

Melissa Macauley. *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China's Maritime Frontier* (Princeton University Press, 2021). viii, 362 pages. Paperback, \$14.98.

This book conducts an in-depth examination of the activities pertaining to the Chaozhou region, which is in the southeastern part of China, from 1767 to 1929. It provides a thorough account of how the tension between the center and the periphery played out during that 150-year period. As is common with Chinese history, patterns of behaviors and outcomes evolve over long periods of time. The author anchors the events of this period in what happened before this period. Even with limited discussion of modern Chinese history, the book makes abundantly clear that during this 150-year period, major transformations were underway. In the narrative, those changes appear when they have a direct impact on Chaozhou and its activities. In other words, the book is not about China per se, but rather one interesting part of China.

The central claim of the book is that the Chaozhou population was able to become dominant economic actors in the region despite having few resources at home and receiving little support from the central Chinese government and in the face of Euro-American colonial activities in the region. They did so by concentrating on economic matters and maximizing their power by working within networks connecting the Chaozhou natives working in Southeast Asia with their family and community connections back in China. Being on the coast, the population of the region was naturally drawn to trade and economic activities of various types in the neighborhood. Some of its regional activities were all within China, but many others were connected to productive activities in the Southeast Asia region.

Another theme deals with the tension that inevitably exists between the central government and the populations on their borders. Often, and that is the case under discussion here, the populations in the border areas resist, to some degree, efforts by the central government to exert their control and extract taxes from those on the border. This naturally leads to a

tendency towards lawlessness and inclinations towards violence. In this case, these tendencies were accentuated by the maritime environment. On one hand, the water interfered with the government's effort to enforce laws as the criminals had access to boats for fleeing and hiding. Piracy becomes a common feature. So, the water offered the Chaozhou, who were in trouble with the government areas, to hide and space to flee into on boats, which would be covered by the legitimate economic activity that the water offered. The central government employed harsh measures to keep the lid on illegal behaviors. Occasionally, they would move the Chaozhou away from the water and force them to try to survive in the interior. Violators of these edicts would risk hanging as punishment.

The appeal of the water for trade, legal or illegal, was compounded by the problems on land. During the period under scrutiny here, there was near-constant political turmoil in China, including the Chaozhou area. Population pressures were also key in causing Chaozhou to look for work elsewhere. And the area commonly suffers from natural disasters, including typhoons and an occasional tsunami. These contributed to the uncertainty that characterized the area. When the center successfully brought the periphery under control, the very success made the general in charge a threat to the central government.

Another critical concept employed in the text is the notion of translocalism. This refers to the way the Chaozhou who traveled to other lands for economic reasons, called sojourners, stayed connected with their origins. Thus, they were distant from each other but connected. Most of the sojourners returned home, but they left behind a community of remaining sojourners. This led to a discussion of the impact on family relations. Most of the sojourners were males, which left many females back at home. Some of the Chaozhou women turned to prostitution. Still, others were able to maintain their homes during the absence of their husbands with the help of

remittances that were typically sent home. The ability of the Chaozhou-turned sojourners to hang together while separated by hundreds/thousands of miles was one of the keys to their success.

One of the unexpected points of the book is that, in some ways, the Chaozhou were behaving much like the European colonialists when they were moving into S. East Asia. Both were determined to exploit the indigenous population (not by illegal or unfair policies). The difference was that the Europeans established the infrastructure of law and order for that exploitation to happen, whereas the Chaozhou just performed the exploitation. In fact, the Chaozhou were able to make use of colonial activities to promote orderly and predictable situations. This allowed them to get more than their equal share of the benefits because they did not have to expend resources to build and maintain the infrastructure.

Scholars of this region will find a wealth of valuable material. The book did a fine job of combining some data presented in tabular form with extended discussions of specific families whose behavior illustrates one of the major themes. The book looks at the connections between economics, politics, and society. Some of the narrative goes into depth on economic matters so the reader can see how the Chaozhou were able to move from a poor region to a rich and powerful region.

The book is well-rooted in the literature from the period. One interesting element was that rather than simply put all the sources in footnotes for the reader to locate at the end of the book, some of the more noteworthy sources were identified by name in the text. Frequent references to early scholars are matched by contemporary scholars.

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