliminary overlook focusing on the earliest stage of supra-regional activities of Islamic people and their roles as mediator in the frontier societies of the South China coastal region paying attention to these sets of interruption and regeneration.

(1) The Formation of Arab, Persian Trade Diaspora in the East ?

In the early Song, a lot of tributary missions came from the countries of the “South Sea.” A certain part of the tributary missions seems to have a close relation to the activity of Arab and Persian sea-traders *Dashi bozhu* 大食船主. *Dashi* 大食 is the transcription of the Persian word, *Tāzī* (or *Tājīk*) which means “an Arab, Arabia” (or “a Persian, one of Arabian origin brought up in Persia”)². *Bozhu* might be the direct translation from the Persian word, *nākhudā*, meaning “head of ship,” which was commonly used around the Indian Ocean.

The first record of the missions from *Dashi* says that merchant ships (*shangchuan* 商船) carrying tribute did not stop to come and go thereafter. Pu Ximi, the head of tributary mission of the caliph, in 976 and his son Pu Yatuoli or Pu Yatili (*Abū Ādil), later appeared as *bozhu* 船主 (“head of ship”) and *fanke* 蕃客 (“foreign guest”). These examples tell us that the tributary missions of *Dashi* king was actually carried out by merchants (See Table 1).

The sea-traders spreading over the Asian Sea played a key role for the formation of the Maritime Asian trade network by connecting the Chinese empire and ports and polities.

For example, *Dashi* ships of Arab, Persian merchants were visiting the South China via Champa and Java. In 971, *Dashi*, Champa and Java sent tribute to (Li Yu 李煜 of the)Southern Tang.³

Furthermore, the Sea-traders dragged new participants into the Maritime Asia. In 977, The Brunei (Boni 勃泥) king decided to send the first tributary mission after he had heard about the Song by Pu Luxie 蒲盧歇 who is considered to be Arab, Persian

² F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary including the Arabic Words and Phrases to be met with in Persian Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930; reprint, New Delhi, 1973), 273, 806.

³ See *Song shi*, chap. 490, Waiguo zhuan, “*Dashi*.”

and had left China for Java and drifted to Brunei.⁴The map shows above-mentioned situation that Dashi ships were heading to China and they dragged other country (Brunei, here) into the circle of maritime contacts.

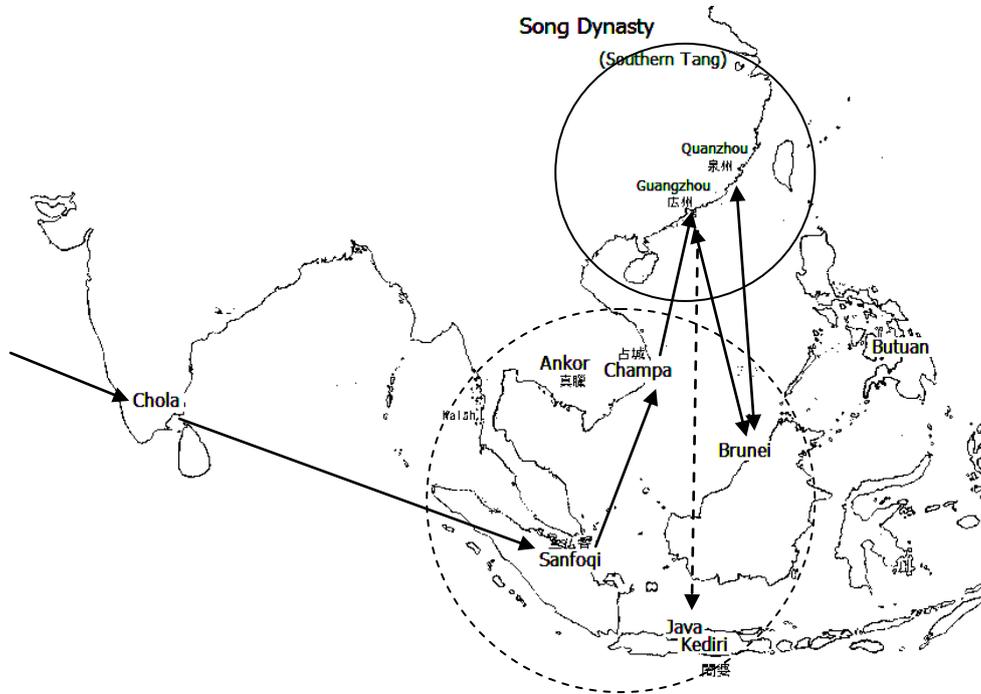
Table 1. The Tributary Missions of Arab, Persian Sea-traders in the Early Song Period

