

# PIRACY, SMUGGLING, AND TRADE IN THE RISE OF PATANI, 1490–1600\*

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## Abstract

This article charts the rise of the Patani Sultanate as a commercial center in the sixteenth century through its connections to South China Sea trade networks. Patani's ascendancy began with its pepper and porcelain trade with Ryukyu after 1490. Patani then emerged as one of a few major pepper ports after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511 and maintained its position by engaging with "piracy" and "smuggling" trade networks along the Fujian coast. By the late 1560s, however, Ming officials were strong enough to chase the merchants from the South China Sea, after which they came to settle in Patani, bringing their immense economic capital to the city. Through this process, Patani not only experienced its greatest economic fortune but also attained the pinnacle of its political power at the dawn of the seventeenth century.

## Introduction: Towards an Autonomous History of Pat(t)ani<sup>1</sup>

John Smail first sounded the call for Southeast Asian historians to engage in studies of autonomous history when he criticized the field's infatuation with the colonial relationship (Smail 1961). He found fault with colonial era scholarship and the nationalist counter-narrative because both approaches placed a contemporary imprint upon pre-nineteenth century Southeast Asia. Over the past two and a half decades, studies in autonomous history have been spearheaded by Sunait Chutintarinond and others, who have begun to illuminate locality in both modern and pre-modern Southeast Asian societies (Drakard 1986, Matheson 1986, Sunait 1989, Sunait and Baker 2002). The Malay-speaking region of southern Thailand, like Aceh and Mindanao, presents a special case because it does not fit neatly into

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, the spelling 'Patani' refers to the Malay sultanate and 'Pattani' to the modern Thai province and city.

the European colonialism-nationalism paradigm. There remains a sense, however, that Pattani possesses a history of its own, but one that has become obscured by the twentieth-century nation-based historical paradigm. The present study focuses on the economic history of the Patani Sultanate during a period prior to its formal inclusion into Siam, when it was an important trade center with far-reaching maritime ties to other parts of Southeast and East Asia.

This article focuses upon Patani's rise to economic success in the sixteenth century. Previous scholarship has generally drawn attention to the region's Hindu-Buddhist legacy dating back to the sixth-century kingdom of Langkasuka, from which Patani descended culturally, though the political connection between the two polities remains unclear.<sup>2</sup> Such studies have also pointed to Pattani's rich Islamic tradition, early conversion, and rise to prominence as a center for religious learning. While these studies serve to illuminate Patani's cultural history, they generally remain firmly entrenched in the "nationalist" historical paradigm. Furthermore, scholarship on Patani's sixteenth and seventeenth century history has focused too heavily upon its political relationship with Siam, owing to contemporary preoccupations with Pattani's provincial status. Not until the mid- to late seventeenth century did Patani's tributary relations and rebellions against Ayutthaya interfere with its commercial success.

Patani's economic fortunes, which were the bedrock of its political power and success in its so-called "golden age" in the seventeenth century, have received little attention. Rising from obscurity in the fifteenth century, Patani was, by the end of the sixteenth century, one of the premier Southeast Asian centers for Chinese and Japanese goods and a major player in the trade of the Malay Peninsula and South China Sea.<sup>3</sup> Recent studies have given thorough analysis to trade on the South China coast, which was the locus of activity for the entire region, but no study has yet drawn attention to Patani's role in these events. Commercial prosperity allowed Patani's rajas to patronize Islamic institutions in the sultanate, enact extensive public works, and attract foreign merchants to their docks during the period of greatest prosperity, 1580–1640. This article focuses on the roots of this economic success.

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<sup>2</sup> Contemporary Pattani historiography owes much to the seminal work of Ibrahim Syukri, though his genealogy connecting Patani's gilded past to twentieth century resistance movements has gone largely unchallenged in local historical writing in Malay. Recent works include Syukri (1985, 2005), Malek (1993), al-Fatani (1994), Bougas (1994), and Gilquin (2002, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Patani is home to one of the oldest Chinese gravestones in Southeast Asia, tribute to the early presence of Chinese merchants there (Franke 1984, 61).

In order to understand Patani's economic activities this article invariably engages with scholarship on "piracy" in Southeast Asia. James Warren, in his seminal work on Sulu society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, argued for a repeal of commonly held views on early Southeast Asian sea raiding that paid no heed to the internal values of those societies (Warren 1981, 147–8).<sup>4</sup> In many studies of sixteenth century "piracy" in the South China Sea the term is used uncritically, and the Chinese sources appear to be taken at face value. We employ the term "pirate" hesitantly, meaning merchants engaged in trade, smuggling, and any form of coastal raiding carried out in defiance of Ming Chinese attempts to suppress a trade that was central to the livelihoods of merchants from all parts of the South China Sea perimeter. This article treats "pirates" in the region as dispersed persons and analyzes their critical role in the flow and growth of trade in the sixteenth century. In this manner we move away from using "piracy" as a moralistic term informed from the bias of European or Chinese records.

To enrich this study we also engage with recent scholarship on smuggling and piracy set within other contexts that focused either on coastal areas or on "artificial" borders that inhibited trade. Eric Tagliacozzo, in his study of late nineteenth and early twentieth century "secret trade" in the Straits of Melaka, framed smuggling within the context of frontiers, borders, and boundaries. He argued that "boundary production and boundary transgression" were two intimately connected parts of the development of a border (Tagliacozzo 2005, 3). In the present study, though focused upon a time and place when boundaries were far less clearly defined, the idea of boundaries and frontiers nevertheless played a central role in the process of developing smuggling networks. From the perspective of Patani and Portuguese merchants, Fujian was a frontier towards which they sailed to engage in profitable trade on the fringes of the South China Sea. Ming Chinese officials, meanwhile, viewed Fujian as a troublesome province on the fringes of the empire that they sought to conform to a broader imperial standard. To the people of Fujian, both locals and merchants who based themselves in Southeast Asian ports, the coastline was not a barrier, but rather a center for the influx of foreign goods, a place of embarkation for local commodities, and a medium for interaction between various peoples from around the South China Sea littoral.

