

FROM EMPIRE TO DYNASTY: THE IMPERIAL CAREER OF HUANG FU IN THE EARLY MING

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In 1511, a Portuguese expeditionary force, captained by the brilliant empire builder Afonso de Albuquerque (1453-1515), succeeded in establishing a presence in Southeast Asia with the capture of Malacca, a port city of strategic and commercial importance. In the colonial "Portuguese century" that followed, soldiers garrisoned coastal forts, officials administered these newly colonized territories, merchants engaged in the lucrative spice trade, Catholic missionaries proselytized the indigenous people, and a European sojourner population settled in Southeast Asia.¹ Although this was the first time larger numbers of indigenous people in Southeast Asia encountered a European empire, it was not the first colonial experience for these people. Less than a century before, the Annamese had been colonized by the Great Ming Empire from China.²

¹ Brian Harrison, *South-East Asia: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1964).

² Han Chinese ruled the Ming dynasty after overthrowing the Mongol-dominated Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) and preceded the Manchu-controlled Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Annam, or Đại Việt was a Southeast Asian kingdom located in modern-day northern Vietnam.

Having succeeded in establishing their presence in Guizhou, Yunnan, Annam, Liaodong, and the southern Eurasian steppe in the early fifteenth century,³ the Great Ming became the largest territorial empire ever created by ethnic Han Chinese.⁴ Unlike the seaborne Portuguese and Spanish empires scattered overseas, the early Ming under the Hongwu (r. 1368-1398) and the Yongle (r. 1402-1424) emperors created a territorially contiguous empire modelled, in many ways, on the recently fallen Mongol Empire ruled by the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368).⁵ Distinct from other early modern empires, the Great Ming between 1368 and 1449, when the empire was made and unmade, demonstrated an extraordinary flexibility in how they administered different parts of the empire. While some colonies, such as Yunnan and Guizhou, were successfully assimilated and became the legacy of the Great Ming Empire bequeathed to the Qing and contemporary China, others such as Annam ultimately drained both the Ming treasury as well as enthusiasm for further colonial expansion. In 1449, when the Zhengtong Emperor (r. 1435-1449, 1457-1465) was captured by a Mongol force at the Battle of Tumu Fortress, the Great Ming Empire, after experiencing military setbacks and colonial blunders over the previous several decades, became a simple "dynasty" once more and would rarely cross over its own borderlands again. The Great Ming Empire between 1368 and 1449, however, was not, as suggested by Timothy Brook, a great state "by inertia and in name," but

³ Guizhou and Yunnan are provinces located in southwestern China; Liaodong, or the Liaodong Peninsula, is situated to the east of the Liao River, and between the Bohai and Yellow seas in northeastern China; the southern Eurasian steppe is the southern region of modern-day Russian Siberia.

⁴ Han Chinese are and have always been the largest ethnic group in China, composing more than 90 percent of the population.

⁵ For more information on the Portuguese and Spanish empires, see C. R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966).

was as I argue the first ethnic Han Chinese great state in action and intention. This, then, is among the very first works of the early Ming as a colonial empire, a period we can best understand by studying the imperial career of Huang Fu, a famous bureaucrat and colonial administrator whose distinguished career spanned almost the entirety of the period of Ming colonial expansion.⁶

The Empire of Great Brightness

On January 23, 1368, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398) proclaimed himself the Hongwu 洪武 Emperor of the Great Ming 大明 (*Da Ming*) and the rightful successor to the Mongol Yuan dynasty. With no explanation or elaboration, the adjective “great” was added to the name of the new dynasty. Timothy Brook has convincingly argued that there was a shared concept of a “great state” in Inner and East Asian history and asked the question of whether the adjective “great” was merely a decorative prefix or an indication of the imperial nature of these states.⁷ Brook perceptively traced the lineage of the use of “great” to self-glorifying non-Han Chinese dynasties such as the Khitan Liao 遼 (907-1125), the Tangut Western Xia 西夏 (1038-1227), the Jurchen Jin 金 (1115-1234) and the Mongol Yuan 元, but little discussed whether ethnic Han Chinese dynasties should also be considered “great states” or colonizing empires.⁸ Although the Great Ming did expand into the deep south and southwest, conquered Annam and Liaodong, and established garrisoned oasis cities in the northwestern corridor leading to Central

⁶ Timothy Brook, “Great States,” in *Journal of Asian Studies* 75, no. 4 (2016): 965.