Year (C. E.)	Member of Embassies	Master or Country
968	Unknown	Dashi 大食
971	Li Hemo 李訶末	Dashi/ Sanfoqi 三佛齊
973	Unknown	Dashi
974	Bu Luohai 不囉海 (Ibrāhīm?)	Dashi king, Caliph 訶黎佛
975	Unknown	Dashi
976	Pu Ximi 蒲希密	Dashi king, Caliph
977	Pu Sihao or Pu Sina 蒲思郝 / 蒲思那 with Mahemo 摩訶末 (Muḥammad?), Puluo 蒲羅 / 蒲囉	Dashi
993	Li Yawu 李亞勿	Dashi/ “bozhu” Pu Ximi
995	“bozhu” Pu Yatuoli 蒲押陁黎 (The son of Pu Xi-mi)	“bozhu” Pu Ximi
999(a)	Pu Yatili 蒲押提黎	
999(b)	Wenmao 文茂	“fanke” Pu Yatili
:		
1003	Poluoqin 婆羅欽	Dashi
:		
1008	“fanke” Li Mawu 李麻勿	“bozhu” Li Yawu

(Sources: *Song shi* 宋史 , chap. 490, *Waiguo zhuan* 外國傳 (Biography of Foreign Countries); *Song hui yao ji gao* 宋會要輯稿 , Fanyi 蕃夷 7, 9; and *Yu hai* 玉海 , chap. 154; and *Xu zi zhi tong jian chang bian* 續資治通鑑長編 , passim.)

⁴ See *Song shi*, chap. 489, *Waiguo zhuan*, “Boni”; *Song hui yao ji gao*, Fanyi 7, p. 8.

Map 1. The Movements of Arab Persian Merchants and Transition of the Zone of Intensive Maritime Trade Activities from the South Sea to South China Coastal Region.



(2) The Disappearance of Arab, Persians and Appearance of Hybrid Sino-Muslims

A detailed account on an Arab (or Persian) sea-trader Pu Ximi 蒲希密 tells us the fact that the Song court did not promote an active maritime trade policy but it addressed an imperial edict to Guangzhou and the leader of foreign settlement to invite foreign merchants. Judging from the text of his *biao* 表 (the letter to the emperor) written by highly sophisticated Classical Chinese following the orthodox terminology of celestial kingdom, the Chinese literati who were familiar with this kind of classical texts must have helped to prepare *biao* for the tributary mission.⁵ In this way, the foreign merchants in Guangzhou, such as above mentioned Pu Ximi, were able to play an exclusively important role as mediator utilizing connections with these local Chinese elites.

An orthodox discourse on the Maritime trade during Song period is about the problem of the “Disappearance of Islamic merchants.” The view that the overseas activities of Chinese merchants developed during the Song period is commonly accepted. A conventional view relating to above is the “expel” of Muslims by Chinese

⁵ See *Song shi*, chap. 490, Waiguo zhuan, “Dashi.”

merchants from the South China Sea and Southeast Asian trade.⁶ However, this explains only one side of what actually happened by seeing the difference of people too rigidly and overlooking the aspects of contacts and assimilations.

In the case of “Muslim merchants,” there were two aspects in the process of assimilation with Chinese merchants. One is assimilation in the types of business and the other is cultural assimilation.

Figure 1. The Grave Stone of Pu *banyuan* dated 1264 and the Old Muslim Cemetery in Bandar sri bugawan, Brunei (Source: Franke and Ch'en 1973).



