

DANIEL MCMAHON

Qing Highland Precedent, Yan Ruyi, and the Defense of the Guangdong Coast, 1804–1805

Recent research on China's Qing 清 dynasty (1644–1911) administration has observed a remarkable elasticity in regional government management. This included not only flexible responses to specific and varying local conditions, but also the borrowing of ideas and techniques that were first tried out in the borderlands of the empire.¹ Perhaps the most famous instance of calculated administrative transfer is seen in the late-eighteenth century, when lessons of rule in China's northwestern territories were applied to the southern coast and the newly intrusive European powers there. Arrangements such as the Canton Trade echoed northern models of trading relations, if proving to be of relatively more limited effectiveness.²

It is widely recognized that the Qing imperial government was unprepared for the demands of the West in the nineteenth century. Its reliance on northern frontier precedent for the management of maritime China, in part, explains why.³ This essay explores a related case of administrative borrowing: the transfer of personnel, policy,

¹ Peter C. Purdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2005), pp. 551–52; C. Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 2006), pp. 210–12. For a related discussion, see Peter C. Purdue, "From Turfan to Taiwan: Trade and War on Two Chinese Frontiers," in Bradley J. Parker and Lars Rodseth, eds., *Untaming the Frontier in Anthropology, Archaeology, and History* (Tucson: U. of Arizona P., 2005). Concerning the transfer of borderland methods in the highland reconstruction following the 1796–1804 White Lotus revolt, see Daniel McMahon, "Qing Reconstruction in the Southern Shaanxi Highlands, 1799–1820: State Perceptions and Plans," *Late Imperial China* 30.1 (June 2009), pp. 100–12.

² For related discussion of administrative borrowing between borderlands, see Hao Yen-p'ing, "Changing Chinese Views of Western Relations, 1840–95," in John K. Fairbank and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China: Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911*, pt. 2, Vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1980), pp. 150–51; Robert James Antony and Jane Leonard, eds., *Dragons, Tigers, and Dogs: Qing Crisis Management and the Boundaries of State Power in Late Imperial China* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 2003) (esp. introductory chap.); Purdue, *China Marches West*, pp. 400, 551–55.

³ Dian Murray concurs that Chinese military and diplomatic considerations in regard to early-19th c. pirates were "much closer to 1750 than 1850"; see "Piracy and China's Maritime Transition, 1750–1850," in Wang Gungwu and Ny Chin-Keong, eds., *Maritime China in Transition, 1750–1850* (Harrassowitz Verlag: Weisbaden, 2004), p. 43.

and bureaucratic perception from the great highland rebellions of the early-nineteenth century – the Miao 苗 (1795–1797) and White Lotus (1796–1804) revolts – to quell sustained piracy along the Guangdong coast. The discussion focuses on the scholar-official Yan Ruyi 嚴如煜 (1759–1826), a defense strategist at work in Guangdong from 1804 to 1805, whose ideas of coastal ecology, history, people, and control were profoundly shaped by his previous pacification experience in the rebel-torn highlands of western Hunan and southern Shaanxi.⁴

As will be seen, a mixture of ignorance, administrative precedent, and recent experience prompted Yan Ruyi, and a group of fellow imperial planners, to recreate the successes of recent borderland pacification using modified strategies of military reorganization and community defense. These plans, even if ultimately effective, encountered substantial problems when applied to the vastly dissimilar conditions of coastal Guangdong. In envisioning the coast in terms of the mountains, sea-going folk in terms of inland subjects, and coastal institutions in terms of inland institutions, Yan Ruyi failed to fully ascertain the qualitatively different impact the sea had upon regional organization, development, and culture. This shortcoming, which he confronted and in part mitigated, reveals the dangers presented by Qing officialdom's calculated transfer of administrative ideas between border regions.

THE OUTBREAK OF PIRACY ON THE SOUTH CHINA COAST

In 1795, the Miao revolt broke out on the so-called western Hunan Miao Frontier (Hunan Miaojiang 湖南苗疆), the mountainous multiethnic borderland where this province abutted Guizhou. In 1796, a second and far larger rebellion erupted in the Han-settled highlands along the Hubei-Sichuan-Shaanxi border.⁵ These revolts, pacification of which required as much as 200,000 troops and 200 million taels, presented one of the greatest challenges to internal control the Qing state had seen in almost a century. They were not, however, the only disruptions facing the dynasty at the turn of the nineteenth century. Concurrently with the outbreak of disturbances in the highland interior, piracy erupted along China's coast. By 1795, large corsair fleets were

⁴ For a study of Yan Ruyi's borderland defense work in western Hunan, southern Shaanxi, and coastal Guangdong, see Daniel McMahon, "Restoring the Garden: Yan Ruyi and the Civilizing of China's Internal Frontiers, 1795–1805," Ph.D. diss. (U. California, Davis, 1999).

⁵ For summaries of the events of the Miao and White Lotus revolts in the late-18th c., see Susan Mann Jones and Philip Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Cambridge History of China: Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911*, pt. 1, Vol. 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1978), pp. 132–44.

ravaging littoral Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang, creating the most formidable threat to maritime security the country had seen since the pacification of Zheng Chenggong's 鄭成功 pirate fleet in 1683.⁶

The situation was especially pressing in Guangdong province, where the raiders (initially drawing aid from the Vietnamese government) had built a confederation of 50,000 to 70,000 men. Qing officials were repeatedly frustrated by these corsairs' superior arms, equipment, organization, and manpower – military capability that allowed them to openly defy state authority. Administrators were further vexed by the coastal peoples' lack of organized resistance, a consequence of both close relations with the pirates and the terror created by the corsairs' methodical brutality. The state faced a crisis: it was hobbled by lack of resources and local support, confronted by a predatory enemy of terrifying power, and subjected to the pressures of a distant inland court that was neither fully sympathetic to regional administrators nor fully cognizant of local coastal conditions.⁷

As the pacification of the White Lotus rebellion drew to a close in 1804, the Jiaqing 嘉慶 emperor (r. 1796–1820) focused greater attention upon the attacks along the south China coast. Having assembled a group of coastal bureaucrats to confront the pirate problem in 1799 – a loosely-organized clique including famed general Li Changgeng 李長庚 (1750–1808), Jiaqing then grew disillusioned with their lack of success.⁸ Echoing the rhetoric of the 1799–1805 “Jiaqing Reforms,” which asserted that incompetent and corrupt regional “officials had forced subjects to rebel 官逼民反,” the emperor turned his support to a new group of more trusted interior administrators. He charged these men, who included Nayancheng 那彥成 (1764–1833) and Bailing 百齡 (1748–1816), with a plan to enact more comprehensive coastal defense based on Ming-dynasty strategies.⁹

⁶ For discussion of this pirate menace and the Qing governmental reaction, see Yang Jinsen 楊金森 and Fan Zhongyi 范中義, *Zhongguo haifang shi* 中國海防史 (Beijing: Haifang chubanshe, 2005) 1, pp. 498–509; Dian Murray, *Pirates of the South China Coast, 1790–1810* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1987), esp. p. 1; Dian Murray, “Conflict and Coexistence: The Sino-Vietnamese Maritime Boundaries in Historical Perspective,” *Wisconsin Papers on Southeast Asia* 13 (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1988). For a more in-depth study of coastal pirates, see Robert James Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late South China* (Berkeley: Institute for East Asian Studies, 2003).

⁷ Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 1–3.

⁸ Yang and Fan, *Zhongguo haifang shi*, p. 503. Concerning the career of Li Changgeng, see Arthur Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943–44), pp. 446–48. Murray refers to Li as “an almost solitary example of a government official resolved to do his duty.” *Pirates*, p. 119.

⁹ Yang and Fan, *Zhongguo haifang shi*, p. 503.

Initiating an administrative reshuffle late in 1804, emperor Jiaqing personally tapped Nayancheng to assume the post of governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi. This administrator, a Manchu bannerman and leading official in the White Lotus pacification, was a man of solid experience, proven efficiency, and impeccable ties to the court-favored “Northern Scholar” clique. Having been alerted by the Grand Council of his new post, Nayancheng then enlisted a trusted rebel-fighting Shaanxi subordinate, Yan Ruyi, to serve as his advisor. The two men remained in Guangdong for the next year, until Nayancheng was dismissed toward the end of 1805.¹⁰

At the time of his recruitment, Yan Ruyi was a nationally noted strategist for community mobilization and defense in mountain areas. In the years 1795–97, he had served as an advisor to the governor of Hunan, advocating and overseeing civil fortification during the pacification of the Miao revolt, in the course of which he had tendered several influential reports. In 1800, as the White Lotus revolt raged, Yan was granted first place by the emperor in a special examination on defensive measures. Thereafter the scholar was posted in southern Shaanxi to mobilize communities in the context of the Jiaqing court’s “strengthen the walls and clear the countryside” (*jianbi qingye* 堅壁清野) initiative. In later years, the scholar would gain further renown for his detailed guidebooks on regional environment and administration – *Miao fangbei lan* 苗防備覽 (*Guide to Defense against the Miao*), *Sanshengbian fangbei lan* 三省邊防備覽 (*Guide to Defense of the Three-Province Border Region*), and *Yangfang jiyao* 洋防輯要 (*Essentials of Coastal Defense*). These works contain his most influential local defense proposals, as does his collected works, *Leyuan wenchao* 樂園文鈔, and the seminal 1820s compendia of statecraft essays, *Huangchao jingshi wenbian* 皇朝經世文編 (*Statecraft Essays of the Reigning Dynasty*).¹¹

¹⁰ For a discussion of Nayancheng’s service fighting pirates in Guangdong, see Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 99–118. For a Qing report of these events, see He Changling 賀長齡 and Wei Yuan 魏源, eds., *Huangchao jingshi wenbian* 皇朝經世文編 (1826–27; hereafter cited as *HCJSWB*), j. 83, p. 30a. For a biographical sketch of Nayancheng, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 584–87. Concerning Nayancheng’s work on the northern border, where he was later transferred, see Chen Wangcheng 陳旺城, *Nayancheng yu Huijiang* 那彥成與回疆 (Taipei: Zhongguo bianzheng xiehui, 1997).