Lance Grahn, in his study of eighteenth-century smuggling along the northern coast of colonial Colombia, argues that smuggling generally complemented other commerce by providing a number of commodities that otherwise would have been unavailable, thus serving as an important and, at times, invaluable method of

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<sup>4</sup> Previous to Warren, studies had generally defended the use of the term "pirate" in the Southeast Asian context and relied upon a British legal definition of the phenomenon (Rutter 1930, 25–28; Tarling 1963, 1–2).

trade (Grahn 1997, 15–30). This view we generally adopt here when examining the motivations of Fujian merchants who either worked at home or throughout the diaspora stretching south to Patani, though the pure necessity of maritime commerce to the people of the coast seems to have driven the smuggling operations more than the desire to obtain a particular commodity. Along the same line, J. L. Anderson notes that “piracy” could act either as a stimulus or a detractor to trade in his broad survey of the Southeast Asian phenomenon because “pirates” might either work in a parasitic manner by preying on existing trade routes or, through the process of plundering and slave-raiding, provide necessary resources and labor for the development of new routes and commodities of exchange (Anderson 1997, 90-6). Following Grahn and Anderson, we have generally chosen to treat smuggling as the main method of trade in the South China Sea and “piracy” as the means by which merchants established themselves and defended their routes, ships, and goods, though set within the peculiarities of sixteenth century trade routes, warfare, and political relations. Merchants engaging in “piracy” and smuggling were integral to sixteenth-century South China Sea trade and played central roles in the rise of Patani as a major commercial power.

The momentous economic changes of the sixteenth century set the stage for trade relations throughout Southeast Asia in the century following, when Chinese, Dutch, English, Malay, Portuguese, Siamese, and other groups contended for control over the great volume of goods that flowed through the region. Patani established itself as an entrepôt of Chinese and Japanese goods through three major stages over the course of the previous century. First, Patani developed trade relations with the island kingdom of Ryukyu from 1490 onward, through which the sultanate developed its domestic pepper production and established connections to the Chinese market. Next, Patani became intimately connected to trade on the Fujian coast after the destruction of the Melaka pepper market in 1511 and developed valuable smuggling networks in collusion with Portuguese merchants. Finally, prominent bands of disaffected “pirates” and smugglers settled in Patani after 1567, who together solidified Patani’s position against its trade rivals on the Peninsula which the sultanate maintained until the Dutch and English trading companies began seriously to interfere with the commercial success of the port.

### **Patani-Ryukyu Trade Relations, 1490–1543**

The growth of relations between Patani and Ryukyu allowed the sultanate to establish itself as one of the main pepper markets of the South China Sea. The first phase in the rise of Patani as a regional trade center began in approximately 1490 when Ryukyu started sending mercantile missions to Patani as part of a broader trade it had carried out since the 1440s with a number of Southeast Asian ports such as Ayutthaya, Melaka, Palembang, northern Javanese polities, and others (Ishii 1990,

358).<sup>5</sup> The *Rekidai Hoan* records these exchanges and shows that the Ryukyuans mainly traded Chinese porcelain and silk for pepper and sapan wood, one of a number of local aromatic woods for which the Patani region had been famous for many centuries (Kobata and Matsuda 1969, 177–82).<sup>6</sup> Four key factors played a role in the emergence of the Patani-Ryukyu network.

Patani's Chinese community first appeared during the time of Zheng He's expeditions, 1405–33. There are no records that show the exact number of people who settled in the area at that time, but one writer recorded that the Chinese had settled in such great numbers in the region that "their heels touched each other" (Chang 1618, in Chang 1991, 20). When they came to Patani, they brought with them knowledge of safe maritime routes to China and their participation in extensive trade networks soon tied Patani to Ryukyu, Fujian and other southern Chinese regions. Other local traders in Patani undoubtedly soon joined the growing Chinese community in the commercial activity in the region.

Following the Chinese official ban on maritime trade in 1433 there had been a steady decline in Ming maritime power, resulting in the development of a number of illicit trading networks, but mainly placing trade in the hands of merchants operating out of Ryukyu (Chang 1990, 67; Reid 1993, 15). This island kingdom was uniquely situated south of Japan, east of the great sea emporium of Ningpo, and north of Taiwan and the Fujian coast where trade activity was the highest in all of maritime China. Many merchants from Fujian came to settle near the Ryukyuan capital of Okinawa after the establishment of the official trade ban and were among the most active in the Patani-Ryukyu network. Via well-established and well-maintained tributary relations with the Ming court, Ryukyu emerged from 1443 onwards as the major player in East Asian trade. Through Ryukyu's network, the ports of Southeast Asia that had traditionally relied upon trade with China for the prosperity of their own economies had access to a steady flow of Chinese goods into their markets (Ishii 1990, 356–7; Chang 1991, 20).

Patani was also evidently developing its own pepper-producing areas in the interior of the Peninsula and continued to do so throughout the period. It may well have been the aromatic wood of the region that first brought Ryukyuan traders there, but pepper soon became the primary commodity of trade. Patani's pepper-growing regions continued to expand over the following century.<sup>7</sup> Patani never

<sup>5</sup> Ishii even speculates that trade between Ryukyu and Patani began earlier, but records of this activity have not survived.

<sup>6</sup> The Chinese had considered the Patani region (and its progenitor Langkasuka) the best source for all the aromatic woods that came to their markets (Wheatley 1961, 265; Bougas 1994, 4).

<sup>7</sup> Tomé Pires spoke highly of Patani as a center for the China Sea pepper trade and seemed to indicate that Patani became the center of trade along the entire east coast of the Malay-Thai Peninsula, its only significant rival at that time being Pahang (Cortesão 1944, 110, 268).

rivaled other pepper-markets such as Sunda, Melaka (before 1511), or Aceh, but its close proximity to southern China likely played a role in the development of the port into one of the major centers for the pepper-porcelain trade.