An example of Arab, Persian descendants in the “dual” process of assimilation can be seen in an old Chinese stele found in the Muslim cemetery in the capital of Brunei darussrusalam, Bandar sri bugawan (See Figure 1). It says, “The grave of Pu 蒲, *banyuan* 判院 (a local official title) from Quanzhou erected in 1264.” It clearly indicate the process of Sinicization in culture because it was written in Chinese and in business type for their base of activity is considered to have been in Quanzhou.⁷

⁶ Shiraishi Akiko (1964:26) pointed out that the development of overseas activities of Chinese merchants expelled Islamic merchants around South China Sea except some Sinicized ones. Kenneth Hall (1985: 196-197) suggests that other than the development of Chinese merchants, political disorder around Persian Gulf after the decline of the Abbasids in the mid 10th century caused the decreasing Arab role in Southeast Asian trade between twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

⁷ See Franke and Ch'en 1973. The credibility of a very rare book *Xishang zazhi* referring to the

What is worth noticing is the dead person's official title. According to my preliminary research on the examples of foreigners bearing official titles, we can find several ways in which foreign merchants obtained official titles. There were foreign merchants who obtained official titles through various ways.

(A) Since, as early as the Northern Song period, some merchants were granted the title of martial official such as *langjiang* 郎將 or *jiangjun* 將軍 as a reward for their tributary activity. The meaning of it is explained by a scholar that these official titles had the function to assure their credibility and gain their prestige toward Chinese merchants and officials of the Maritime Trade Supervisorate (*shibosi* 市舶司).⁸

(B) There were also foreign merchants who tried to obtain a local official rank by money or by an illegal way. For example, in 1124, the old woman of foreign origin named Pu brought the bribes of foreign exotics to the imperial court and asked for an official rank for her son. The account says that a eunuch helped her.⁹ It is possible to view that for the foreign merchants, to become official was a good way to pursue a safer living basis than to depend only on an unstable maritime trade.

(C) It was also very common during Southern Song period to grant foreign merchants, official titles as reward for carrying exotics or guiding the embassy of foreign country. For example, in 1136, a lower-rank martial official title, *chengxinlang* 承信郎, and a set of official suits was given to Pu Luoxin 蒲囉辛 from an "Arab or Persian barbarian country" (*Dashi fanguo* 大食蕃國) who built a ship and carried frankincense and paid the tax equal to 30'000 *guan* copper coins to the Maritime Trade Supervisorate at Quanzhou 泉州. The account reveals that the aim of this reward by the emperor was to prompt foreign merchants to bring more frankincense. In 1156, Pujin, who had resided in Guangzhou for a long time and was already granted *chengxinlang*, was promoted to be *zhongxunlang* 忠訓郎 by his merits of tributary (*jinfeng* 進奉). Previously, he had come as the member of embassy from Sanfoqi. At the same time, Pu Yanxiu 蒲延秀 was granted *chengxinlang*, following the example of Chen Wei'an 陳維安 who had guided the embassy from Champa the other day.¹⁰

In Addition, we cannot neglect another important meaning of granting official title, that is, official approval of their local influence. And we have a good example of this

person of Brunei inscription and introduced by Zhuan Weiji ("Wenlai-guo quanzhou songmu kaoshi [An Interpretation of the Song period's Quanzhou Grave from Brunei]," *Haijiaoshi yanjiu* [Maritime History Studies], no. 2[1990]: 80-84) was argued by several scholars and mostly questioned. See articles by Chen Tiefan and Wolfgang Franke, Lin Shaochuan and Gong Yuanming in *Haijiaoshi Yanjiu*, no. 2(1991) and Xie Fang in *Haijiaoshi yanjiu*, no. 1(1998).