⁷ Brook, “Great States,” 957.

⁸ The Khitan Liao, Tangut Western Xia, and Jurchen Jin were regional regimes of ethnic minority people that coexisted in northern China with the ethnic Han-dominated Northern (960–1127) and Southern Song (1127–1279) dynasties.

Asia, Brook argued that little territorial acquisition took place under the Ming and that the dynasty soon relinquished any form of great state expansionism after the missions of the eunuch admiral Zheng He 鄭和 (1371-1433) in the early decades of the fifteenth century.⁹ Admittedly, Brook's essay deals with some larger questions, but to fully understand whether the ethnic Han-dominated Ming should be considered one of the "Great States" of Inner and East Asian history, I argue it was, and to chronicle its rapid shift away from the "great state" model, requires that we closely examine early Ming territorial expansion under the Hongwu and Yongle emperors.

Shortly after the founding of the Ming dynasty, the Hongwu Emperor ordered sequential northern expeditions to punish the remnants of the Mongol Yuan and drive them back into the steppe under the slogan "Expel the northern barbarians, Recover the land of Central Brightness" (驅除韃虜, 恢復中華). As intellectual and strategic descendants of the Great Mongol Yuan, however, the Hongwu Emperor coveted the lands remaining in Mongol hands, particularly Yunnan, controlled by Basalawarmi 把匝剌瓦爾密, the Prince of Liang, and southeastern Mongolia and Liaodong, under the government of the Uriyangkhad Mongol general Naghachu 納哈出 (?-1388). Over the next several decades, the Hongwu Emperor and Ming military forces rapidly defeated the remaining Mongol troops and occupied these lands, most never previously controlled by a Han Chinese dynasty. This first wave of military and colonial expansion constituted the main undertaking of the dynasty in its early years. The Hongwu Emperor as the preeminent decision-maker, along with his counsellors and commanders, worked exceptionally hard to integrate these new lands into the Ming Empire. To consolidate these new borderlands, the Hongwu Emperor employed distinct strategies: in Liaodong, garrisons including fortresses

⁹ Brook, "Great States," 965.

堡 (*bao*), guards 衛 (*wei*) and battalions 千戶所 (*qianhusuo*) were ordered to be constructed in concert with the northern expeditions. Additionally, the Hongwu Emperor established several princely fiefs along the northern borderlands in Datong, Guangning, Ningxia, Daning, and Ganzhou, and entrusted his sons with their protection. In the southwestern borderlands, the Hongwu Emperor embraced the cultural incorporation of other ethnic groups by practicing the chieftainship 土司 (*tusi*) model thus consolidating Ming sovereignty through the promotion of obedient native chieftains. Through a series of aggressive military expeditions and administrative consolidations under the Hongwu Emperor, the initial borderlands of the Ming empire were established. The Hongwu Emperor's son, however, would prove an empire-builder like his father. The Yongle Emperor would push beyond the initial phase of colonial expansion by dispatching troops into the far northern Mongol steppe, marching to the tropics in the deep south, ordering dogsled armies into Siberia, and approving the famous series of vast maritime expeditions commanded by the eunuch admiral Zheng He to spread Ming influence throughout the present-day South China Sea and Indian Ocean.¹⁰

During the second wave of colonial expansion under the Yongle Emperor, the Ming took advantage of a power struggle between the Trần and Hồ families in Đại Việt and sought to enrich the diversity of the empire by sending invasiory armies into the tropics. Not for hundreds of years, the

¹⁰ Herold J. Wiens, *China's March Toward the Tropics: A Discussion of the Southward Penetration of China's Culture, Peoples and Political Control in Relation to the Non-Han-Chinese Peoples of South China and in the Perspective of Historical and Cultural Geography* (Hamden, CT: The Shoe String Press, 1954). See also Alexander Woodside, "Early Ming Expansionism (1406-1427): China's Abortive Conquest of Vietnam," in *Papers on China* 17 (1963): 1-37; Lo Jung-pang 羅榮邦, "Intervention in Vietnam: A Case Study of the Foreign Policy of the Early Ming Government," in *Tsing-hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, New Series 8 (1-2): 154-85.