The fall of Melaka in 1511 brought much greater initial benefit to the pepper-traders of the South China Sea than to the Portuguese, who spent the following four decades attempting to tap into the Chinese market, with only limited success (Ferguson 1902, 94, 100, 156, 163).<sup>8</sup> A new network emerged almost immediately in which pepper from Patani, Sunda, and Pahang was drawn northwards into the ports of Ryukyu and Fujian. This shift away from Melaka allowed for trade between Patani and Ryukyu to reach its height in the years 1508–43 (Kobata and Matsuda 1969, 181–2). No quantities can be estimated, but the largest number of surviving documents date from that period. Other than the major commodities already mentioned, Ryukyu also imported camphor, gold, tin, ivory, sandalwood, bezoar stones,<sup>9</sup> dried prawns, birds' nests, beeswax, and dried buffalo and deer meat from Patani<sup>10</sup> in exchange for its own sulfur and horses, Chinese porcelain, silk and other cloth, copper coins, iron and ironware, and grain, and Japanese weapons, armor, and gold handicrafts (Sakamaki 1964, 387).

The shift in trade from Melaka to Patani also brought a massive influx of Islamic merchants, who linked the sultanate into wider networks of the early sixteenth century, boosting the port's position *vis-à-vis* its neighbors. These networks stretched as far as south Sulawesi, where the Portuguese noted Patani merchants as one of the most active groups of merchants by the 1540s (Reid 1983, 137). Through this process of expansion, Patani merchants also played a role in the forging of diplomatic and religious bonds with rulers across the region in places such as Gowa, Makassar, and elsewhere (Noorduyn 1956, 249). The establishment of Portuguese power in Melaka, however, severed what had been vital maritime trade routes through the straits, and thus cross-peninsular trade rose in the decades following, particularly the Kedah-Patani route, along which merchants made use of interior rivers for part of the journey (Reid 1993, 59). These overland routes, forged by Islamic merchants from both sides of the peninsula, kept trade between prominent Indian Ocean trade emporia and Patani alive throughout the sixteenth century. Further evidence of Melaka's workforce having shifted to Patani can be

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<sup>8</sup> This has been dealt with extensively in the secondary literature and is only discussed here briefly to highlight the role of the shifting networks for Patani (Ptak 2002, 447–67).

<sup>9</sup> Bezoar stones, produced in the stomachs of goats, were used as medicine against internal poisoning, poisoned wounds, and a host of other illnesses (Teixeira 1902, 230).

<sup>10</sup> Patani did not export rhinoceros horn, as claimed by the Dutch merchant John Huyghen van Linschoten. He seems to have confused Patani with Patna, a polity on the Bay of Bengal near the Ganges (Burnell and Tiele 1884, 8–10; Linschoten 1910, 206–7). A clarification between the two states has appeared (Bowrey 1905, 222).

seen in Peter Floris's observations of the Javanese slave rebellion in 1613, when the discontented workers burned much of the city (Moreland 1934, 94–5). Their existence in Patani in such great numbers suggests that the sultanate absorbed at least a portion of Melaka's underclass of laborers and craftsmen who served as a valuable asset in a region where the scarcity of manpower was commonplace.

Ultimately, Ryukyu's hold on trade with Patani and other Southeast Asian ports weakened during the 1520s and 1530s because of three interrelated factors (Sakamaki 1964, 388–9). First and foremost, "pirate" fleets originating along the coast of Fujian preyed upon ships that passed through their waters, a route that Ryukyuan ships took when accessing Southeast Asian ports other than Luzon. The shift of trade into the hands of Fujian merchants will be fully discussed in the next section of this article, but here it may suffice to say that Ryukyu steadily lost out to Fujian merchants and ceased to be a major factor in Patani trade by mid-century. Patani merchants engaged in the profitable pepper and porcelain trade may not have cared with whom they traded as long as they continued to gain access to Chinese goods. Furthermore, Fujian was geographically closer, and thus shipments returned more easily and quickly to Patani and the other pepper ports. Unlike the Ryukyu-based traders, the merchants of Fujian employed more aggressive tactics when dealing with coastal authorities and, at times, with each other. Perhaps most crucial was the influx of Portuguese firearms that enhanced the ability of Fujian seafarers to wage war on their enemies (Ptak 2004, 12). The Portuguese had just arrived on the scene and, in their attempt to gain access to Chinese porcelain and silk, opened up new trading links with the merchants of Fujian and, to a lesser extent, those of Guangdong. The first phase of Patani's commercial success came to a close but was succeeded by another period of even greater economic activity as the Patani-Fujian-Portuguese networks triumphed decisively over the trade missions of Ryukyu.

The Patani-Ryukyu trade nevertheless had profound effects on the local economy and allowed Patani to expand its pepper-growing regions. Though there is no available quantitative data concerning pepper production in the sultanate, it is clear that Patani maintained its position as a major pepper port visited by Chinese, Portuguese, and other merchants after its trade with Ryukyu declined. Throughout the first half of the century, Patani was second only to Ayutthaya in the number of trade missions it received from Ryukyu. Soon Portuguese traders came to establish warehouses in Patani in 1516, and the community had grown to about 300 merchants by the late 1530s (Hutchinson 1940, 22). Patani's most active and profitable trade connections continued to be with Chinese merchants, however, now living in Fujian.

## Smuggling and “Piracy” in the Patani Trade Networks, 1511–67

During the second phase, Patani assumed a more direct role in the trade of the South China Sea. The official Ming ban on Chinese maritime trade had left merchants with two options: tributary trade missions or smuggling. Tributary trade missions as a method of attracting Chinese trade had declined by the late fifteenth century. Two of the polities that had sent active trade missions to the Ming emperors – Ayutthaya and Melaka – may well have blocked attempts by potential rivals such as Patani to follow the same course. The fall of Melaka to the Portuguese, however, placed the South China Sea pepper trade in the hands of merchants from Patani, Pahang, Sunda, and Fujian (Ptak 2002, 459). Of these, only Fujian was a major consumer of pepper – as the entry point for much of China – whereas the former three polities were the producers in the network. As a result, “small private merchant empires” emerged in the early decades of the sixteenth century, composed of now displaced Melaka-based Islamic merchants with connections to Fujian who traded for pepper grown in the three pepper-producing regions (Ptak 2004, 10). Pepper had to be smuggled into Fujian at various points along the coast beyond the gaze of Ming officials who patrolled tirelessly to prevent trade they considered illegal. Despite official efforts, smuggling grew from the 1520s onwards as the main economic activity in the South China Sea.