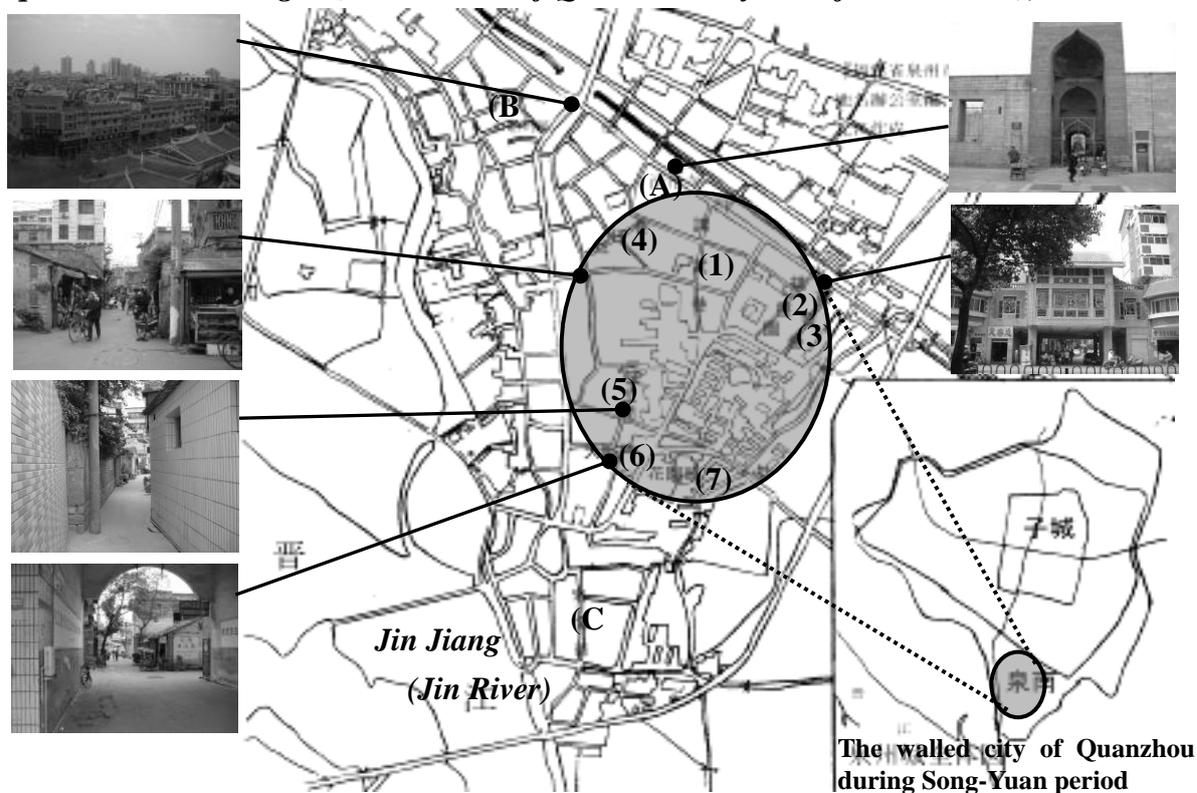
⁸ See Shiraiishi 1964: 25.

⁹ *Pu yang wen xian* 莆陽文獻, Liezhuan 列傳 (Biographies) 32, "Lin Ji 林枏."

¹⁰ *Song hui yao ji gao*, Fanyi 4-94; 7-48.

pattern. It is an example of famous foreign merchant of Quanzhou——Pu Shougeng 蒲壽庚. He was granted the titles of *zhaofushi* 招撫使 (commander of local militia) and *shibo tiju* 市舶提舉 (head of the office of maritime affairs) during the last years of the Southern Song.¹¹ In my opinion, these titles were not more than a nominal approval of his private militia consisting of thousands men and a substantial control of maritime trade at Quanzhou lasting 30 years.¹²

Map 2. The Presumed Area of Pu Shougeng's Residence in the Quanzhou City
(Based on Fujian sheng quanzhou shi diming bangongshi (ed.), *Fujian sheng quanzhou shi diminglu* (Place Names of Quanzhou City in Fujian Province), 1982.