Yongle Emperor would argue, had Han Chinese armies crossed into Annam. This time, the Ming government would conquer their troublesome neighbors and “civilize” them by making them into a Ming colony. To oversee the conquest and consolidation of Annam into the Great Ming Empire, the Yongle Emperor turned to a somewhat obscure and controversial figure named Huang Fu 黃福 (1362-1440). In 1405, while serving as minister of works, Huang Fu was impeached by the infamous Left Censor-in-chief 左都御史 (*zuo duyushi*) Chen Ying 陳瑛 (?-1411) for misusing laborers. As a punishment, the Yongle Emperor demoted Huang to minister of punishments and forced him to serve his duty in Beijing, a city in the midst of massive and dirty reconstruction.¹¹ The following year, Huang was embroiled in a corruption case against his subordinates. For his lack of oversight, Huang was again punished by the Yongle Emperor.¹² This time, he would be dispatched to the colonial frontier to oversee the Ming conquest of Annam, a mission that seemed like a certain death sentence in the infamous miasmatic atmosphere of the torrid south. Who was Huang Fu and why did the Yongle Emperor “punish” him with this important mission?

Huang Fu's Early Career

¹¹ *Ming taizong shilu* 明太宗實錄 [Veritable Records of the Ming Taizong Reign] (1430; reprint, Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1963), 41: 永樂三年夏四月癸未 (May 16, 1405). In *Ming shi* 明史 [History of Ming] (1739; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 157, *liezhuan* 45, Huang is recorded as being demoted to minister of the Branch Ministry 行部尚書 (*xingbu shangshu*) in Beijing. For information on the Branch Ministry in Beijing, see: Edward L. Farmer, *Early Ming Government: The Evolution of Dual Capitals* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University: 1976); Xu Hong 徐泓, “Ming Beijing xingbu kao” 明北京行部考 [Study on the Beijing Branch Ministry], *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究, vol. 2, no. 2 (December 1984): 569-598.

¹² *Ming taizong shilu*, 50: 永樂四年春正月丁巳 (February 14, 1406).

In the twenty-second year of the reign of Emperor Huizong of Yuan 元惠宗 (1362), Huang Fu was born in Changyi County, in what is present-day Shandong province in northern China. During the rebellions against the Yuan, Huang Fu's parents must have seen the potential to change the fate of their whole family in the education of their son. After a childhood studying for the civil service examinations, fully reinstated by the Hongwu Emperor, Huang Fu passed the highest level of the examinations and earned the illustrious *jinshi* degree in 1384, just four years after the bloody Hu Weiyong 胡惟庸 (d. 1380) Affair that rocked the entire Ming bureaucratic system and resulted in the end of the office of the grand councilor 丞相 (*chengxiang*). In these uneasy times, the gifted Huang, then only twenty-four, was appointed to the prestigious Directorate of Education 太學 (*taixue*) in the capital at Nanjing. After some time, Huang was appointed a registrar 經歷 (*jingli*), an anonymous, subofficial functionary office, in the Front Imperial Insignia Guard 金吾前衛 (*jinwu qianwei*).¹³

In the precarious political turbulence under the reign of the capricious Hongwu Emperor, Huang Fu managed to survive, and apparently thrive, by keeping his silence and only addressing the emperor to support the latter's positions. In what turned out to be the final year of the Hongwu Emperor's reign, Huang Fu was rewarded for his steadfast support by being promoted to a vice ministership in the Ministry of Works 工部侍郎 (*gongbu shilang*).¹⁴

After the death of the Hongwu Emperor in 1398, his grandson Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆 (1377-1402), the eldest surviving legitimate son of the short-lived heir-prince Zhu Biao

¹³ *Ming shi*, juan 157, *liezhuan* 45.

¹⁴ *Ming shi*, juan 157, *liezhuan* 45; *Ming taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄 [Veritable Records of the Ming Taizu Reign] (1418; reprint, Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1955), 257; 洪武三十一年夏四月丁酉 (May 7, 1398).

朱標 (1355-1392), ascended the throne as the Jianwen 建文 Emperor (r. 1398-1402). The bookish and impressionable young emperor, supported by the close associates Huang Zicheng and Qi Tai, immediately implemented a policy of reducing the feudatories 削藩 (*xiaofan*) to politically and militarily weaken the emperor's more powerful uncles. In response, the Jianwen Emperor's battle-tested uncle Zhu Di 朱棣 (1360-1424), kidnapped his younger brother Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378-1448), and the formidable Uriyangkhad Mongol cavalry under his control, and launched the so-called Campaign to Quell Disorders 靖難之役 (*jing nan zhi yi*) (1399-1402) against his nephew's central government in Nanjing.