The Portuguese soon realized that their capture of Melaka had done more to disperse trade to other ports than to draw it into their orbit. For the first decade after the conquest, however, when they were allowed to trade at Canton unhindered, the Portuguese managed to carry on a prosperous trade for Chinese porcelain and silk. But after the Portuguese were expelled from Canton in 1522 they had to search for trading connections elsewhere, for unlike the merchants of Patani and Pahang, who had long-standing connections with Chinese merchants, the Portuguese were bereft of such social capital (Chang 1934, 69). They had to seek out new economic ties along the east coast of the Peninsula, eventually establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with the Patani trading community that was just then emerging as the premier peninsular port for Chinese goods and pepper sales (Ferguson 1902, 162).

The administration of the emerging Portuguese trade empire was weakest in the China Sea, which remained until at least mid-century a minor appendage to its burgeoning India and Maluku trade (Boyajian 1993, 63). Many Portuguese merchants engaged in trade for personal profit and had to rely upon their own armaments and ties to local rulers for protection of their mercantile interests (Boyajian 1993). When they entered the South China Sea trade, especially as it was conducted off the Fujian coast, they had no decisive military advantage over their rivals, nor could they risk open display of their guns lest they draw further wrath from the Ming central government. Thus the Portuguese, in close connection with Patani

merchants, entered into the complex milieu of the smuggling trade by acquiring pepper at Patani and Pahang and trading it in China along the Fujian coast.

The geography of the Chinese provinces of Fujian, and to a lesser extent Guangdong, was quite amenable to smuggling (Murray 1987, 9). More than 700 islands dotted the sea off the coast of Fujian alone, where they functioned as refuges, trade havens, navigational markers, and anchorages for passing ships. Since the formal coastline was most heavily patrolled by Ming officials, most of the trade occurred amongst the many islands, where bargains could be struck more easily beyond the watchful eye of the coastguard ships (Chang 1934, 69–70).

“Piracy” and “smuggling” in the context of Fujian must be seen as relative terms. As the semi-independent maritime trading entities emerged in the South China Sea after 1511, they might be seen both as economic and quasi-political units which lay beyond the jurisdiction of Ming officials. Though merchant groups had an explicit interest in conducting trade, when they found their position threatened they either resorted to bribing Fujian élites for political protection or responded violently. The Ming records reflect the Chinese government’s belief that they possessed a monopoly on legitimate violence, even in Fujian waters where so-called “pirates” posed a direct challenge to their authority (Higgins 1981, 95–148). Only those who attempted to enforce the Ming ban considered the merchants to be illegal smugglers. If the active trade along the Fujian coast proved anything it was the necessity of smuggling for the prosperity of the Fujian economy under the Ming ban and the permeability of the coastline for ships and merchants who carried goods in and out.<sup>11</sup> Coastline merchants established their own set of rules, trading openly where weak authority or subtle bribery allowed, smuggling when forced to do so, and even resorting to coastal raiding when directly threatened.

The *Hikayat Patani*, the royal chronicle of Patani, never uses any term equivalent to “pirate.”<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that many of the “pirates” traded peacefully in Patani and only seem to have gained a reputation as coastal raiders in Ming waters. The Portuguese, at times, self-identified as pirates, but saw their actions as justified as the only available recourse to the Ming ban on maritime trade (Boxer 1953, 191). Individual merchants participated in Fujian trade at times as

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<sup>11</sup> Studies of the futility of governmental control over perceived crime elsewhere serve as a reminder of the limited ability pre-modern “policing” forces possessed against their rivals (Berdan 1999, 255–69).

<sup>12</sup> In the discussion of the Chinese merchant who presented a cannon ball to the raja of Patani, the *Hikayat Patani* calls him a “mere merchant.” For references to the *Hikayat Patani* chronicle, we consulted the original 1839 Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (Abdullah Menshi) manuscript in Jawi, the oldest known extant version of the chronicle. For the convenience of readers without access to the manuscript, references to Andries Teeuw and David Wyatt’s transliteration and translation have been included (LC 1839, 11–14; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 75–8, 152–4).

peaceful merchants, at others as smugglers working undercover and, when threatened, as “pirates” in the eyes of the Ming officials, by employing force to conduct trade without harassment (Higgins 1981, 25–7). The Ming sources convey the impression that the merchants engaged in smuggling precisely because those who recorded the events had an interest in the reduction of trade and the reestablishment of Ming power in southern China. Characterizing the coastline as lawless here seems only to suggest that it remained beyond the control of China’s administration. To actors within this trading system, codes of conduct, how merchants established “legitimate” trade agreements between various groups, and how and when one waged war against rivals must have all possessed an internal logic or a variety of competing logics that should be viewed as akin to “laws”, though they never attained political legitimacy with which to support the independence of their societies.

Trade remained the main interest of most, if not all, of the merchants toiling in Fujian waters. Though Portuguese records often portray their allies and competitors as passive members in the trading system, a close reading of such records reveals a more complex relationship. Gaspar de Cruz, for example, wrote that the Portuguese managed to enter into the Fujian markets because Chinese merchants of the diaspora who composed the bulk of their crew had contacts – whether financial or familial – with local merchants along the coast (Boxer 1953, 192).<sup>13</sup> Many of the Chinese merchants aboard Portuguese ships came from Patani, where a large Fujian diaspora lived and where the Portuguese had a growing economic presence (Ptak 2002, 459). Ships arrived filled with pepper that merchants exchanged for local wares, foodstuffs, porcelain, and silk (Chang 1990, 74). This system put the Chinese merchants employed by the Portuguese at a clear advantage in bartering for their portion of the profits, because, when they were in Fujian, they could often rely upon family connections or other social relations to obtain better prices (Boxer 1953, 192). The same group of Chinese merchants also worked with local elites to gain access to capital, manpower, or protection for their trade activity (Chang 1934, 69–70; Chang 1983, 227; Ng 1995, 392). Furthermore, they worked as interpreters and arranged the exchange of goods, which naturally put them in a profitable position *vis-à-vis* the Portuguese.