The other places related with foreigners and maritime trade in present Quanzhou city: (A) Qingjingsi 清淨寺 (Old Mosque first built in Song period) (B) The site of the Maritime Trade Supervisorate of the Song (C) Jubao jie 聚寶街 (gathering treasures street)

His family's local influence seems to have lasted until the Yuan period. The old street names preserved in nowadays Quanzhou city are said to have relation with the lost residence of Pu Shougeng (See Map 2). For example, (1) Jiangwu Lane (Jiangwu xiang 講武巷), the place of Pu Shougeng's Jiangwu hall [Jiangwu tang 講武堂] (2)

¹¹ So1991; So2000:106-114,301-305.

¹² See Mukai 2007: 67-96.

Chess-board Garden(Qipan yuan 棋盤園), Pu Shougeng made a part of his Flower Garden [Huayuan] into a big chess-board, (3) Donglu Lane(Donglu xiang 東魯巷, the place of Pu Shougeng's study) (4) Zaozi Lane (Zaozi xiang 灶仔巷, the place of kitchen for Pu Shougeng's barracks), (5) 33 rooms (Sanshier jian 三十二間, rooms for 33 beauties who act as pieces on the big chess board in his garden in the storied building of Pu Shougeng's residence), (6) Great Narrow Gate (Da'ai men 大隘門, the gate of Pu Shougeng's residence), (7) The edge of Flower Garden (Huayuan tou 花園頭) (see Map2). When we mapped all of these place names, his residence covered most part of the foreign settlement in Quanzhou. It suggests that local influence of foreign people in Chinese port city should not be underestimated.

(3) Implication of the Surrender of Pu Shougeng toward the New Order

In 1276, Pu Shougeng “betrayed” the Southern Song dynasty and surrendered to the Mongols with the thousands of his private militia and the citizens of Quanzhou. The map 3 shows the military situation of the southeast coast of China around 1276, the period of final battles between Song and Yuan dynasties.

We can see square flames rimmed with black, gray and white colors in the map. The flame rimmed with black and gray color is the military and governmental headquarters of the Yuan dynasty. And with white color is of the Song dynasty. Then the flames without color are private military forces of the coastal regions they kept neutral attitude during the battles between the Song and the Yuan.

Through this map, it is clear that the situation is very different from what obviously believed in many respects.

Firstly, as Professor Lo Jungpang and Xiao Qiqing's studies show, the Mongol empire had already built the powerful navy by 1276.¹³

Furthermore, the Mongols obtained many Song battle ships during the war on the Yangze river. For example, the battle of *Jiaoshan* 焦山 was a crucial turning point for that the Mongols defeat the Song Navy and which was a fatal damage for the Song dynasty. In the battle, the Mongols obtained 7 hundred sea-going jonks called White Spallow battle ships (*baiyaozi* 白鷗子).¹⁴ And soon later, the Mongols copied the design and made 100 White Spallows. As a result, when they built the Navy and its headquarter is called Supreme Marshal Office of the Coast at Dinghai 定海 (*Yuanhai*

¹³ See Lo 1955; Xiao 1990.

¹⁴ Su Tianjue 蘇天爵, *Guochao mingchen shilie* 國朝名臣事略, chap. 2, “Chengxiang henan wudingwang 丞相河南武定王” (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996, p. 29); *Guochao wenlei* 國朝文類, chap. 70, Yuan Mingshan 元明善, “Gaocheng dongshi jiazhuo 藁城董氏家傳,” p.9 (*Yuanwenlei* 元文類, Taipei: Shijie shuju 世界書局, 1989, p.772).

zhaotaoshi 沿海招討使 , later moved to Qingyuan 慶元 [Ningbo, today] and elevated in rank as *duyuanshuaifu* 都元帥府), they had at least 5000 soldiers and 800 sea-going battleships.¹⁵ And it is said that the Yuan fleet boarding several hundred thousands' trained soldiers crossed the ocean to siege Southern Song capital Lin'an 臨安 — Hangzhou, today.¹⁶ Other figures on the map were obtained from various contemporary historical sources.¹⁷

As a contemporary historical source reveals, one of the Song loyalists and local military chief called Zhang Zhezhai 張哲齋 tried to gather other military forces along the South China coastal region for the battle against the Mongols. Although the plan met with failure and he was soon executed, the victory of the Mongol was not solid if a lot of maritime forces had supported him.¹⁸ Under these circumstances, Pu Shougeng's surrender was timely and highly appraised and fully rewarded by the Mongols after the war.