During the confusing years of this infamous civil war between uncle and nephew, there is little known of Huang Fu's career. One suspects the unscrupulous abridgement and distortion of historical records to justify the acts of the Yongle Emperor by his historians resulted in the purge of many of the vital documents pertaining to the bureaucracy of the Jianwen Emperor, in which Huang Fu served. When the war was over and the Yongle 永樂 Emperor enthroned in 1402, Huang Fu was listed among the twenty-nine survivors of the "traitorous party" 奸黨 (*jian dang*) who had served in Jianwen's government during the war.¹⁵ Although many of that "traitorous party" would be executed, Huang Fu immediately pledged his allegiance to the ambitious new emperor and was rewarded by being promoted to minister of works in Nanjing.¹⁶ Was this a reward for steady, faithful, and sedate service for more than a decade in an important ministry? A reward for pledging his loyalty to the new emperor? An expedient decision by an untried emperor to staff his ministries with men of considerable bureaucratic experience? Whatever the case, the quiet Huang Fu served as minister of works for

¹⁵ *Ming shi*, juan 157, *liezhuan* 45.

¹⁶ *Ming taizong shilu*, 12a: 洪武三十五年 (建文四年) 九月甲申 (September 30, 1402).

several years until being embroiled in the cases against his subordinates mentioned above. Nothing in his career to date would suggest Huang Fu would prove to be one of the greatest colonial officials of the early Ming, or that he would have an illustrious career that would span the reigns of six emperors, but in June 1406 the Yongle Emperor ordered Huang Fu to “redeem” himself by supporting the ongoing military operations of Zhu Neng 朱能 (1370-1406), the Duke of Cheng 成國公, and Zhang Fu 張輔 (1374-1449), the Marquis of Xincheng 新城侯, and that career began.¹⁷

From Annam to Jiaozhi 交址¹⁸

In April 1403, just four months after being enthroned, the Yongle Emperor received envoys from the tributary state of Đại Việt 大越 (1054-1400, 1428-1804), who reported that the royal line of the Trần 陳 family had recently died out and Hồ Hán Thương 胡漢蒼 (d. 1407), the prestigious nephew of the deceased emperor, was being proposed as the new ruler. The reverent new ruler had dispatched these envoys to request the Great Ming Emperor for permission to ascend the throne.¹⁹ The Yongle Emperor, focusing on restoring domestic order and consolidating power at the time, approved the request after a cursory verification.²⁰ In the following year, however, a refugee named Trần Thiêm Bình 陳添平²¹ arrived in Nanjing claiming to be a survivor and rightful heir of the Trần family. When Trần was presented to the Yongle Emperor, he exposed Hồ's usurpation and begged for

¹⁷ *Ming taizong shilu*, 55: 永樂四年六月辛酉 (June 18, 1406).

¹⁸ In *Ming shi*, the official History of the Ming, the name appears as 交址, but in modern secondary sources name of the colony is often written as 交趾.

¹⁹ *Ming taizong shilu*, 19: 永樂元年夏四月丁未 (April 21, 1403).

²⁰ *Ming taizong shilu*, 25: 永樂元年閏十一月戊午 (December 28, 1403).

²¹ In *Ming shi*, the name appears as 陳天平.

a Ming military force to help restore the throne of the Trần family.²² Trần Thiêm Bình's claim remained dubious until Bùi Bá Kỳ 裴伯耆, an official from Đại Việt, confirmed Trần's tale. According to Bùi, the courtier Hồ Quý Ly 胡季犛 (Lê Quý Ly 黎季犛) (1336-1407) had staged a coup in 1400, slaughtered the Trần clan, and proclaimed himself the Thánh Nguyên 聖元 Emperor of the Đại Ngu 大虞 (also known as the Hồ dynasty, Nhà Hồ, 胡朝). Hồ then changed his name to Hồ Nhất Nguyên 胡一元, abdicated the throne in favor of his son Hồ Hán Thương, but remained in control of domestic affairs as the retired emperor.²³ The Yongle Emperor, apparently enraged at being deceived, dispatched an imperial envoy to scold the Hồs and ordered them to enthroned Trần Thiêm Bình as the emperor.²⁴ The Hồs responded to the edict by promising to swear fealty to the Great Ming.²⁵ The Yongle Emperor thus ordered five thousand Ming soldiers to escort Trần back to Annam.²⁶ Just across the border, however, Hồ forces ambushed the Ming escort and captured Trần, who was later executed.²⁷ The Yongle Emperor flew into a rage when the news reached the capital. He decided to send an expedition to punish "the contemptible scoundrel" who had dared to harass another Ming tributary state, the Kingdom of Champa, violate the sanctity of Siming