If the Portuguese possessed a counterweight to the social capital of the dispersed merchants it was their possession of firearms and their readiness to trade them in Fujian (Ptak 2004, 12). No records detailing quantities of gun sales are available, but one may take the rising level of violence as evidence of the influx

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<sup>13</sup> Fernão Mendes Pinto noted in several instances that Portuguese captains often hired Patani merchants and crewmen, who were said to be both loyal and trustworthy (Mendes Pinto 1989, 104–6, 135–8).

of firearms into the smuggling networks. The 1530s and 1540s saw an increasing number of coastal raids and the Portuguese – in concert with their trading partners – gained a steady presence in Fujian (Boxer 1953, 191–2).<sup>14</sup> Many “pirate” bands began to appear in open defiance of the Ming ban and operated within the smuggling networks for their own profit. The level of direct conflict reached a climax in 1548 when Ming officials managed to defeat Hsu Tung, whose band had gained great power through the preceding decade (Ng 1995, 394; Wills 1979, 211–2). Internal corruption, however, led to the dismissal of those officials who opposed smuggling along the coast and ushered in a brief reversal of the more serious attempts at suppressing trade. In this case, the “corruption” of Fujian officials might be seen as the pragmatic manner in which coastal authorities came to regard the necessities of trade in the region in defiance of the strictures imposed by the unrealistic Ming ideological environment.

In general, the violence convinced many rulers on the perimeter of the South China Sea to seek military protection for their merchant vessels and thus led to a general escalation of ship armaments (Kathirithamby-Wells 1993, 124–5; Manguin 1993, 205–6). Furthermore, it might be speculated that Patani’s assault on Ayutthaya in 1564 was only possible because of the vast improvements in guns its rulers had acquired from the Portuguese and the expansion of its fleet during the preceding decades (LC 1839, 18–24; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 81–6, 157–61). Still, military threat seemed greatest along the Fujian coast where merchant ships most risked being attacked.

When merchants dared not attack local officials, they bribed them to allow trade in the ports (Boxer 1953, 192). In one instance, a local governor attacked many of the smugglers in the region, including Portuguese ships. Having bested his enemies by force of numbers, the governor then gave the Portuguese captain the opportunity to offer a bribe. Apparently a satisfactory transaction occurred between the two parties, because soon after the governor temporarily opened Ningpo and the ports of Fujian to the Portuguese without harassment. Bribery was often an attractive alternative to force, not only because it was naturally safer, but also because it drew less attention from Ming officials who were not directly co-opted in the process. It also shows that the bureaucracy of Fujian was rife with “corruption” and people at the highest posts often involved themselves directly in illicit trade.

Chinese and Muslim merchants based in Patani also engaged in trade along similar routes as the Portuguese (Mendes Pinto 1989, 104–6). Likewise, many Fujian merchants found it safer to transport their goods south to Patani and the other

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<sup>14</sup> Hsu Tung, one of the “pirate” chiefs, had previously traded at Melaka and maintained a close relationship with the Portuguese (Ng 1995, 394).

pepper ports where they could conduct their trade in relative peace and safety (Chang 1934, 69, 95; Ptak 2002, 458; Andaya 1993, 44; Roelofsz 1962, 263). In all of the dealings within the Patani-Fujian-Portuguese networks, there was a surprising level of cooperation between the three major players.<sup>15</sup> Certainly individual merchants competed for sales when in port, but as the Portuguese adventurer Fernão Mendes Pinto noted in his colorful account, they often greeted each other at sea with a lessened degree of hostility than that which they showed Ming officials (Mendes Pinto 1989, 104–6). In comparison to the Fujian coast, where one had to be on constant guard, Mendes Pinto depicts Patani as a safe haven where Portuguese and other ships returned to safety after enduring the rigors of smuggling and raiding (Mendes Pinto 1989; Collis 1949, 67–9). The characterization of the period as one of “lawlessness” seems merely to convey Ming conceptions of all trade along the Fujian coast as illegal and should not be taken as any indication of the actual volume of trade conducted. There was a general rise in trade such that one might view the expansion of smuggling and “pirate” networks as the lifeblood of the overall economic fabric of the South China Sea in which Patani was becoming a significant player from the 1530s onward (Ptak 2002, 451).

Following the death of Hsu Tung in 1548, “piracy” erupted to unprecedented levels of coastal raiding and smuggling, probably due to a combination of bureaucratic bribery and a splintering of the once relatively united “pirate” band into many competing factions. The block of Fujian smugglers who had tended to “cooperate” in preceding years now began to compete much more fiercely with one another as many new merchants were forced into the fray as a result of Ming policies suppressing coastal raiding, which disrupted the remaining stable trade centers (Wills 1979, 212). South China entered what was termed the *wokou* crisis, 1549–61. Originally the term was used to refer to the Japanese “pirates” who had entered the area for coastal raiding and smuggling, but later came to encompass all the people who conducted illegal trade along the Fujian coast, most of whom were Chinese. Spurred on by access to Portuguese guns, rival groups fought each other as much as they opposed Ming government interference in their affairs (Higgins 1981, 61, 63). Individual “pirate” bands often controlled one or more ports, which they used as bases for raiding and trade. The 1550s saw an increase in violence at sea, but trade continued to prosper with the influx of Japanese goods into Fujian-centered networks which finally eclipsed the Ryukyu trade. At this time Patani began to gain access to Japanese goods through the network when some of the *wokou* groups visited the port (Ptak 2002, 458). This trade, whether in the hands

<sup>15</sup> Examples of cooperation and good relations between the Portuguese, Fujian, and Patani merchants appear throughout Mendes Pinto’s work (Mendes Pinto 1989; Ptak 2002, 466).

of merchants from Fujian, Portugal, Japan, Siam, or Malay parts of the Peninsula, was clearly now in the hands of anti-Ming merchants and smugglers (Boxer 1953, 193).