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of Yan Ruyi’s wartime service in Hunan and Shaanxi, see McMahon, “Restoring the Garden.” For reports in these primary sources, see Yan Ruyi, ed., *Miao fangbei lan* (preface 1820), j. 21–22; Yan Ruyi, *Leyuan wenchao* (pref. dated 1844; hereafter cited as *LYWC*), j. 4–7; Yan Ruyi, ed., *Sanshengbian fangbei lan* (preface 1830; hereafter cited as *SSBFBL*), j. 12–13; Yan Ruyi, ed., *Yangfang jiyao* 洋防輯要 (rpt. Taipei: Xuesheng, 1985 [1838]; hereafter cited as *YFY*), j. 17; *HCJSWB*, j. 82, 83 (esp. pp. 31a–36a), 89, 114.

As of 1804, Yan Ruyi had spent four years as a highland field official, training militia, organizing mountain hamlets, and fighting rebels. It was during this struggle that he came to the attention of Nayancheng, then the acting governor-general of Shaanxi and Gansu, who through an exchange of letters questioned Yan on borderland conditions, local defense, military reform, and administrative reorganization. In Yan Ruyi, Nayancheng saw a skilled, experienced, tough, and dedicated subordinate. When the bannerman was transferred to Guangdong, he arranged for the highland official to accompany him as a member of his personal staff. Yan agreed and in the course of assessing coastal conditions over the next year he submitted a series of proposals on martial mobilization and fortification, now reprinted in the *Yangfang jiyao* and *Huangchao jingshi wenbian*. These reports form the foundation of the current study.¹²

LOCAL ENVIRONMENT: MOUNTAINS, COAST, AND SEA

The coast of Guangdong is a shelf of mountainous land extending west from the mouth of the Pearl River delta to the border of Vietnam, a line of some 1,500 miles of cliffs, inlets, harbors, and small deltas. Like the Hunan-Guizhou-Sichuan and the Hubei-Shaanxi-Sichuan border regions – sites of the Miao and White Lotus revolts – it was rugged and remote at that time, a physiographic frontier lying at the periphery of both the Lingnan macroregion and the Chinese empire.¹³

When Yan Ruyi arrived in Maritime Guangdong he found mountains not unlike those of his Hunan home, albeit hotter and wetter and comprised of rough slopes and small valleys. The physical terrain inhibited roads, intensive agriculture, and concentrated settlement, while encouraging frequent movement to sustain subsistence. Like the highlands of Yan's experience, it was also overlaid by a complex set of prefectures, departments, and independent subprefectures – special administrative jurisdictions that were intended to strengthen security and defense.¹⁴

¹² Concerning the correspondence between Nayancheng and Yan Ruyi, leading to this recruitment, see *LYWC* 4, pp. 31a–33a; 7, pp. 7a–8a. After his service in Guangdong, Yan Ruyi was redeployed in southern Shaanxi and became a central figure in the reconstruction effort following the White Lotus revolt. For related information, see Daniel McMahon, “Southern Shaanxi Officials in Early-Nineteenth Century China,” *TP* 95.1 (June, 2009).

¹³ For a more complete discussion of regional conditions, see Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 6–22.

¹⁴ For related observations in Yan Ruyi's Guangdong reports, see *YFJY* 17, pp. 20b, 21a–21b, 27b.

At the edge of the Guangdong mountains was the coast, an area cut by a profusion of tiny coves, deltas, rivers, and inland waterways. In contrast to the fertile Pearl River delta, this littoral largely lacked abundant agricultural land, and thus local inhabitants turned to fishing and oceanic trade for profit and survival. Small communities dotted the coastline and settled in the limited areas where both farming and fishing were possible.¹⁵

The specific region to which Yan Ruyi refers in his defensive essays is, in fact, vaguely defined. It includes the “strategic areas of the ocean, mountains, and streams” of Guangdong that he personally investigated in Nayancheng’s service.¹⁶ Yan discusses, for example, the treacherous jutting rocks of Jieshi Harbor (Jieshikou 碣石口) and the perilous shallows of the harbor mouth of Jiazi Gate (Jiazimen 甲子門).¹⁷ Oddly though, the scholar says little concerning the inner reaches of the Pearl River delta, perhaps because the corsair incursions into this interior did not increase until 1808, three years after his departure.¹⁸ The scope of his geographic depictions, rather, were clearly meant to be more sweeping, incorporating not just coastal Guangdong, but also maritime Fujian and Zhejiang. This big picture framework, if sacrificing specific geographic detail, made his discussion and defensive strategies potentially applicable beyond Guangdong, to the entire Chinese coastal region being ravaged by pirate attacks in 1805.¹⁹

Beyond the coast lay the South China Sea, the aquatic mass linking coastal communities to the Pearl River delta, southeast China coast, Vietnam, and the maritime world of Pacific Asia. The immediate “inner ocean 內洋” was a stretch of shallow sea marked by some 700 islands of all sizes (Hainan Island being the largest) – landmasses employed for navigation, anchorage, supplies, and concealment. Further on, the shallows deepened into the “outer ocean 外洋,” a vast expanse cut by sea lanes that brought tribute and commercial exchange from the ports of Southeast Asia and beyond.²⁰

The ocean, be it of Guangdong or the entire South China coast, presented an environment at variance with the mountains in which Yan Ruyi had previously labored. In addition to providing alternative forms

¹⁵ Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 6–22.

¹⁶ *YFY*, *xu* 序, p. 3a; *HCJSWB* 83, p. 30a.

¹⁷ For Yan Ruyi’s discussion of these and other strategic areas, see *YFY* 17, p. 39a.

¹⁸ Concerning the pirate attacks in the Pearl River delta, see Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 120–31; Robert James Antony, “State, Community, and Pirate Suppression in Guangdong Province, 1809–1810,” *Late Imperial China* 27.1 (June 2006), pp. 1–30.

¹⁹ See, for example, the discussion *YFY*, *xu*, p. 3a; 17, p. 26b.

²⁰ Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 8–9.

of subsistence supported by differing technology and social organization, the maritime world also offered unparalleled ease of transport. A ship from a coastal village was accessible to other villages, regional cities, and international ports (and hence commercial and cultural contact) to an extent inconceivable for isolated highland hamlets. This sea also possessed its own distinct patterns. Life was governed by the winds, tides, and monsoons, each observed in the differing contexts of the coastal strip, inner ocean, and deep seas.²¹

The Complications of the Coastal Environment

The south China coast was the stage for the pirate conflict, and Yan Ruyi devoted considerable intellectual energy into making sense of it. His previous service (and strategizing) in Hunan and Shaanxi had focused on making optimal use of rugged mountain terrain to farm, coordinate communities, and sustain lines of communication.²² The scholar's old highland concern for steep grades, poor roads, and eroded soil were now replaced by a new awareness of waves, winds, tides, and seasons. In his *Yangfang jiyao* essays, which were echoed later by pacification officials such as Bailing, Yan identified the manner in which open seas, waterways, tiny inlets, and outer islands affected the scope of the corsair attacks, as well as the methods by which these conditions might be managed.²³

Despite the confident tone of his writing, Yan Ruyi was clearly stunned by the power and impact of the ocean. The maritime world was, after all, new to him. Now in 1805, Yan looked for, and found, seemingly familiar problems shaping defense, security, and control. Indeed, he concluded that challenges to effective local control had been exacerbated by the difficulties of this new environment, making them even harder to overcome.

The most immediate problem that Yan Ruyi faced was the exceptional mobility afforded by the sea. In the mountain areas that he knew well, movement was invariably slow and laborious. In contrast, ocean transport was rapid, offering far less restriction to the size of the mass in motion. These conditions provided the pirates with greater freedom than that enjoyed by inland rebels. As Yan Ruyi wrote:

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

²² For Yan Ruyi's discussion of highland terrain in the Miao and White Lotus areas, as well as plans for work in the context of these difficult environments, see *LYWC j.* 5–6 and Yan Ruyi, *Sansheng shannei fengtu zashi* 三省山內風土雜識 (1805).

²³ Concerning governor-general Bai Ling and pirate pacification, 1809–10, see Antony, "State, Community, and Pirate Suppression."

The pirates are pillaging the coast, riding the wind in a blithe manner. When we confront them head on in order to block them, we find ourselves facing against the wind. But when we wish to chase their tail in order to strike them, then by the time we have sounded the alarm and mobilized the troops, the sails of the pirates are already far away, having moved several *li* 里 distant.²⁴

Yan was familiar with guerilla action, but he had never before seen it carried out with such frightening strength and speed. Riding on the ocean, the pirates were capable of striking (or trading or resupplying) then slipping away almost wherever and whenever they pleased – even under the nose of the Qing military forces!

A second difficulty was the near-incomprehensible scope of the sea. “The vast ocean,” Yan Ruyi wrote, “stands as a barrier.” The winds and fog acted as a shroud and the islands were scattered far and wide. If the pirates kept moving they were nearly impossible to locate but if they dropped anchor they became the proverbial needle in a haystack. Even if they could be located, Yan lamented, there still remained the added difficulty of conveying intelligence concerning their location and disposition across the ocean’s gulf.²⁵ Rebel mobility and concealment in a vast hinterland were the type of complication that Yan Ruyi had identified in the mountain borderlands during the Miao and White Lotus revolts, but here they were viewed with a discernibly sharper edge of anxiety. The sea was a great unknown – a physical and cultural void into which pirates seemingly disappeared at will.