Long believed view that the Mongol army was mainly consisted of cavalry and foot soldiers and not good at naval battle is not more than a myth. So, we must reconsider the role of Pu Shougeng who previously believed to be purely a mercantile figure and contributed to the Mongols by giving tade ships for the Mongols navy.

However, if we closely observe the military situation around 1276, it is obvious that Pu Shougeng's contribution was still important for the Mongol's victory against the Song. The Southern Song princes and his followers, escaped from the capital Lin'an and fled to Fuzhou ,still had a quite large military forces as shown on the map. Add to this, Pu Shougeng's contribution was not merely supplying ships. Rather, his actual contribution was in the battles and it had significant under the realm of the Mongols. We can observe his participation in the naval battles against the remaining Song followers by a few surviving records.¹⁹

The connection with a Jalayil commander, Suodu which in turn in the overseas missions to the countries in the South Sea during early Yuan period should have formed and consolidated in the process of cooperation in the battles against the Southern Song loyalists. In this sense, the determining fact in the Pu Shougeng's

¹⁵ *Yuanshi*, chap. 132, Liezhuan 列傳 (Biographies) 19, Halatai, p.3216.

¹⁶ *Yuan bingzi pingsonglu* 元丙子平宋錄 (Qing period manuscript in Beijing University Library); *Pingsonglu* 平宋錄 (Shoushangecongshu 守山閣叢書 edition), the tenth month of the twelfth year of Zhiyuan 至元 period.

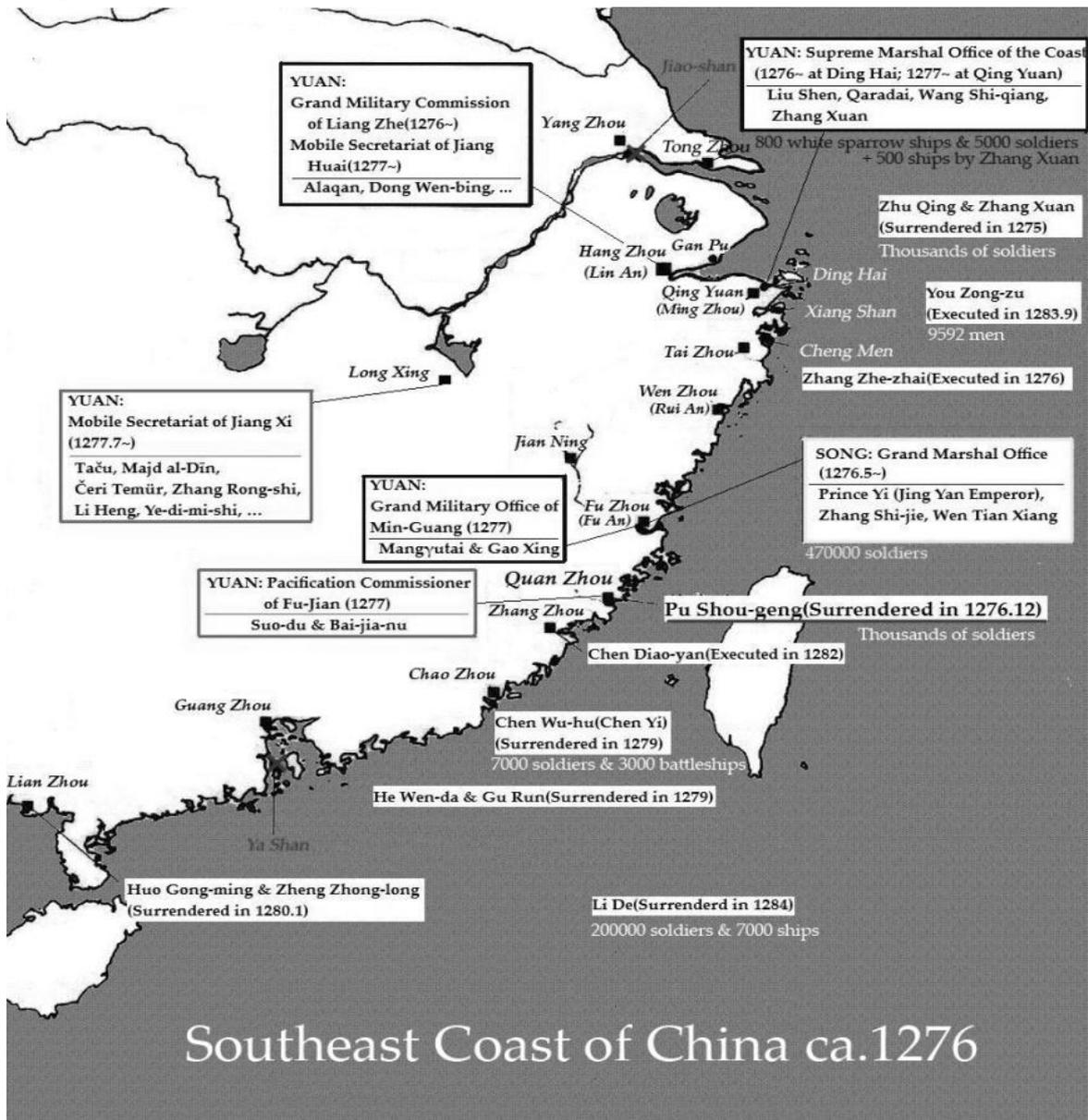
¹⁷ Figures of private military forces of the coastal region are mainly based on *Yuan shi*, Shizu benji and that of the Song navy is based on “Guangwang benmo 廣王本末 ”(in *Songji sanchao zhengyao* 宋季三朝政要), the eleventh month of the Jingyuan 景元 period (1276).