Wang Chih succeeded Hsu Tung as the leader of the largest band of *wokou* throughout the 1550s. He commanded a loose merchant empire that stretched as far south as Patani, where he is said to have traded his wares frequently without conflicts with the local authorities (Wills 1979, 211–2). He possessed great military skill and was an able commander at sea, where he harassed his enemies tirelessly. Ming officials even managed to bribe him into attacking rival bands in a slow process of elimination (Wills 1979, 213). The government did not enact serious measures to reassert direct control of Fujian until about 1557 and by 1561 sections of the coast were free of “pirate” bands. Ming control was finally reasserted in Fujian in 1564 and Guangdong in 1566 (Wills 1979, 211). The following year the central government lifted the ban on trade by issuing new licenses to local merchants. Almost overnight many small-scale merchants gave up smuggling to work within the new system, which allowed them to trade without fear of retribution (Ptak 1998, 187). The Portuguese had already established “legitimate” trade with China at Macau in 1553 and afterwards appeared to rely less upon mercantile connections they had previously garnered in Patani and other Southeast Asian ports. Patani merchants were, by that time, in a strong enough position to forge new connections with China Sea traders to further their own economic interests (Mendes Pinto 1989, 273).

The decline of Ryukyu-Patani trade missions in the 1540s brought about no general downturn for the economy of the sultanate. Instead, Patani merchants in the period 1511–67, whether under the protection of Portuguese shipmasters or aboard their own ships, continued to establish new relations with merchants throughout the South China Sea networks centered on the Fujian coast. In many cases merchants from Fujian who had operated at ports in Ryukyu merely returned to their home province as the focus of the trade networks shifted southward. Along the island-dotted coastline of Fujian they continued to trade with Patani merchants, among others, which brought bountiful rewards for merchants who braved the seas. As the high era of “piracy” along the South China coast came to a close at the end of the 1560s, most smugglers of the region accepted the new Ming system of mercantile conduct.

### **The Lian Dao-Qian Band in Patani, 1566–1600**

Not all of the *wokou* groups accepted the new Ming policy, however. Lian Dao-Qian, a native of Guangdong and a prominent member of one of the “pirate” bands subdued in 1566, soon reorganized disaffected merchants and smugglers in the region under his leadership and by 1567 was again leading raids along the

coastline (Chan 1976, 927–30). The Ming authorities placed a bounty price upon him and supplied superior vessels to Fujian and Guangdong with which to apprehend him. The authorities also attempted to turn one “pirate” leader against another and even managed to co-opt Lian’s fleet against one of his rivals in 1569. Meanwhile, Lian feigned further cooperation as he rebuilt his own fleet and drew in stragglers from other bands to restore his group’s numbers. By July of that year, one report estimated he had as many as 5,000 followers armed with Portuguese firearms (Chan 1976, 928). For the following three years, he alternated between submission to and rebellion against the Ming court as he continued to dominate trade and smuggling along the coast.

In the face of mounting opposition, Lian and his band fled south in 1573 along the coast, perhaps spending time in Taiwan and the P’eng-hu Islands, and settling at K’un-lun Island (Pulo Condore) in the South China Sea in 1574 (Chan 1976, 929; Wade 2004, 60, 75). He also probably spent time along the coast of central Siam, where a joint Chinese-Siamese force is said to have attacked him (Wade 2004, 59). In 1578, he moved his base to Patani, when his forces are thought to have declined to about 2,000 men (Wade 2004, 57, 62; Wee 1987, 223). There is no indication why he moved suddenly much further south, but it is possible that, following a major defeat, he relied upon long-standing trade connections with the sultanate and found welcome there. Local Pattani tales tell that Lian conquered the city, but given that the court chronicle of the sultanate, the *Hikayat Patani*, does not mention such an attack, it is probable that he gained influence there after a symbolic show of arms (Wade 2004, 56).<sup>16</sup> The Ming records for 1580-81 show that authorities continued to try to apprehend Lian while he continued to lead raids from Patani against Chinese ships (Wade 2004, 56).

Lian Dao-Qian quickly solidified his position in Patani by marrying a member of the royal family (Wade 2004, 75; Wee 1987, 223).<sup>17</sup> While in local tales this is usually stated to be the raja’s daughter, the ruler at the time of Lian’s arrival was Sultan Bahadur, who was not known to have had any children. A more likely case is that he married one of Bahadur’s sisters, perhaps Raja Ijau. She was the eldest of three royal sisters, is not known to have entered into any other marriage, and succeeded Bahadur following his assassination in 1584. When he married the royal princess, Lian is said to have embraced Islam (Wee 1987, 223). The conversion

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<sup>16</sup> The authors of the *Hikayat Patani*, it might be added, were never shy to mention conflicts or potential threats to Patani, particularly those posed by Ayutthaya (LC 1839; Teeuw and Wyatt, 1970; Wade 2004, 75).

<sup>17</sup> Wee based his account on stories said to have been common in the Pattani area in the 1920s and 1930s.

of the Chinese merchant leader no doubt convinced many of his followers to do likewise. This process pays credence to the already strong influence of the Islamic merchants and the court culture that was emerging in Patani by the late sixteenth century. Lian also acquired a fief somewhere near Patani, where he established a short-lived port that bore his name (Wade 2004, 59–60). Chinese records even suggest that other members of Lian’s band attained prestigious positions in the raja’s service and that some members were bequeathed the local title of *datuk* (Kobata and Matsuda 1969, 179–80). The success of Lian and his band in Chinese and oral accounts thus exhibits the flexible nature of the Patani court to incorporate Malay, Chinese, and perhaps even Siamese interests, and thus affords a different view than that portrayed in the *Hikayat Patani*. Taken as a whole, Lian’s activities in Patani suggest that he and his followers sought to establish permanent ties in their new base. After 1581, he fades from the Ming records, which suggests that he retired from sea raiding and took up permanent residence in Patani.<sup>18</sup>