A third complication was the different, and highly specialized, technology required to contend with the ocean. “In land warfare,” Yan recorded, “there is nothing more convenient than riding horses. In water warfare, however, one needs boats.” Using ships required detailed knowledge of composite elements (sails, oars, rigging), the science of sailing (use of tides and winds), and the armaments of nautical warfare (bows, cannons, fire weapons) – in effect, a whole new world of learning.²⁶

²⁴ *YFY* 17, p. 20b.

²⁵ *YFY* 17, p. 25b.

²⁶ *YFY* 17, *xu*, pp. 3a; 17, p. 22b. Yan Ruyi’s guidebook has essays on all aspects of this knowledge, including an entire chapter on “military armaments” (*bing qi* 兵器), complete with discussion and illustrations; see *YFY* 21. In 1826–27, He Changling and Wei Yuan noted that “concerning the circumstances of oceanic defense,” Yan Ruyi “had a slight knowledge of only 10–20%”; see *HCJSWB* 83, p. 30a. Curiously, this comment was inserted into Yan’s preface to *Yangfang jiyao*, printed in the *Huangchao jingshi wenbian*, but is not found in the original essay.

The reliance on ships, in particular, presented problems shared by the government and pirates alike. The crafts' wooden hulls rotted and became infested with maggots. Their supporting poles and sails mildewed. Masts and rudders broke, and cables connecting the anchors snapped. Such circumstances, Yan Ruyi wrote, often dissuaded the military from even attempting to use their vessels to block or pursue the pirates. Larger ships, in particular, were problematic as they needed constant costly upkeep, as well as special harbors to provide anchorage and protection from inclement weather. Many of the region's inlets, however, were too shallow or possessed rocky shoals that threatened to damage or strand these boats.²⁷

A final difficulty was the challenge the oceanic environment presented to the military tactics as practiced in the hills by the Qing government. Pursuit of the enemy was difficult given the pirates' exceptional mobility and refuge in myriad hidden harbors and inlets along the coast, akin to the secluded valleys that had shielded mountain rebels. The scouting of the enemy was further impeded by the particularly slippery nature of water transport. As Yan pointed out:

In areas possessing mountains and valleys, the clever soldier can disguise himself as a bandit and infiltrate the bandit's lair. He can also disguise himself as a beggar and wait along the road. In areas possessing plains, the mounted outpost scout can go alone to investigate the ramparts of the bandit strongholds. But in areas possessing an ocean, this is harder to say. The scout cannot use a horse, he must use a boat. ... If the boat is small, it will sink under the heavy waves. If it is large, then it will require oars and sails and many people to man it. Moreover, the fog and waves are unending, and the islands are difficult to find. ... There is no way the investigation can succeed. If by chance the scout locates them [then this is still no good]. If the pirates are coming with a favorable headwind, their large ships and huge sails will make them move like the wind. The sails of the scouting vessel will be too feeble and it cannot but be left behind.²⁸

In the maritime case, the sea and need for ships presented exceptional obstacles to even approaching the insurgents, let alone observing or apprehending them.

²⁷ *YFJY* 17, pp. 22b, 23a-23b; Antony, "State, Community, and Pirate Suppression," pp. 9-10.

²⁸ *YFJY* 17, pp. 25a-25b.

Despite the stark difference presented by a maritime environment, Yan Ruyi's view of local conditions continued to be framed by a vision of China's internal highlands – conceptual terms understood, and largely shared, by superiors such as Nayancheng. Yan's conclusion, drawn from personal frustration and pragmatic observation, was that on the coast, ecological complications were analogous, but more formidable. In the mountains, offensive warfare was difficult because rebels were hard to locate and capture. On the sea, he concluded, offensive strikes might not be effective at all. Nayancheng heeded this logic, although, as will be seen, emperor Jiaqing was never fully convinced.

YAN RUYI'S HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

Yan Ruyi's discussion of coastal history, building to the pirate attacks, reveals a related attempt to fit past events into a *Book of Changes*-based cyclical model of history, in use since the Song dynasty and employed by many concerned literati thinkers of his day. This model views historical change as a contest between positive (*yang* 陽) and negative (*yin* 陰) forces, yielding alternating periods in which evil and heterodoxy were supplanted by prosperity and proper teachings (and visa versa).²⁹ In his depictions of the history of highland western Hunan and southern Shaanxi, Yan employed this narrative template to praise the purportedly settled and civilized days of the early Qing under the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (r. 1662–1723): a period of cultural flourishing. He then explained that over the next century surging public greed and negligent administration steadily eroded proper ethics, bringing in its wake signs of dynastic decline: a period of cultural degeneration evidenced by conflict, corrupt local officials, and moral decay.³⁰

Echoing this basic story, Yan's discussion of coastal history outlined a corresponding series of rises and falls in civilization reflective of larger fluctuations of cyclical yin/yang forces.³¹ Yan Ruyi begins the narrative early in the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644). He states that the government had established defensive outposts on the coast, but

²⁹ For a related discussion of the middle Qing conception of cyclical change, a vision that informed literati discontent in the face of the growing problems of the late eighteenth century, see McMahon, "Restoring the Garden," pp. 69–80, 170–77; Daniel McMahon, "Dynastic Decline, Heshen, and the Ideology of the Xianyu Reforms," *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 38.2 (June 2008), pp. 233–35; McMahon, "Qing Reconstruction," pp. 91–96.

³⁰ For Yan Ruyi's accounts, see *SSBFBL* 12, pp. 43b–44a. See also *LYWC* 6, pp. 8a–9a, 14a.

³¹ For this account, see *YFJX*, *xu*, pp. 1a–3b.

relinquished hold of strategic areas such as Changguo 昌國, Wuyu 浯嶼, and Penghu 澎湖 – a move Yan believed was tantamount to giving the lands to the pirates to occupy. The Ming's defenses deteriorated during and after the reign of the Jiajing emperor 嘉靖 (1522–1566) in the middle Ming. During this time

... regulations became daily more relaxed, the defensive outposts were deserted, and the treacherous people (*jianmin* 奸民) of the interior colluded with the Japanese barbarians (*woyi* 倭夷), taking advantage of the situation to stir up trouble ... [As a result], the people suffered from extreme privation.³²

This description mirrors Yan's story of the Hubei-Shaanxi-Sichuan border region during the late-Ming dynastic decline. As in the mountains, coastal defenses weakened as a result of poor planning and official neglect, while the insurgents gained strength due to weak social order and collaboration with furtive supporters.³³

This disorder is said to have sparked intense concern. Numerous "Men of Ability" – Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507–1560), Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512–1601), and Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), among others – "prepared proposals for defense and blockades."³⁴ Of these proposals, some plans were implemented to good effect, such as Zheng Duanjian's 鄭端簡 (1499–1566) recommendation to recruit civilian men to pursue and capture pirates. Nonetheless, Yan recorded, many other equally valuable proposals were slighted, to the ultimate detriment of Ming security. Coastal defense proved inadequate, and the pirates were left free to continue ravaging the coast.³⁵

China's fate, however, changed with the founding of the Manchu Qing. Yan wrote that during the early years of this dynasty the government regained strategic regions forfeited during Ming; it established secure garrisons on islands in the east and south China seas (particularly Taiwan) and restored administrative offices in strategic coastal harbors. The Qing also girded its physical defenses, building garrisons, walls, outposts, cannon platforms, and signal towers up and down the coast. Finally, it improved its military forces, taking greater care in selecting officers, training troops, preparing boats and arms, and conducting patrols.³⁶

³² *YFJY, xu*, pp. 1b–2a.

³³ *SSFBFL* 12, pp. 43b–44a.

³⁴ *YFJY, xu*, p. 2a.

³⁵ Concerning Zheng Duanjian's strategies, see *LYWC* 6, p. 17b. Concerning the fortification of the coast, see *YFJY* 17, p. 26b. Concerning the Ming failure, causing "many *junzi* 君子 of former times to sigh with regret as their plans had not been implemented," see *YFJY, xu*, p. 3b.

³⁶ *YFJY, xu*, pp. 1a–1b.

Yan Ruyi thought that the results of these policies were spectacular. The pirates were crushed, peace was restored, and “the people of the coast came to farm, grow mulberry trees, and recite from the Classics.” That is to say, according to this narrative, the coast not only enjoyed proper military defense and direct political administration, but also embraced the fundamentals of orthodox imperial civilization.³⁷

In accordance with the cyclical system of the *Book of Changes*, which Yan was using as a historical model, the coast subsequently suffered moral and administrative deterioration after the enlightened years of the Kangxi reign. Yan is reticent concerning the precise reasons why this breakdown took place. In general form, however, he remained consistent with highland discussions (and Jiaqing Reforms views) that attribute growing social problems to the relaxation of military defense, administrative negligence, and the proliferation of morally bankrupt collaborators.

PIRACY AND PIRATE PACIFICATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Yan Ruyi’s historical account contributes to our understanding of the south China coast, but it fails to observe a number of important changes. In his effort to accord with popular historical models of the imperial past, seemingly in mimicry of his account of the Hubei-Shaanxi-Sichuan border region, he omitted (or, perhaps, was unaware of) key developments that caused the Guangdong coast to take a different historical trajectory. Not just the ecology of the coast, but also the manner in which piracy acted within it, were significantly dissimilar to the region’s highland counterparts – differences that help explain the persistence of piracy despite the Qing’s best attempt to eradicate it with traditional means.