²² *Ming taizong shilu*, 33: 永樂二年八月丁酉 (October 2, 1404); Yamamoto Taturō 山本達郎 suggested that the Yongle Emperor may have already had plans to invade Annam in August 1404, which means he interprets the tale of Trần Thiêm Bình as a fabricated excuse. For more information, see: Yamamoto Taturō, *Annan shi kenkyū: Gen Min ryōchō no Annan seiryaku* 安南史研究：元明兩朝の安南征略, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Yamakawa, 1950), 285-286.

²³ *Ming taizong shilu* 33: 永樂二年八月乙亥 (September 10, 1404).

²⁴ *Ming taizong shilu*, 38: 永樂三年春正月甲寅 (February 16, 1405).

²⁵ *Ming taizong shilu*, 43: 永樂三年六月庚寅 (July 22, 1405).

²⁶ *Ming taizong shilu*, 49: 永樂三年十二月庚辰 (January 8, 1406).

²⁷ *Ming taizong shilu*, 52: 永樂四年三月丙午 (April 4, 1406).

Prefecture 思明 in Guangxi, and had insulted the Great Ming by his refusal to obey orders.²⁸

In May 1406, the Yongle Emperor mapped out a campaign to invade Annam with two expeditionary forces—one led by Zhu Neng and Zhang Fu, approaching Annam from Guangxi—and another captained by the second son of Mu Ying 沐英 (1345-1392), a famous Ming general who had helped conquer Yunnan, named Mu Cheng 沐晟 (1368-1439), who would attack across the Ming-Annamese border through Yunnan.²⁹ To oversee logistical support, and serve as the administrator of Annam after it was captured, the Yongle Emperor ordered Huang Fu to follow the troops through the relay system, the “arteries and veins” of early Ming colonial empire.³⁰ On his journey to the Ming borderlands with Annam, Huang Fu recorded his experiences in a journal entitled *A Journal of a Voyage on a Mission to Annam* (奉使安南水程日記 *feng shi Annan shuicheng riji*). Three months after leaving Nanjing, Huang Fu joined the Ming armies encamped in the southern Guangxi borderlands.³¹ While Huang remained in southern Guangxi handling civilian affairs and military logistics, Zhang Fu commanded Ming expeditionary

²⁸ *Ming taizong shilu*, 53: 永樂四年夏四月辛未 (April 29, 1406); *Ming taizong shilu*, 21: 永樂元年秋七月丁酉 (August 9, 1403); *Ming taizong shilu*, 30: 永樂二年夏四月癸酉 (May 11, 1404).

²⁹ *Ming taizong shilu*, 53: 永樂四年夏四月癸未 (May 11, 1406).

³⁰ For information on the Ming relay and post office system, see: Lane J. Harris, “The ‘Arteries and Veins’ of the Imperial Body: The Nature of the Relay and Post Station Systems in the Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644,” in *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015): 287-310, and “Into the Frontiers: The Relay System and Ming Empire in the Borderlands, 1368-1449,” in *Ming Studies*, 72 (2015): 3-23; *Ming taizong shilu*, 55: 永樂四年六月辛酉 (June 18, 1406).