¹⁸ “Zhang Tiezhai” in *Wenshan xiansheng wenji* 文山先生文集, chap. 19, zhuan (Biographies).

¹⁹ Liu Yueshen 劉岳申 , “Wen Tianxiang zhuan 文天祥傳 ” in *Wenshan xiansheng wenji*, chap. 19.

activities in the next stage was a military contribution as a private military force in the battles. In this sense, how the personal ties bonded key persons is crucial for better understanding of a background of the maritime trade and overseas missions conducted in the new order under the Mongols.

Map3. Military Situation of the Southeast Coast of China around 1276



The ruling system of South China was constructed by the hands of Mongol generals stationed there and the connections of each branches of the Yuan troops was kept in the administrations after the war.²⁰

The same is true in Fujian province. There were two distinct troops in Fujian

²⁰ See Tsutsumi Kazuaki, 1996, 1998, 2000.

administration which is originated from the former military order. When Pu Shougeng surrendered, there were two major headquarters dispatching the branch troops and conducting subjugation of the region. The troop under Mangyudai was a branch of the army corps headquartered at Hangzhou. Another one under Suodu was a branch of Jianxi army corps (See Table 2).

Pu Shougeng participated the battle in corporation with Suodu and his militia was connected with the troop of Suodu and he himself became an official of the Mobile secretariat of Jianxi. Then the connection with Suodu and also his maritime trade network was important for his subsequent activities in the field of foreign relation under the Yuan regime. And another figure Mangyudai became even more eminent and influential in Fujian and Zhejiang region and seems to have tried to control the maritime trade in opposition to former Song trade network under Pu Shougeng. For example, in 1278, Mangyudai arrested an envoi dispatched to foreign country by Suodu and Pu²¹. Behind him should be the network of Central- and Western Asians. Because he had a close connection with a Central Asian Muslim official Shihab al-Din. And using his fleet he sometimes seize trade ships to obtain illegal duties²².