Yan Ruyi was correct in noting the mid- and late-Ming disturbances carried out by “Japanese pirates” (in fact, a mix of Chinese and Japanese) with the assistance of an inept Ming navy, disaffected soldiers, corrupt officials, and coastal collaborators. These attacks up and down the coast of Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang sparked an intense government debate over the value of both defensive and offensive policy. Over time a variety of responses were implemented, including prohibitions on sea transport, the offer of money and rank in return for pirate

³⁷ *SSBFBL* 12, pp. 43b-44a.

surrender, and the organization of boatpeople into sea-going *baojia* 保甲 systems, using boats rather than families as the basic unit of organization. These efforts, however, failed either to fully end the unrest or to disrupt the mutual sympathies evinced on the coast, at least vis-à-vis a distant, hostile, and poorly informed inland government.³⁸

Following the establishment of the Qing regime, piracy continued to be a serious problem. The famed Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong built a base on the island of Taiwan, employing it for frequent assaults on the China coast. The government's responses both to subsequent coastal pirate suppression and to mountain rebel suppression were significant. Following Ming precedent, Qing officialdom solicited surrender with offers of rank and wealth. When this failed, it implemented a five-province ban on coastal trade, buttressed by community defense. When this too failed, the court imposed a quarantine of the coast, going so far as to enforce a twenty-year evacuation of the coastal population. It was in this context that the military action Yan Ruyi spoke of was carried out. When combined with the surrender of key pirate leaders and an assault on the Zheng stronghold on Taiwan, the policies stopped the resistance, albeit at great cost to the coastal people.³⁹

In the course of these efforts, several characteristics of Qing maritime administration were revealed. Most striking was the Manchu administrators' relative lack of understanding of the southern coast, as compared to the northern frontier. Perhaps as a result, maritime policy tended to focus on basic objectives of defense and security: unimaginatively treating the coast much like any other troublesome borderland. Perhaps also as a result, administrative writings echoed many of the generic Confucian ideals proclaimed in early Qing frontier policy. Most fundamental was a stated belief in "benevolence 仁," extending humane treatment, conciliation, moral suasion, and military coercion to deter social violence and effect the moral transformation of regional people.⁴⁰

³⁸ For discussions of the Ming pirate incursions and responses to them, see Kwan-wai So, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State U. P., 1975); Roland Louis Higgins, "Piracy and Coastal Defense in the Ming Period, The Government Response to Coastal Disturbances, 1532-1549," Ph.D. (U. Minnesota, 1981); Ishihara Michihiro 石原道博, *Wakō 倭寇* (Tokyo, 1964), esp., pp. 144-213; Paola Calanca, "From a Forbidden Ocean to an Ocean under Close Watch: The Ming and Early Qing Governments and the Maritime Problem," in Paolo Santangelo, ed., *Ming Qing yanjiu* (Naples and Rome, 1998), pp. 19-25; Antony, *Like Froth*, pp. 22-28.

³⁹ Lawrence D. Kessler, *K'ang-hsi and the Consolidation of Ch'ing Rule, 1661-1684* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1976), pp. 15, 39-46, 90-97; Antony, *Like Froth*, pp. 28-37.

⁴⁰ For discussions of early Qing maritime policy, see Calanca, "From a Forbidden Ocean," pp. 18-25; Cheng Chongde 成崇德, "Qingdai qianqi bianjiang tonglun (xia)" 清代前期邊疆通論(下), *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 89.1 (1998), pp. 16-17; He Yu 何瑜, "Qingdai haijiang zhengcedede sixiang tanyuan" 清代海疆政策的思想探源, *Qingshi yanjiu* 89.2 (1998), pp. 77-79.

The population of the coast was also largely – although certainly not entirely – Han Chinese, akin to the settlers of Qing inner highlands such as the Hubei-Shaanxi-Sichuan border region.⁴¹ Accordingly, the maritime frontier was ruled with a firm awareness of the administrative precedents and methods governing the imperial “people 民” of the Chinese heartland 內地. The Manchu regime incorporated the shoreline into its regular bureaucratic orbit and administered it using revolving officials and imperial law. Concurrently, it promoted orthodox education and agriculture, cultivating local people to better match orthodox inland models of subject and society.⁴²

The cultural successes resulting from these policies that Yan Ruyi proclaimed were exaggerated, although the scholar was correct in noting an improved enforcement of regional security. With the economy’s flourishing in the subsequent middle-Qing period, fueled in part by relaxation of restrictions on sea trade, the problems of smuggling and piracy resumed. This activity, however, was small-scale and largely contained by the established coastal system of defense and policing.⁴³

This peace eventually broke down, as Yan Ruyi observed, if not entirely for the reasons he provided. Yan’s censure of the greed and incompetence of local officials, for example, might better be taken in the context of the larger structure of disadvantageous bureaucratic priorities. Following the suppression of Taiwan in the 1680s, the attention of the Qing court shifted from the coast to the inner Asian frontier, reestablishing a precedent in which the concerns of maritime China received a consistently low priority. The military network on the coast was further impeded by gaps in the provincial chain of command, overlapping jurisdictions, rival forces, and a lack of trans-jurisdictional cooperation. The contemporary system of defense thus lacked both the resources to properly maintain itself and the mechanism to institute meaningful reform. With time and neglect, it lost effectiveness.⁴⁴

⁴¹ For a discussion of coastal Dan people, see Helen F. Siu and Liu Zhiwei, “Lineage, Market, Pirate, and Dan: Ethnicity in the Pearl River Delta of South China,” in Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 2006), pp. 285–309. Concerning the Yao people during the Ming, see David Faure, “The Yao Wars in the Mid-Ming and Their Impact on Yao Ethnicity,” in *ibid.*, pp. 171–89. For related discussion, see Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉, *Zai guojia yu shehui zhijian* 在國家與社會之間 (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe), pp. 98–108.

⁴² He, “Qingdai haijiang,” pp. 87–88. For a discussion of governance of Han people in southern Shaanxi – argued as a case of interior administrative methods applied to correct a rebellious mountain population – see McMahon, “Qing Reconstruction,” pp. 85–118.

⁴³ Calanca, “From a Forbidden Ocean,” pp. 30–37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37; Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 20–22; Cheng, “Qingdai,” p. 16; He, “Qingdai haijiang,” p. 86.

Yan Ruyi's criticism of pirates and collaborators, faulting their moral standards as well as their socially disruptive behavior, should also be viewed in the context of maritime livelihood. In a manner reminiscent of the northern frontier, and even the mountain borderlands, the coast simply did not offer much arable land. With rapid mid-Qing population growth, found here as throughout the empire, survival increasingly necessitated subsistence via alternative means: in this case, reliance upon the ocean. Thus problems arose. Sea-based occupations involved forms of social organization (such as the joint employment of men and women on boats), specialized knowledge (such as fishing and sailing), seasonal occupation (such as piracy), international cooperation, and cultural exposure that threatened to erode the dominant influence of Confucian social ethics and ritual. As maritime people developed – or, as the case often was, maintained – dissenting ideas concerning gender relations, family organization, and livelihood, they came into conflict with the conservative, continental-based values of China's northern capital. Action that seemed immoral to Yan Ruyi and the Qing bureaucracy may have been natural, and even necessary, to those actually engaged in coastal life.⁴⁵

In his reports, Yan also gave little attention to the origins of the pirate confederation ravaging the Guangdong coast in 1805. In so doing, he seemed unaware of the foreign influences that set this organization apart from the rebel bands of the Shaanxi highlands. Piracy had occurred, to some degree, throughout the early and middle Qing periods, growing in frequency with the deterioration of defensive fortifications and expansion of coastal poverty. This, however, had consistently been a small-scale and seasonal threat. From the early 1780s the nature of local piracy changed radically with the establishment of the Tay-son regime of Vietnam. New Vietnamese rulers assembled a force of Chinese fishermen and merchants, perhaps by threat, commissioning them as privateers. On behalf of the Tay-son, the officers of this force sought out and recruited Guangdong pirates interested in unprecedented opportunities for plunder and titles, men who were then incorporated into a growing navy and dispatched to pillage the south China coast.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Antony, *Like Froth*, pp. 11–13. These circumstances are discussed throughout Antony's monograph.

⁴⁶ Qi Ping 齊平, "Qing zhongye Guangdong haidao wenti tansuo" 清中葉廣東海盜探索, *Qingshi yanjiu* 98.1 (1998), p. 40; Antony, *Like Froth*, pp. 37–38; Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 32–40; Murray, "Piracy and China's Maritime," pp. 48–56.

This recruitment created a more formidable breed of Guangdong pirate. From the Tay-son regime, they received refuge, training, armaments, and experience – assets that transformed seasonal raiders into professional mercenaries, pirate captains into coalition admirals, and pirate ships into the most powerful and terrifying fleet sailing the South China Sea. Even after the Tay-son regime fell in 1802, cutting off retreat into Vietnam, the corsairs yet prospered. Far from being a collection of loosely-organized insurgent bands, they were now a rogue navy bound by an alliance of six redoubtable leaders. By 1805 this fleet had reached its height, expanding to some three times the size and strength of the Guangdong navy.⁴⁷

The objectives and methods of the pirate coalition differed from many of the inland insurgents. They were not like the Miao rebels, attempting to reclaim lost territory. Nor were they like the White Lotus sectarians, striving to overthrow the Qing regime to effect millennial world transformation. The pirates' primary motivation was profit and they achieved this end via the looting of villages, attacks on ships, collection of protection money, extortion, kidnapping, and theft. When they were offered a better pecuniary opportunity to surrender, many did so. Further, even while defying government authority, they did not actively attempt to undermine it. Indeed, the perpetuation of a weak but stable Qing regime was entirely to their advantage, offering steady revenue and resources with a minimum of resistance.⁴⁸

In sum, although the history of the Guangdong coast might be tailored to match Yan Ruyi's cyclical historical analysis, the fit is not a particularly good one. The social and administrative conditions of the coast were not fully suited to the culture and rule that Yan envisioned. Nor did the period of quiet in the middle Qing necessarily confirm either the successes or failures that he claimed occurred. The emerging aid of Vietnam's Tay-son regime – arguably far more than the decay of public morals – facilitated the creation of the new pirate menace. As argued thus far, Yan Ruyi simply claimed another instance of regional decline. Yet by doing so he seemed to have overlooked the historical differences that set the coastal region apart.