³¹ Huang Fu 黃福, *Feng shi Annan shuicheng riji* 奉使安南水程日記 [Journal of a Voyage on a Mission to Annam], in *Annan zhuan* 安南傳 [Chronicles of Annam] (reprint, Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1969).

forces in Annam, after the sudden death of Zhu Neng on November 12, 1406.³² Under this brilliant new commander, Ming expeditionary forces swept through the orchestrated Annamese defense and successively conquered the strategic post of Duobang 多邦 on January 19, 1407, the Eastern Capital 東都 (modern-day Hà Nội) on the next day, and the Western Capital 西都 (modern-day Thanh Hóa) on January 26th.³³ Within six months, Zhang Fu's military forces had conquered Annam, captured the Hồ "pretenders," and declared the country "pacified" 平 (*ping*).³⁴

On July 5, 1407, the Yongle Emperor issued an ecstatic imperial edict declaring to the empire the pacification of Annam.³⁵ In the edict, the Yongle Emperor legitimated the Ming invasion of Annam by tracing Han Chinese control over Jiaozhou 交州, the ancient name of Annam, and explaining that with the end of the Trần lineage, the Annamese people had petitioned the Ming to restore "civilized rule" after a period of "barbaric practices" 夷習 (*yi xi*).³⁶ The Yongle Emperor, "bending over and consulting public opinion, benevolently approved the ardent expectation of the Annamese people" (俯徇輿情, 從其所請), thereby granted Annam a new name, Jiaozhi 交址, and placed it under the direct control of a Regional Military Commission 都指揮使司 (*du zhihui shi si*), a Provincial Administration Commission 承宣布政使司 (*chengxuan buzheng shi si*), and a Provincial Surveillance Commission 提刑按察使司 (*tixing ancha shi si*).³⁷ In

³² *Ming taizong shilu*, 60: 永樂四年冬十月丙午 (November 30, 1406).

³³ *Ming taizong shilu*, 62: 永樂四年十二月丙申 (January 19, 1407), 永樂四年十二月丁酉 (January 20, 1407), and 永樂四年十二月癸卯 (January 26, 1407).

³⁴ *Ming taizong shilu*, 67: 永樂五年五月乙丑 (June 17, 1407).

³⁵ *Ming taizong shilu*, 68: 永樂五年六月癸未 (July 5, 1407).

³⁶ *Ming taizong shilu*, 68: 永樂五年六月癸未 (July 5, 1407).

³⁷ *Ming taizong shilu*, 68: 永樂五年六月癸未 (July 5, 1407).

other words, the Yongle Emperor was planning to turn Annam into a province of the Ming.

To oversee the transformation of Annam into a Ming province, the Yongle Emperor appointed Huang Fu as both the provincial administrator and surveillance commissioner. He thus became the highest-ranking Ming administrative and judicial official in Jiaozhi; a frontline official in the Ming empire's newest colonial possession. Shortly after the new colony was "pacified," Huang Fu sent a memorial to the Yongle Emperor entitled *Panegyric on the Pacification of Jiaozhi* 賀交趾平定表 (*he Jiaozhi pingding biao*) offering proposals to administrate and consolidate Ming control in the new colony. Huang proposed "to follow the virtue of the sages in appeasing the indigenous people and to administer them without distinction" from Ming subjects; "to appoint magistrates to pacify the people and commanderies to control the population"; to station troops in garrisons to guard against disturbances; and to economically "turn land that had been grassy wastelands for thousands years into cultivatable farmland"; to transform people who had been barbarians for generations with tattoos on their forehead into civilized people; to produce clothing and food ample enough to feed and clothe the people; and finally, to introduce enough civilization to transform the strange local customs.³⁸ In other words, Huang Fu laid out a plan to administer this new colony by transforming it into a part of the central realm.

Huang Fu's Imperial Career in Jiaozhi

³⁸ Huang Fu 黃福, "Huang Zhongxuan gong wenji" 黃忠宣公文集 [Collected works of the honorable Huang Zhongxuan (Huang Fu)], *juan* 13, *bieji* 6 *juan* in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 [Collectanea of works mentioned in the *cunmu* catalog], ed. Siku quanshu cunmu congshu biancuan weiyuanhui 四庫全書存目叢書編纂委員會 (Ji'nan: Qifu shushe, 1997), 333.

Between 1407 and 1424, Huang Fu faithfully followed his blueprint for assimilating the new colony into the Ming Empire. Almost immediately, Huang sought to make Jiaozhi into a normal province through redistricting administrative divisions and establishing institutions to guarantee the distribution and implementation of government decrees. Accordingly, the new colony was divided into seventeen prefectures 府 (*fu*), forty-seven sub-prefectures 州 (*zhou*), and a hundred and fifty-seven counties 縣 (*xian*).³⁹ He also oversaw the opening of eleven guards 衛 (*wei*) and one Military Inspectorate 巡檢司 (*xunjian si*) to defend the southern extension of the empire and three Maritime Trade Supervisors 市舶提舉司 (*shibo tiju si*) to regulate overseas commerce, collect customs duties, and prevent the smuggling of contraband goods.⁴⁰ Huang also physically linked Jiaozhi with the Ming relay and post station network by establishing some 380 post stations and 29 relay stations running north to south in Jiaozhi by the early 1420s.⁴¹ The introduction of new administrative divisions, opening of colonial institutions, and extension of the Ming communications system provided for the convenient flow of information and established a typical array of government offices for controlling a province.

