

WAR, TRADE AND PIRACY IN THE CHINA SEAS (1622-1683)

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to examine the rise and fall of a prominent 17th century Chinese maritime power: the Cheng lineage. It elucidates how, due to the consequences of specific historical circumstances at 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.