⁴⁷ Antony *ibid.*, pp. 38–53; Qi, “Qing zhongye,” pp. 40–43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44; Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 154–55.

THE PEOPLE OF THE COAST

Having examined the environment and history influencing the 1790–1810 pirate attacks along the Guangdong coast, a few words need to be said concerning regional social conditions and the problems they presented around 1805. Here again, we take the writings of Yan Ruyi, particularly those found in the *Yangfang jiyao*, as our contemporary bureaucratic frame of reference. In the coastal essays, we find a familiar set of descriptions drawing upon the socio-ethical (essentially behavioral-based) categories that he and fellow administrators also applied in analyzes of contentious Hunan and Shaanxi highland societies. There is suggestion, however, that the application of such classifications to a coastal setting obscured state understanding of distinctive local characteristics. Yan identified familiar groups of “good,” “unreliable” “and “treacherous” people, but did not always ascertain the manner that these folk differed from their counterparts in China’s interior.⁴⁹

In a fashion consistent with recent reports on the White Lotus revolt, rhetoric about the Jiaqing Reforms, and emperor Jiaqing’s own strident censure, Yan Ruyi reserved his strongest criticism for local administrators.⁵⁰ Coastal officials, he asserted, had ignored pirate and collaborationist activity in their jurisdiction and indeed actively evaded state punishment by concealing incidents of disruption, paying people to keep quiet, and blowing small matters out of proportion to give the impression of conscientiousness. Some even took bribes from the pirates. “Local officials,” the scholar stated, were “not good subjects” and were not to be trusted.⁵¹

Echoing virtually word-for-word the emperor’s opinion that “officials forced subjects to rebel,” Yan Ruyi further asserted that administrative negligence was the prime source of the pirate turmoil. Because local rulers acted improperly,

... the pirates consequently expanded out of control, the merchants and travelers lost their money, and the laborers in agriculture and sericulture became unemployed. This corrupted the country and harmed its people.⁵²

⁴⁹ Antony, *Like Froth*, pp. 83–84. Concerning socio-ethical classifications used by the Qing bureaucracy in connection to the Miao and White Lotus revolts, see McMahon, “Restoring the Garden,” pp. 51–67, 181–97.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *LYWC* 6, pp. 1a–2a. For a discussion of the ideology of the Jiaqing Reforms, see McMahon, “Dynastic Decline.”

⁵¹ *YFY* 17, pp. 21b, 22b, 23b–24a.

⁵² *YFY* 17, p. 21b.

A lack of ethical and governmental guidance adversely affected regional agriculture, handicrafts, and morality – that is, civilization itself. In making such a claim, Yan Ruyi evinced little awareness of related administrative problems, particularly huge jurisdictions, poorly demarcated administrative boundaries, and a pervasive lack of available resources. It is ironic that by the time he truly appreciated these concerns, he (like Nayancheng) had already been cashiered in disgrace, falling victim to emperor Jiaqing’s own Confucian views and lack of sympathy.

Perhaps not surprising in light of prevailing imperial views, Yan Ruyi’s coastal defense essays make little mention of his recent peers. If the scholar was in contact with established Guangdong administrators (as he likely was) he effaced the fact. Rather, he followed the line set by the emperor, his patron’s patron, and gave little written attention to either the strength of recent initiatives or the contributions of those who enacted them. Like Jiaqing, he chose to look further back in time, to the work of Ming-dynasty geographers, strategists, and pirate-fighters such as Tang Shunzhi, Mao Kun, Tan Lun 譚綸 (1520–1577), Hu Shining 胡世寧 (1469–1530), Jing Fan 景范 (1587–1644), Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528–1587), and Gu Yanwu. The contribution of these men served as Yan Ruyi’s formal frame of reference – even in later years, when he prepared his *Yangfang jiyao* – allowing him to suggest a plan of action conspicuously separate from contemporaries then under a cloud of suspicion.⁵³ This is not to say, however, that the scholar was unaware of, or always truly in disagreement with, the proposals of better-informed local strategists, especially in regard to the defense of harbors and coastal villages.⁵⁴

Yan Ruyi’s essays also have little detailed discussion of local gentry beyond arguing that they knew local conditions and would be fierce when protecting their homes, thus being suitable as the backbone of his local defense initiative.⁵⁵ Given the scholar’s highland methods of community organization and intelligence-gathering, it is certain that he was in communication with Guangdong elite. His writing, however, does little to distinguish the different kinds of gentry, Han and non-

⁵³ For Yan Ruyi’s discussion of key Ming strategists, see *YFYX*, xu, pp. 2a–3a; 17, 16b. For an example of his criticism of strategists of “later generations,” see 17, pp. 20a–20b.

⁵⁴ In 1804–05, Guangdong governor Sun Yuting 孫玉庭 (1753–1834) provided more open support for local Guangdong strategists. In the politics of the day, Sun worked in opposition to both Nayancheng and Yan Ruyi, eventually forcing their removal. See Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, p. 684; Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 116–18; and Yang and Fan, *Zhongguo haifang shi*, p. 504.

⁵⁵ See, for example, *YFYX* 17, pp. 22a–22b.

Han, existing on the provincial coast. Nor does it conspicuously advocate the use of local elites as advisors, although this did occur later when governor-general Bailing embraced the suggestions of Canton scholar Lin Botong 林伯桐 in 1810.⁵⁶ The early-nineteenth century may have witnessed a growing “maritime lobby” in Guangdong. In 1805, however, Yan Ruyi showed little awareness either of this lobby or of the ways in which it differed in perspective and agenda from interior highland gentry groups.⁵⁷

Following bureaucratic conventions common for both Qing frontier and heartland, Yan Ruyi spoke most often of the generic “people” or “subjects” (*min*) of the coast, referring to several kinds defined by ethical and existential – rather than ethnic – characteristics. As he had on the mountain borderlands, particularly the southern Shaanxi highlands, Yan lauded the foundational “good people” (*liangmin* 良民) who “have their own homes and are able to provide for themselves through their own livelihood.” These folk were the salt of the earth: settled, self-supporting, bound by family ties, tax-paying, and cognizant of orthodox morality and law. The scholar asserted that they both possessed an inherent goodness and constituted a majority of the coastal population, being “a hundred times more numerous than the ‘unreliable people’ (*wulai* 無賴).”⁵⁸ Adverse circumstances had positioned them disadvantageously, paralyzing but not destroying “hearts that harbor a hatred of the pirates and cherish the notion of slaughtering them.”⁵⁹

The *wulai* (basically, unemployed young men) and “treacherous people” (*jianmin*, or pirate collaborators) that Yan Ruyi excoriated were akin to those he criticized in southern Shaanxi. These were petty deviants who circulated within normal society but were not bound by its rules, disrupting society either directly (via extortion, kidnapping, and

⁵⁶ Concerning Bailing’s use of Lin Botong, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, p. 510.

⁵⁷ Concerning the term “maritime lobby,” a group of Chinese emigrants and “migrant communities” that since 1500 “had supported the economic and social interests of China’s coastal provinces against the rigidities and the security fears of conservative officialdom,” see Philip A. Kuhn, “Why China Historians Should Study the Chinese Diaspora, and Vice-versa,” *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 2.2 (Nov. 2006), esp. pp. 170–71. For a study of the rise of Canton localism and “localist identity” in the nineteenth century, see Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 2006). The growing influence of local literati in debates on maritime defense was reflected in new compilations dignifying the work of Canton scholars, such as the Daoguang era (1821–50) *Guangdong haifang huilan* 廣東海防彙覽.

⁵⁸ *YFY* 17, pp. 20b–21a.

⁵⁹ *YFY* 17, p. 21a. These rhetorical descriptions of good and bad subjects mirror Yan Ruyi’s social classifications for the southern Shaanxi highlands. For related discussion and examples, see Daniel McMahon, “The Essentials of a Qing Frontier: Yan Ruyi’s ‘Conditions and Customs in the Mountains,’” *MS* 51 (2003), pp. 318–19, 324–25.

violence) or indirectly (via the clandestine sale of goods and services to the enemy). As Yan wrote, they “take advantage of the situation to make a profit, buying cheap goods and selling them at twice the price, marketing weapons and wooden implements” needed by the pirates.⁶⁰ Like the *jianmin* and *wulai youmin* 無賴游民 of the White Lotus rebellion, these furtive miscreants served as the eyes, ears, and claws of the insurgents, as well as a steady source of new recruits. Equally, like their highland counterparts, Yan held them to be critical to restoring defense and social order. The pirates simply could not prevail without the aid of collaborators and the state could not prevail unless this collaborative relationship had been fully severed.⁶¹

Finally, Yan Ruyi spoke of the pirates themselves, discussing them in terms that made them appear of a common type with the highland non-sectarian rebels of southern Shaanxi. In writing, the scholar referred to both the corsairs and the mountain rebels using the ideograph *dao* 盜, usually translated as “bandit” or “rebel.” This linguistic usage should not be surprising: in Yan’s eyes the pirates were little more than sea bandits (or, put differently, the rebels were land pirates). Categorically denying any validity to the insurgents’ dissenting worldview, he identified a common denominator in terms of their greed. This avarice, he believed, informed pirate action, bringing them to attack ships, loot villages, kidnap the wealthy, extort fees, and gamble.⁶²

Yan Ruyi thus identified social groups in simplified and standardized bureaucratic terms. The difference between, say, the “treacherous people” of the Shaanxi hills and those of the Guangdong coast was masked by their common classification as *jianmin*. In Yan’s depiction they were essentially the same people with essentially the same problems. The logic of such classification suggested that they could be (and should be) handled using essentially the same methods.