One of the most popular stories of Pattani tells of Lian’s sister, Lian Gu-Niang, arriving in Patani with a fleet of her own to search for her brother (Wee 1987, 223). Upon learning that he had adopted local Malay customs, religion, and dress, she begged him to return to China and embrace his own culture once more. Lian Dao-Qian refused and a battle ensued in which his sister was defeated. Her generals, refusing to accept defeat, committed ritual suicide and Lian Gu-Niang hanged herself from a tree. Years later, a gravestone was erected by members of her family bearing the Chinese date equivalent to 1574 (Franke 1976, 47).<sup>19</sup> Though this date seems impossibly early, since the grave was constructed many years after her death, it is likely that the date was erroneously estimated by the engraver. Nevertheless the gravestone suggests that the two bands were active in the region in the late 1570s. Today a temple and small memorial remain near the Gresik mosque in the old city of Pattani.<sup>20</sup>

Lian Dao-Qian is best known in Patani as the person who cast its three famous cannons (Wade 2004, 76–7; Wee 1987, 223–4). In Malay accounts, he is only credited with furnishing the cannon ball as a gift to the raja of Patani. According to stories preserved by the Chinese community of Pattani, Raja Ijau requested three

<sup>18</sup> Ming records last mention Lian in connection to a raid he led against Qiong-zhou and Ya-zhou (both administrative divisions on Hainan Island) in 1580–81 (Wade 2004, 56).

<sup>19</sup> Franke was initially skeptical of a date so early for Chinese in the Pattani area, but after his study of a tombstone dated 1592, he found the earlier engraving to possess more authenticity (Franke, 1984, 61; Wade 2004, 75–6).

<sup>20</sup> ‘Gresik/Kresik’ is the Malay spelling for the mosque and today is used to refer to the area around the old city of Patani. ‘Kru Se’ often appears in scholarly writing in English, which is the Romanization of the Thai spelling for the same word.

cannons to be constructed and after merchants acquired the necessary amount of copper or brass, Lian constructed the cannons and gave each of them a name: Nang Patani, Seri Negeri, and Maha Lela.<sup>21</sup> Various colorful tales tell that the greatest of the three cannons would not fire and that, after recasting it, Lian died during a test fire.<sup>22</sup> All accounts agree that Raja Ijau had ascended the throne prior to the time of the casting of the cannons, thus suggesting that they were constructed at some point in the late 1580s. The fact that Raja Ijau had no children that succeeded her to the throne of Patani may also indicate that her possible marriage to Lian only lasted a brief period before he met his tragic end.<sup>23</sup>

The arrival of Lian Dao-Qian's band in Patani in 1578 seems only to have increased the economic power of the sultanate. While Ming officials considered such smugglers and "pirates" as dangerous adversaries, other surviving records suggest that the rulers of Patani welcomed Lian Dao-Qian and that he and his followers enjoyed social positions among the elite of the court and marketplace. This fact provides further evidence that Lian Dao-Qian's band possessed great economic power and played a direct role in forging enduring bonds between Patani and the merchants of China and Japan.

### Conclusion: The Commercial Boom and the Rise of Patani

Patani's growing trade connections that culminated with Lian Dao-Qian's arrival brought great benefits to the sultanate. First and foremost, Patani exemplified a port polity caught in the general upturn of what Anthony Reid has termed the "Age of Commerce." The great commercial boom of 1570–1630 saw a surge of economic activity and, in this respect, Patani might be seen as the herald of a wider trend, uniquely situated as it was on the southern end of the Gulf of Thailand, eastern side of the South China Sea, and on the northern end of the Malay world, where trade flourished long after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese. In the sixteenth century, as in centuries before and after, the sea served as the great connector between far-flung ports, where profitable trade was conducted by innumerable merchants. The trade of the South China Sea and Patani's place in that commercial activity is one example of the region-wide boom, and the manner in which the fortunes of

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<sup>21</sup> The above names were drawn from Chinese legends (Wade 2004: 76–7). Malay accounts name them Seri Negeri, Tuk Buk, and Nang Liu-Liu (LC 1839, 14; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 78, 154).

<sup>22</sup> The *Hikayat Patani* also features this part of the story but again does not tell who recast the cannons (LC 1839, 14; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 78, 154).

<sup>23</sup> Many later Chinese legends of Lian Dao-Qian claimed him as the progenitor of the entire community. This reflects his position as the founder of their community in the Pattani region (Wee 1987, 224).

polities rose and fell according to their ability to attract merchants to their docks. Such trade gave rise to more powerful political regimes, introduced new products, commercialized the economies of the region with Japanese and American silver, gave birth to a diverse array of merchant diasporas, and created new relationships between distant communities who traded for mutual benefit.

On a regional scale, Patani might be seen as having bested a number of rivals in its ascent to become one of the premier markets for Chinese and Japanese goods. In this regard, Patani did not gain a permanent advantage over Pahang and Nakhon Si Thammarat – its principal competitors for east coast peninsular trade – until the arrival of Lian Dao-Qian’s fleet in the 1570s.<sup>24</sup> The “pirates” constituted a formidable force in Patani waters by warding off any attempts at political intrusion from the north or south. Despite their reputation as brigands and sea raiders, these “pirates” also possessed valuable trade connections throughout the South China Sea and possessed a great deal of capital with which to finance mercantile projects. Indeed, through the settlement of the region by Lian Dao-Qian’s followers, Patani gained the reputation as the “door to China and Japan” (Davies 1961, 70).<sup>25</sup> Patani established direct trade relations with Japan by 1592, which became a significant part of the sultanate’s overall economic activity in the century following. A triangular trade between Patani, Fujian, and Japan prospered until the late seventeenth century, when internal political instability in the sultanate finally led to the deterioration of the links (Sarasin 1977, 62; Ishii 1998, 103–29). When the United East India Company (VOC) arrived in Southeast Asian waters at the dawn of the seventeenth century, Patani was one of the first ports visited, and the Dutch established a factory and carried on active trade there for the following two decades.<sup>26</sup> By 1604, VOC officials had employed Chinese contacts in Patani to assist their diplomatic efforts in both Siam and China (Terpstra 1938, 22; Groeneveldt 1898, 14–9). In much the same manner, the English East India Company established a factory in Patani in 1612 but only managed a sporadic trade there throughout the seventeenth century (Moreland 1934).