What I have described above is in a sense how the former Song trade network was absorbed into the Yuan regime. And this is one example of what already theoretically said that is how the over Eurasian network was completed in the east because of the unification of long divided China by the Mongols. Furthermore, the significance of Pu Shougeng's surrender was not only for his contribution to the dynastic change but also for his participation in the formation of the new order of the overseas relationship.

Conclusion

Through above-mentioned examples of earliest stage of the activities of Arab, Persians and their offspring around South China Sea, we can (at least partly) observe that the evolution of their "diasporic" communities was not a seamless process and we can see several sets of interruptions and regenerations. These occasional disruptions were considered to be related to the shift of gravity in the Cross-Cultural exchanges in the maritime world.

²¹ See *Yuan shi* 元史, chap. 12, Shizu benji 世祖本紀 (Basic Annals of the Emperor Shizu) 9, the seventh month on the nineteenth year of Zhiyuan 至元 period, p. 245 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 edition).

²² See *Dayuan shengzheng guochao dianzhang* 大元聖政國朝典章, chap. 22, hubu 戶部 8, "Shibo zefa ershisan tiao 市舶則法二十三條," p.47 (*Yingyin Yuanben Dayuan shengzheng guochao dianzhang* 影印元本大元聖政國朝典章, Taiwan: Wenhai chubanshe 文海出版社, 1964 [reprt., Kyoto: Zhongwen chubanshe 中文出版社, 1976, 2vols.], vol.2, pp. 1061-1062).

Guangzhou and Quanzhou had successively constituted twin location of Arab, Persians migration and focus points of Cross-Cultural exchanges on the South China coast. Approximately after the decline of the Tang rule in the early 10th century, the gravity of Cross-Cultural exchange seems to have moved from Guangzhou to the Straits of Malacca. By 970s, the Arab, Persian sea-traders' active tributary missions to the Song court represents the revival of the active role of the ports on the South China coast and then, the retreat of the Arab, Persians in the South Sea during the Southern Song period again lead to the shift of the major role in the Cross-Cultural exchange to the Southeast Asian ports.

As Janet L. Abu-Lughod pointed out, the Straits of Malacca gained its importance when China retreated and, in reverse, it reduced importance when China actively embarked to the maritime world. Accordingly, the Chinese overseas expansion and the destiny of the Straits were interrelated.²³ Moreover, the role of *comprador* was not only for the ports of the Straits but also for those of the South China coastal region that had been the main base for the Chinese overseas endeavor. So what is crucial for the prosperity and the decline of the ports of the Straits and the South China coastal region was a shift of zone of the intensive trade activity and active port city in area of maritime communication. And I prospect that it is also the case for the situation around the southward expansion of the *Yuan* dynasty in the next stage.

On the other hand, as a whole process, we can still see the period argued in this paper as a consistent cycle. As we have seen, during the Song period, *bozhus* and *fankes* of Arab-Persian origin were active and their offspring, Pu Shougeng expanded influence from the late Song to early Yuan. At least pay attention to the trans-regional activities of trans-periodic succession is important to see this long term transition can be seen as one continuous period. When we focus on whole process of "trans-periodic" succession of the Islamic groups, further studies may discover the long cycle of Maritime trade network from 10th century toward "the Age of Commerce" as one continuous process. This can be a contribution to overcome the dynasty-divided historiography.

²³ Janet L. Abu-Lughod pointed out that the "natural" role of the ports along the Straits (of Malacca; e.g., Palembang, Jambi and so on) was that of *comprador*, a role that is both politically contingent and economically unstable. And especially in relation with Chinese maritime development, we can observe a see-saw like transitions in the importance of the ports in the Straits. She wrote, "Whenever the Chinese moved aggressively outward, the intermediary ports paradoxically became more prosperous but less important. Whenever the Chinese pulled back from the western circuit or, even worse, interdicted direct passage of foreign ships into their harbors, the ports in the straits flourished, but only because Chinese vessels took up the easternmost circuit slack by meeting their trading partners at Palembang, Kedah, or, later, Malacca" (Abu-Lughod 1989: 311).

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