Yan Ruyi’s analysis, a discussion that would be familiar to any contemporary Qing administrator, thereby made the coastal people seem more like interior Han Chinese subjects than perhaps they really were. The Guangdong coast, to be sure, had been affected by the eighteenth-century doubling of population that had had such a powerful impact on other Qing border regions. Sustained in-migration had

⁶⁰ *YFJY* 17, pp. 22a.

⁶¹ *YFJY* 17, pp. 20b–21a, 21b–22a. Concerning Yan Ruyi’s criticism of “unreliable” and “treacherous” people in the southern Shaanxi highlands, see *LYWC* 7, p. 26b, and McMahon, “Essentials,” p. 325. On the popular support of the pirates, see Robert James Antony, “Pirates, Bandits, and Brotherhoods: A Study of Crime and Law in Kwangtung Province, 1796–1839,” Ph.D. diss. (U. of Hawaii, 1988), pp. 125–29; Antony, *Like Froth*, pp. 129–37.

⁶² *YFJY* 17, pp. 21a, 26a.

also similarly exacerbated coastal poverty, unemployment, indigence, and social conflict. By the late-eighteenth century there was a large pool of unmarried and socially marginal men who, stranded on land, pushed out to sea to pursue piracy as a means of subsistence and social advancement.⁶³

Important differences, however, existed. The Guangdong coast was not a new settlement frontier akin to, for instance, the Hunan Miao Frontier. It had been fully settled by the Ming and had developed a highly complex and stratified society with its own distinctive maritime culture. The coast was cut by social divisions largely overlooked in Yan Ruyi's defense essays, if not his guidebook and not by Guangdong scholar-officials. Pertinent here was subethnic separation of groups such as the Punti, Hakka, Hoklo, and Tanka, as well as non-Han ethnic groups such as the Yao and Dan, each with their own distinctive mores and patterns of life. Dian Murray notes, for example, that the Tanka boat people's lack of lineages, as well as their poverty and tendency to live on the sea, shielded them from government observation and made them natural allies of ocean-going raiders. Thus, when Yan Ruyi talked of Guangdong "people" – a sweeping classification that denoted a homogenized Qing subject – these were not always the same acculturated Han as found in the heartland, nor did these maritime folk necessarily consider themselves to be the same.⁶⁴

Consider the implications of such distinctiveness. Pirates and pirate dealings were anathema to the Qing government, but not always so to local people. To be sure, many suffered coercion and the tactics of the corsair confederation inspired widespread terror – the source of a mounting social backlash against it. The long-term existence of piracy, however, was grounded in a regional legacy of tolerance. Since Ming times, merchants (and ethnic Dan people) turned to collaboration, smuggling, or even outright raids, thereby earning statuses as *wulai*, *jianmin*, or *dao* in the eyes of the government but remaining respectable in the eyes of local society. As revenue minister Xie Jie 謝杰 (d. 1604) wrote in the 1500s: "The pirates and traders [were] the same people."⁶⁵ It was also common for pirates to organize themselves based

⁶³ For discussions of regional development, see Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1987), pp. 178–84; Antony, *Like Froth*, chap. 7.

⁶⁴ Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 6, 12–17; Antony, *Like Froth*, pp. 83–88, 139. For a collection of Qing writings on the Tanka, see *YFY* 15, pp. 8a–16a. For related discussion of the ethnic development of coastal non-Han people, see Siu and Liu, "Lineage, Market, Pirate, and Dan," pp. 285–309; and Faure, "Yao Wars," pp. 171–89.

⁶⁵ For this quotation and related discussion, see So, *Japanese Piracy*, pp. 15–40, 214–15.

on ties of lineage, ethnicity, and common provenance. The areas from whence the raiders originated, presumably, were not the same places they attacked and plundered, but rather regions to which they retreated when they required safe haven, allies, and bases of support. The coast, it seems, fostered a naturally dissenting social order.⁶⁶

YAN RUYI'S PROPOSALS FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE GUANGDONG COAST

In light of the intervening complications of environment, history, and society, how then did Yan Ruyi and his peers propose to resolve the pirate conflict? Echoing earlier essays on Hunan and Shaanxi mountain borderlands, Yan's coastal writing in the *Yangfang jiyao* focus upon defense and social consolidation, viewing the regional turmoil as a problem not just of insurgents, but of all society. Even more than in the mountains, however, Yan held that success required aggressive defensive coordination of government and subjects to resist insurgent attacks and isolate the enemy. Indeed, Yan offered virtually no direct *offensive* strategies for the coast at all, focusing rather upon administrative reform, community defense, military fortification, and solicitation of corsair surrender.⁶⁷

Yan Ruyi's anti-pirate plans closely resemble his defensive proposals for White Lotus pacification organized under the rubric of the "strengthen the walls and clear the countryside" policy.⁶⁸ The fundamental rebel weakness that had inspired this initiative in the highlands was held to be even more compelling on the coast. The raiders lacked a home base of support and moved at will through the ocean. But for all their freedom, power, and mobility they remained reliant upon their links with coastal communities for the repair of their ships and the supply of essentials such as clothes, food, weapons, tools, wood, saltpeter, and sulfur. This circumstance, Yan asserted, revealed the pirates' Achilles heel:

There are no ships on the ocean that can go two years without needing repairs, and there is no wood [on these ships] that can go

⁶⁶ Calanca, "From a Forbidden Ocean," pp. 41-43.

⁶⁷ Concerning Yan Ruyi's related views on coastal defense, see *YFJY* 17, p. 28a. For an important discussion of Yan's thinking on mountain defense, see Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1970), pp. 47-50.

⁶⁸ On the implementation of the *jianbi qingye* policy, see Jones and Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline," pp. 136-44; Kuhn, *Rebellion*, pp. 44-50.

one year without breaking. When their masts and rudders become bent, then their ships will become empty vessels, and when their sailcloth is rotted, then it will be difficult for them to move even a single inch. If the pirates' boats gradually deteriorate, then the pirates themselves cannot but gradually disperse.⁶⁹

The corsairs were only as strong as their ability to acquire necessary materials. If they were deprived of these materials they would inevitably falter and fade – just as the White Lotus rebels had in previous years.⁷⁰ In making these recommendations Yan Ruyi was echoed more publicly by both Nayancheng and Bailing.

Reforming Administration

In light of his Confucian (and Jiaqing Reforms) understanding of administrators as the root of the social turmoil, the scholar Yan proposed changes advocated earlier for the Hubei-Sichuan-Shaanxi border region. First, he recommended that local officials be strictly investigated and receive reward or punishment based on their actions. If these administrators erred seriously, they were to be cashiered or even executed. If, however, they proved themselves able to defend against pirates such that for two years the coast was shielded from raids, they were to be granted a guarantee of official appointment, assuring advancement of their careers.⁷¹

Also, as he had argued in the pacification of the Miao and White Lotus revolts, Yan Ruyi recommended that field officials be given greater latitude to carry out their responsibilities. Coastal officials faced unusually trying circumstances. Appointed from outside areas, they did not know local conditions and had little hope of locating the pirates. If they were bound by rigid plans dictated by higher levels of government, “they would have no firm ability to handle the situation” – frustrating circumstances that Yan and Nayancheng encountered firsthand as they attempted to implement a court-mandated ocean offensive.⁷² Yan Ruyi suggested, rather, that officials be given freedom to adapt plans to actual conditions, as well as to modify these plans as circumstances required. The advantages incurred could be even further consolidated if administrators were kept at their posts for longer tenures.⁷³

⁶⁹ *YFJY* 17, pp. 21b–22a.

⁷⁰ Antony, “State, Community, and Pirate,” pp. 5–7.

⁷¹ *YFJY* 17, p. 24b. For similar highland proposals, see *LYWC* 6.

⁷² *YFJY* 17, pp. 24a–24b

⁷³ *Ibid.*

This was classic nineteenth-century statecraft reasoning and the Jiaqing court understood its value to borderland administration. After Yan Ruyi's subsequent reappointment to southern Shaanxi in 1809, he himself would come to serve over twenty years as an official in that interior region, granted considerable freedom in rebel pacification, community mobilization, and post-rebellion reconstruction. Similar latitude was allowed in highland northern Sichuan and western Hunan.⁷⁴ Emperor Jiaqing, however, did not feel these measures to be suitable in the case of maritime Guangdong, as evidenced by his repeated and rapid replacement of pacification officials. Added administrative flexibility, it seems, had only offered regional administrators added opportunity to not do their jobs properly.⁷⁵

Organizing Community Defense

Upholding the notion that “using soldiers to defend people is not as good as using the people to defend themselves” – the defining principle of the *jianbi qingye* strategy – Yan Ruyi also advocated community defense.⁷⁶ He had good reason. After years of official neglect, the formal military presence on the coast had deteriorated alarmingly. Soldiers were poorly trained, badly equipped, and inadequate in number. Supplementing their strength with outside troops was possible, but (Yan believed) imprudent. A large-scale transfer would require significant expenditure at a time when resources were scarce and the emperor lionized a policy of strict governmental frugality. Further, even getting new troops on site would be onerous, as the journey over the mountains would be “like an expedition to a distant land.” Local solutions were needed.⁷⁷

To this end, Yan called for the formation of *tuanlian* 團練 militia such that “on the surface it strengthens the people’s power to resist invasion and under the surface it restricts the people’s capacity to do wrong.” As in the war-torn White Lotus regions, militias were to be established under the rubric of the *baojia* system and organized by community elders with the guidance of local officials. The households of

⁷⁴ For discussion of extended tenure and unusual flexibility granted to early nineteenth century border officials, focusing on the Han River highlands, see McMahon, “Southern Shaanxi Officials.”

⁷⁵ On replacement of Guangdong coast administrators, including Nayancheng and Yan Ruyi, see Murray, *Pirates*. Concerning Yan Ruyi’s long-term retention as a leading official in southern Shaanxi, see *LYWC*, *shou* 首, pp. 3b–6a.