Though the trade ban had long served to inhibit the work of smugglers before 1567, the fact that Lian Dao-Qian and other “pirate” leaders refused to return to trading under the new system of official licenses suggests that they were, in fact, threatened by the abolition of the trade ban. Lian Dao-Qian attained great social prestige because of his success in obstructing the ban, not because he was

<sup>24</sup> Reid seems to have erroneously dated their arrival to the 1560s (Reid 1993, 212).

<sup>25</sup> Sarasin Viraphol noted that Patani and the Japanese port of Hirado were referred to as “sister ports” because of the flourishing trade conducted between them during the period 1611–28 (Sarasin 1977, 15–6).

<sup>26</sup> For an account of VOC activities in Patani, see Terpstra (1938).

a particularly gifted merchant.<sup>27</sup> Despite the great strength of his followers and their impressive fleet, Lian Dao-Qian's social position was contingent upon the maintenance of the ban itself. Once a majority of the former smugglers and "pirates" embraced the new trading system of official licenses after 1567, the social position of the "pirate" leaders became deflated. Thus it was not only military threat but also a peculiar social dynamic that compelled Lian Dao-Qian to relocate to Patani.

The Chinese community in Patani flourished after the death of Lian Dao-Qian and continued to remain active in economic affairs in the region for at least a century. The Chinese residents managed to attain such prominent positions in trade that one early seventeenth century Dutch writer characterized Patani as effectively a Chinese colony that lay outside the political domain of China proper (van Noort 1926, 124–5; van Foreest and de Booy 1980, 222–3). Other early Dutch observers recommended Patani as the best place to engage in trade with China if Canton was not open to them (Unger 1948, 146–7). The *Hikayat Patani* only mentions the Chinese merchants in conjunction with the casting of the cannons, but this should not be taken as firm evidence of an otherwise exaggerated view of the Chinese in Patani. The chronicle was primarily concerned with affairs within the court and paid almost no attention to trade or local intrigue beyond the palace walls. Chinese descended from Lian Dao-Qian's band are even said to have migrated south into Kelantan, where they engaged in gold mining and pepper planting, and where they preserved oral accounts of their origins (Wee 1987, 224).

No doubt Malay-speaking and Muslims residents of Patani also benefited from the general economic boom and found opportunities to forge relationships with Chinese merchants for their own profit. Others, perhaps forced out by Chinese competition, sought out opportunities in other ports. The prominent position of Patani families in the wider Malay world is one of the most striking examples of Patani's rise to economic success. In Makassar, by the turn of the seventeenth century, Patani merchants played a significant part in the economic activity of the city (Cummings 1998, 114). By the 1630s, Maharaja Lela, an *orang kaya* (member of the élite) from Patani, was selected as the leader of the Malays in Makassar and became a close ally of the sultan, fighting against the Dutch until their capture of the city in 1669 (Sutherland 2004, 80). Likewise in Batavia, Entji Amat, another Patani nobleman, was selected as leader of the community there and amassed a great personal fortune through trade and corruption (Reid 1993, 129).

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Nugent, in his study of smuggling along the Ghana-Togo borderland, noted that attempts at trade control and the abolition of "illicit" trade actually provided some ambitious merchants an opportunity to gain social prestige via smuggling. Within this schema, certain successful smugglers owed their newly acquired social capital to the existence and maintenance of the forces that worked to prevent them from trading (Nugent 2002, 77–113).

One should not paint too rosy a picture of Lian Dao-Qian's activities in Patani. With such an influx of powerful élites and their dominance, at least for a few decades, of economic affairs, there must have been resistance among already-established élites against threats to their power. These disaffected members of society may have been influential in urging Sultan Bahadur to impose high port taxes upon trade during the latter part of his reign. Early Dutch and English records state that conditions for trade were very poor when Sultan Bahadur ruled Patani and that prominent *orang kaya* deposed him and placed Raja Ijau upon the throne (van Foreest and de Booy 1980, 226). This dispels the feeble theory, perhaps first propagated by the French priest Nicolas Gervaise, that the queens had been installed because they were more easily controlled than male rulers (Gervaise 1688, 316–7). Instead, evidence suggests that Raja Ijau ascended the throne after being entrusted with rule by the leading families of Patani because she possessed a skill in economic bargaining that was widely attributed to women throughout early modern Southeast Asia (and even today) and governed the polity with greater wisdom and skill than her predecessor.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it has often been noted that property was better protected in Patani than in surrounding regions, here due to the fact that the *orang kaya* were more active in affairs of governance.<sup>29</sup> It follows that protection of private property and the establishment of opportunities conducive to trading became the hallmark of Raja Ijau's reign.

Great economic success further allowed Raja Ijau to enact great public works. Most famously, she financed the casting of the three cannons, already discussed. Gresik mosque, one of the most powerful and enduring examples of the prestige of the sultanate, may indeed have been built at this time or slightly later, as a result of royal patronage.<sup>30</sup> Most importantly in economic matters, Raja Ijau's ministers constructed a number of canals that made fresh water available to Patani's growing population (LC 1839, 49–50; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 105–6, 177–8). Other channels allowed more convenient transportation of goods within the city and connected the city center with the more distant docks. Gresik mosque and the canals of Raja Ijau, though perhaps less splendidous, are no less important to Pattani than the temples of Angkor and their famous irrigation works are to Cambodia, as potent reminders of the power, prestige, and prosperity attained during a polity's golden age.

<sup>28</sup> In the records of Dutch Admiral Jacob Van Neck, Raja Ijau plays an active part in trade negotiations (Terpstra 1938, 8). The prominence of women in commercial affairs elsewhere in Southeast Asia was often noted by travelers in the region (Reid 1988, 162–5).

<sup>29</sup> Mendes Pinto mentions a Patani merchant of the 1530s who had had his property confiscated unfairly by the raja of Patani. The situation appears to have changed dramatically by 1600 (Mendes Pinto 1989, 105–6; Villiers 1990, 91).

<sup>30</sup> The mosque attributed to Sultan Mudhaffar's reign was probably an earlier, perhaps temporary, mosque that preceded Gresik mosque (LC 1839, 14–15; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 78–9, 154–5).

### Abbreviations

LC 1839 – Abdullah bin Abdulkadir (copyist). *Hikayat Patani*. Singapore, 1839.  
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