⁷⁶ *YFJY* 17, p. 20b.

⁷⁷ *YFJY* 17, pp. 20b–21b, 27b. These problems, and ensuing ideas of local defense, extended to the end of the pacification in 1810. See Antony, “State Community, and Pirate,” pp. 7–19.

the towns and villages were then to be registered and arranged such that every ten families had a “banner head” (*qitou* 旗頭), every three villages had a “militia captain” (*tuanzhang* 團長), and every 10–19 villages had a “militia commander” (*tuanzong* 團總).⁷⁸ These leaders, selected from “honest gentry and elders,” were to ensure that the militia were assembled and drilled, deployed in defense of home, harbors, and coast, as well as used to apprehend the “strange and evil men” sought by local authorities.⁷⁹

As in southern Shaanxi and western Hunan, Yan Ruyi further advocated that civilians provide for their own protection via walled fortifications (*bao* 堡) – a method that he claimed had been effective against pirate attacks during the Ming period.⁸⁰ These forts were to be built “with rough stones laid up on the exterior and stamped earth in the interior four to five *chi* 尺 (about a meter and a half) thick, such that they are able to withstand cannon fire.”⁸¹ As conditions allowed, moats were also to be dug, with dense thickets of thorn and bamboo planted just beyond. Local officials were to take the lead in promoting such defenses, enticing the rich to donate money and the poor to donate labor.⁸²

Bao fortifications, once constructed, would then be deployed according to the methods of “strengthening the walls and clearing the countryside (*jianbi qingye*)” that had been implemented during the White Lotus revolt. Scattered populations needed to be concentrated together so that people, food, supplies, and livestock could easily take refuge in the forts, ensuring security and protection against pirate attack. Further, fort captains and lieutenants were to be appointed (here overlapping with *tuilian* and *baojia* organizations) and made responsible for sustained defense and supervision. Coastal villages, thus fortified, would then remain in contact with neighboring communities to provide aid when needed to “cut the enemy off and attack from two sides.”⁸³

⁷⁸ *YFJY* 17, pp. 20b–21b, 27b.

⁷⁹ *YFJY* 17, pp. 21a, 27a; *LYWC*, j. 5–6; Kuhn, *Rebellion*, pp. 47–50.

⁸⁰ On Yan Ruyi’s proposals for coastal fortifications, see *YFJY* 17, pp. 26b–28a. For his discussion of Hunan Miao Frontier fortification, see *LYWC* 5, pp. 5a–5b, 16a–23b, and j. 5 generally. For his discussion of three-province border fortifications, see *LYWC* 6, pp. 12b, 21b–22b.

⁸¹ For the quotation, added to the original text, see *HCJSWB* 83, p. 2a. For the original text, see *YFJY* 17, p. 26b.

⁸² *YFJY* 17, p. 27a.

⁸³ *YFJY* 17, pp. 26b–27a. Antony, “State, Community, and Pirate” argues that such gentry-managed militia grew in effectiveness and that “the Qing state actually was able to use militia to penetrate deeper into local society, yet not necessarily at the expense of the growing power of many local elites” (p. 16). Concerning similar proposals during the White Lotus revolt, see Jones and Kuhn, “Dynastic Decline,” pp. 136–44. For original texts, see *HCJSWB* j. 82, 89.

Yan Ruyi's coastal plans, however, were somewhat different from those used in the highlands. One change was a stronger emphasis on moving and amassing populations. In the Shaanxi highlands, Yan had questioned the effectiveness of "clearing the countryside." The scattered and easily exhausted farmlands there had repeatedly impeded attempts to sustain large-scale settlement. Such fears, however, were largely absent in the scholar's vision of the coast. The existence of stronger lineage organization, greater ease of transport, readily available food from the ocean, and Ming and early Qing precedent for the use of *jianbi qingye* reassured him that it was possible for coastal people to live in closer quarters without a crisis of subsistence.⁸⁴

A second change was an even more explicit emphasis upon policing and internal surveillance, intended to cut pirates off from their coastal collaborators. The investigation of fort populations was to be the routine responsibility of the fort captains, a process ideally facilitated by the restriction of all trade and social exchange to within the guarded walls of the fortifications. Additionally, reliable local informants were to be actively recruited, serving as the government's "eyes and ears" by uncovering dangerous plots and secret pirate supporters.⁸⁵

Civil fortification of the coast was hardly a new idea. The true challenge was finding ways to coordinate and systematize disparate regional efforts such that they might be galvanized into an integrated province-wide defensive shield.⁸⁶ Having only served less than a year, Nayancheng and Yan Ruyi had neither the time, resources, nor support to fully realize these plans. Nevertheless, government support for local defense continued in subsequent years, even among those, like Guangdong governor Sun Yuting 孫玉庭 (1753–1834), who were not afraid to oppose Nayancheng on other issues. Nayancheng's successors sustained civil militia and community fortification efforts, eventually creating an effective force by 1809.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *YFJY* 17, pp. 26b–27a. For Yan Ruyi's criticism of "clearing the countryside," see Yan, *Sansheng shannei*, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *YFJY* 17, p. 27a.

⁸⁶ *YFJY* 17, pp. 22a–22b; Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 108–9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 124–31, 201; Qi, "Qing zhongye," pp. 45–46; Antony, "State, Community, and Pirate," pp. 10–19. Fredric Wakeman argues that the effectiveness of these militias was the primary reason there was no major resurgence in piracy in the three decades following pacification. See Frederick Wakeman, Jr., *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U. of California P., 1966), p. 24.

Reforming the Military

In light of Yan Ruyi's understanding of the weaknesses of the Qing military presence on the coast, he also proposed three methods to strengthen the army. There, the arguments were that the forces used against the raiders had a critical role to play, although in this case the role should be primarily defensive. In the mountains, the military had relied on civilian defense to secure people and supplies, isolating the rebels so that they might be pursued and destroyed by roving armies. Given Yan's doubts concerning the efficacy of oceanic search-and-destroy missions, on the coast he proposed employing troops as a second layer of fortification, filling in the gaps left by community defense. The stress was to be placed not on the pursuit of the pirates, but on causing their further isolation and disintegration from lack of support.

Yan Ruyi's first proposal was for the reform of military personnel. In his view, the most fundamental problem the soldiers faced was not their lack of numbers, but their lack of training and discipline. Having a large army was not an asset when the troops fled the battlefield, scattered upon defeat, and abused local people. Echoing earlier proposals for Miao and White Lotus pacification, the scholar argued that it would be better (and more cost-effective) to have fewer soldiers of higher quality: men whose "strength and bravery surpass ordinary people, whose speed and reflexes are exceptional, and whose age does not exceed thirty years." If such men were recruited, intensively trained, provided with better weapons and supplies, and led by capable generals, then "3,000 troops [would] be comparable to an army of 100,000 ordinary soldiers."⁸⁸

Yan's second proposal was to construct and repair "blockhouses" (*diaobao* 碉堡). According to his design, they were to have three levels and would be approximately thirty to forty feet high and ten feet thick, with a gate on the first tier and gun and cannon portals on the third tier. Built of stone and brick, they would be tall enough for guards to see long distances and fire upon approaching pirate ships, as well as sturdy enough to withstand enemy cannon bombardment. Yan urged that such structures be built in all strategic harbors, cliffs, and inlets, on the highest ground possible.⁸⁹

Blockhouses were intended to serve much the same function as the earthen forts (*tubao* 土堡) constructed in the Hunan Miao Frontier.

⁸⁸ *YFY* 17, pp. 20a–20b. For similar views espoused for the defense of southern Shaanxi, see *LYWC* 6, pp. 15b–16a, 7, pp. 7a–8a.

⁸⁹ *YFY* 17, p. 27b.

They would protect soldiers (about a dozen men and a captain), as well as guns, cannons, tools, water, and supplies. Additionally, they would serve as bases: a home for patrols and a center for military discipline. Such fortifications were meant to be the building blocks of a regional defense network. Their being linked with local militia meant that if someone fired a signal cannon “all blockhouses within one hundred *li* [would be] alerted and all stalwarts of the villages [would] be prepared.” Ideally, Yan wrote, “if the pirates’ strength is slight, they will not dare approach the blockhouses, and if their strength is great, they will not be able to get past the blockhouses to loot and pillage the interior.”⁹⁰

Yan Ruyi’s third proposal was for a change in the ships employed to combat the corsairs. The government, he wrote, had invested considerable money in large ocean-going vessels, using them to pursue pirates and strike across great distances. Such ships, however, were ineffectual as long as the pirates hid along the nearby coast. They had proven clumsy, easily damaged, expensive to maintain, and incapable of anchoring in most harbors. Smaller boats, on the other hands, were cheaper, more numerous, easier to obtain, and more quickly mobilized. Smaller vessels, moreover, could be used in conjunction with the newly-formed crack troops. When the pirates approached, an alarm would be given and the soldiers would man the boats, moving quickly to either block or pursue the invaders.⁹¹

The bannerman Nayancheng (and, later Bailing) was in basic agreement with Yan Ruyi’s views on military reform, particularly those concerning coastal fortification, and he took steps to strengthen garrisons, build forts, and coordinate defenses. He also endeavored to repair and augment Guangdong’s ailing naval fleet. These efforts, however, were plagued by problems. Not only was there a chronic lack of manpower, boats, arms, and money, there were also formidable complications with officers who were incompetent or beyond the governor-general’s command, as well as with soldiers who were in the pay of the pirates or too frightened to act.⁹²

Encouraging Surrender

Finally, in light of his own strategic thought, his doubts concerning a naval offensive, and his Jiaqing Reforms faith in the basic goodness of local subjects, Yan Ruyi proposed inducing pirates to surrender. As with the “coerced people 協民” identified during the White Lotus

⁹⁰ *YFJY* 17, p. 27b–28a. Concerning advocacy of mountain forts during the Miao revolt, see *LYWC* 5, pp. 5a–6a, 16a–23b.

⁹¹ *YFJY* 17, pp. 23a–23b.

⁹² Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 100–9.

conflict, those who had been forced to join the enemy were to be allowed to submit and return to their former occupations without fear of punishment, although some might stay among the pirates and serve as spies and governmental agents.⁹³ As an added incentive, if they captured or killed their leaders and surrendered their ship, they were to be permitted to keep the booty stored in the ship's hold. Yan wrote the following about those who voluntarily surrendered:

There should be no obstruction to keeping them alive. We treat them kindly and send them back... We can use the surrendered bandits to turn around and entice others into surrender, as well as command the submissive pirates to be the first in attacks [on other pirates]. In this way, those in the corsair bands will turn upon one another 自相魚肉. Their power will disperse and the root [of the turmoil] will be extirpated in its entirety.⁹⁴

Offering clemency, Yan Ruyi maintained, would weaken the insurgents, settle the people, and strengthen the military. The strategy mirrored pacification efforts advanced in both west Hunan and southern Shaanxi, having been particularly effective in dividing native bands during the Miao revolt.⁹⁵

This policy, however, was hotly contested in Guangdong. Nayan-cheng, drawing from Ming and early-Qing precedent (as well as, presumably, Yan Ruyi's advice), championed it. Following an unsuccessful effort to exterminate the pirates on the open seas, he then offered money (ten taels per pirate), jobs, and military rank to those who surrendered. The initiative enjoyed modest success, resulting in the submission of some 3,000 pirates along with their military equipment.⁹⁶

A number of provincial officials, Guangdong governor Sun Yuting in particular, railed against it. In a memorial to the emperor, Sun pointed out that the act of giving each pirate ten taels would bankrupt the provincial treasury without producing guaranteed results. Equally damning, rewarding criminals for stopping their crimes sent the wrong message to the people. Not only did it leave wrong-doers unpunished

⁹³ Concerning government views on "coerced people" during the White Lotus rebellion, see Jones and Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline," p. 143. For a discussion of the ideas linking the Jiaqing Reforms, *jianbi qingye* strategy, and new clemency for *xiemin*, see McMahon, "Qing Reconstruction," pp. 98–100.

⁹⁴ *YFJY* 17, p. 26a.

⁹⁵ *YFJY* 17, pp. 24a–24b, 26a. For related discussion, see Murray, "Piracy and China's Maritime Transition," pp. 57–58. Concerning the role of surrender policy in the pacification of the 1795–97 Miao rebellion, see Daniel McMahon, "New Order on the China's Hunan Miao Frontier," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial Studies* 9.1 (Spring 2008), pp. 7–9.

⁹⁶ Qi, "Qing zhongye," pp. 44–45; Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 112–17.

and victims unavenged, it made embracing piracy seem a more profitable enterprise than resisting it. The emperor was swayed by Sun's arguments and incensed that Nayancheng would grant pirates rank and reward without his explicit permission. It was, in fact, this issue more than any other that resulted in the official's dismissal.⁹⁷

THE FALL OF THE GUANGDONG PIRATE CONFEDERATION

Yan Ruyi and Nayancheng's plans for local defense, military fortification, and pirate pacification eventually proved efficacious against the corsairs. The successes to come, however, were far from evident in 1805. Having cashiered Nayancheng, the court replaced him with Wu Xiongguang 吳熊光 (1750–1833), another Jiaqing-favored official with little prior maritime experience, charging him to more fully comply with imperial policy for a sea offensive. Wu endeavored to do so, proposing the construction of a fleet of new, more sea-ready ships – large vessels of the type Yan Ruyi had cautioned against. In the ensuing years, pacification became strained. The pirate confederation penetrated coastal defenses, entered the inner waterways of the Pearl River delta, ravaged communities, and devastated the pacification fleet. By 1809, the Qing navy was reduced by half and many officials, Sun Yuting among them, had become convinced of both the ineffectiveness of sea offensives and the necessity of expanded local defense.⁹⁸

The emperor replaced Wu Xiongguang with Bailing, who as the new governor-general pursued a more balanced agenda, returning to many of the policies espoused by Yan Ruyi. In addition to renewed efforts to build an effective fleet, Bailing imposed a strict coastal embargo. Subscribing to the principle that the pirates were only as strong as their source of support, he regulated ports, girded resistance, strengthened coastal garrisons, and increased patrols. Bailing renewed calls for clemency, attempting thereby to divide and weaken the pirates by inducing them to surrender. These policies, based on no less than twenty years of militarization and community mobilization, finally succeeded.⁹⁹

The rapidity of the pirates' reversal of fortune – taking, as it did, less than two years for their power to disintegrate – suggests that the Qing effort was not the only factor in the corsairs' defeat. As scholars observe, the Guangdong confederation was plagued by natural disas-

⁹⁷ Qi, "Qing zhongye," pp. 44–45; Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 112–17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–21, 201.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123–50; Qi, "Qing zhongye," pp. 43, 45–48; Antony, "Pirates, Bandits, and Brotherhoods," pp. 58, 65, 123–24.

ter, conflicting objectives, internal power struggles, and ineffective organization. As resistance stiffened, pirate leaders defected, turning their strength against other pirates. By the end of 1810, some four-sevenths of the corsairs had surrendered and the rest were pursued and destroyed.¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSION

The scholar-official Yan Ruyi's proposals for military and community management of the Guangdong coast, seen in his *Yangfang jiyao* essays, were fashioned in the shadow of two interpretative models. The first was the Jiaqing Reforms vision of social turmoil: one that saw unrest as rooted in administrative negligence and rectified by governmental diligence and humane rule. The second model was officialdom's vision of the White Lotus rebellion: one that defined insurgency in terms of enemy ecology, neglect of early Qing policies, and regional moral decline, with resolution sought via administrative reform, community defense, and mass clemency (in essence, the *jianbi qingye* strategy). These models yielded a palpable bureaucratic explanation of problems and solutions that, squabbles over specific points of policy aside, was echoed by virtually all officials working on the Guangdong coast in the early-nineteenth century. As Peter Perdue observes, "relations on one frontier with one group altered perceptions and behaviors toward other groups on other frontiers."¹⁰¹ In Yan Ruyi's essays, we see a related case of not just the transfer of personnel, but also of concepts of environment, people, and administration from internal mountain borderlands to the southern coast.

In a sense, this movement of men and ideas, harkening to the experience of recent highland pacification, might be seen as a success. The Guangdong bureaucracy faced enormous, and quite distinctive, difficulties of strengthening its navy, engaging the corsairs, and coordinating coastal populations. Yan Ruyi's work indicates that at least some field officials, a significant group of whom had little prior maritime experience, grappled with these problems and devised solutions. Indeed, the scholar's proposals for coastal fortification and militia mobilization would eventually thwart the pirate attacks when implemented consistently and on a large scale.

¹⁰⁰ Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 130–50; Qi, "Qing zhongye," pp. 43, 45–48; Murray, "Piracy and China's Maritime Transition," p. 59; Antony, *Like Froth*; Antony, "State, Community, and Pirate," pp. 19–23.

¹⁰¹ Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 553.

This said, the Qing war against the corsairs was clearly troubled. It entailed two decades, frequent change of personnel and tactics (of which Nayancheng and Yan Ruyi provide one example), and did not bring victory until the pirate confederation had already collapsed – some four years after Nayancheng’s dismissal. In Yan Ruyi’s reports, we find signs of why bureaucratic woes persisted. His analysis, if in harmony with Jiaqing rhetoric and governmental views on highland pacification, was not ideally suited to Guangdong conditions. Conceiving the coast in terms of mountains, coastal people in terms of inland subjects, and coastal piracy in terms of mountain banditry led Yan to favor local defense, gloss over the distinctiveness of maritime people and history, downplay the expertise of preceding officials, and underestimate the exceptional social and international circumstances that sustained corsair survival. It seems that the Qing court’s practice of transferring borderland experts had, in this case, resulted in limitations as well as innovations.

Such blinders on bureaucratic perception arguably contributed to later tragedy. The fall of the pirate confederation was taken as a vindication of Qing policies and many (though certainly not all) subsequent hinterland officials were, as Dian Murray puts it, “lulled into a false sense of security about the state of their coast.” Transferred from the interior, these administrators had little motivation to either challenge established views or to fix security problems seemingly already fixed. The result was a brief period of reconstruction followed by a relaxation of governmental attention.¹⁰² The established system of coastal defenses limited pirate activity over the next three decades, but would again prove ineffective when confronted with the new gunships and tactics of the maritime European powers. The Qing court, having overcome the corsairs in 1810, felt it knew the coast and controlled it. Largely it did, but with analytical shortcomings that it did not yet fully appreciate.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>HCSJWB</i>	He Changling 賀長齡 and Wei Yuan 魏源, eds., <i>Huangchao jingshi wenbian</i> 皇朝經世文編.
<i>LYWC</i>	Yan Ruyi 嚴如煜, <i>Leyuan wenchao</i> 樂園文鈔
<i>SSBFBL</i>	Yan Ruyi, ed., <i>Sanshengbian fangbei lan</i> 三省邊防備覽
<i>YFJY</i>	Yan Ruyi, ed., <i>Yangfang jiyao</i> 洋防輯要

¹⁰² Murray, *Pirates*, pp. 157–58; Qi, “Qing zhongye,” p. 48; Antony, “State, Community, and Pirate,” p. 24; Murray, “Piracy and China’s Maritime Transition,” pp. 59–60. Yan Ruyi’s guidebook to coastal defense, *Yangfang jiyao*, constituted a rare early response to the sustained problems of 19th-c. coastal defense.