After the war of conquest, consolidation also required reconstruction. Shortly after taking up his post, Huang sent a memorial to the Yongle Emperor suggesting the introduction of new tax system, but requesting a temporary reduction in taxes for war-torn areas.⁴² The Yongle Emperor favored Huang's suggestion and ordered him to eliminate all

³⁹ Guo Zhenduo 郭振铎 and Zhang Xiaomei 張笑梅, eds., *Yuenan tongshi* 越南通史 [History of Vietnam] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2001), 398.

⁴⁰ Guo and Zhang, *Yuenan tongshi*, 398.

⁴¹ Harris, "Into the Frontiers: The Relay System and Ming Empire in the Borderlands, 1368-1449," 12.

⁴² *Ming taizong shilu* 77: 永樂六年春三月庚申 (April 7, 1408).

tyrannies 苛政 (*kezheng*) left by the Hồ dynasty and to replace them with a looser 寬簡 (*kuanjian*) system.⁴³

While Huang and the Yongle Emperor were reducing, or at least claiming to reduce, the burden placed on the indigenous population, continuous military convulsions plagued the early years of the colony. The rebellions led by Giản Định Đế 簡定帝 Trần Ngỗi 陳頤 in 1407-1409, Trùng Quang Đế 重光帝 Trần Quý Khoáng 陳季擴 in 1409-1413, and by Trần dynasty loyalist generals Nguyễn Súy 阮帥 (d. 1414), Đặng Dung 鄧容 (d. 1414) and Nguyễn Cảnh Dị 阮景異 (d. 1414) resulted in an explosive growth in Ming military expenditures. Meanwhile, Ming control of Jiaozhi was also under a series of unremittingly attacks by the red garment rebels 紅衣賊 (*hongyi zei*).⁴⁴ In his letter to the highest Ming military general in Jiaozhi, Zhang Fu, who was granted the title Duke of Ying 英國公 for his service in conquering Annam, Huang Fu expressed great concern over the stubborn resistance in the colony: "there have already been three rebellions in eight years since the pacification of Jiaozhi and accordingly three expeditionary forces were required to be sent."⁴⁵ In addition to fierce resistance by the indigenous people, Huang found it increasingly difficult to supply Ming military operations: "If suppressing the rebels is easy, then appeasing the indigenous people is hard; if reassuring the

⁴³ *Ming taizong shilu* 68: 永樂五年六月癸未 (July 5, 1407); *Ming Taizong shilu*, 77: 永樂六年春三月庚申 (April 7, 1408). *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* 大越史記全書 [Complete Annals of Đại Việt] (1697; reprint, Chongqing: Xi'nan shifandaxue chubanshe, 2005).

⁴⁴ *Ming taizong shilu*, 218: 永樂十七年十一月丙午 (November 22, 1419).

⁴⁵ Huang Fu 黃福, "Feng zongbingguan Yingguogong" 奉總兵官英國公 [To the Duke of Ying, military commander], in Chen Zilong 陳子龍, ed. *Huangming jingshi wenbian* 皇明經世文編 [Collected writings about statecraft from the Ming dynasty], *juan* 20 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962).

population is hard, providing enough food for their consumption is even harder.”⁴⁶ Since “transporting food from Guangxi overland is perilous and costly,” Huang Fu encouraged Ming garrison forces in Jiaozhi to open up wasteland and farm for their own consumption.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Huang Fu suggested the Yongle Emperor supplement military supplies by encouraging merchants to transport food from inland areas to Jiaozhi in exchange for licenses for selling salt 開中 (*kaizhong*).⁴⁸ The Yongle Emperor appreciated Huang’s advice and implemented his plan accordingly. The promotion of the military *tuntian* 屯田 and *kaizhong* systems decreased the Ming’s dependence on the tax revenue collected from the new colony for local defenses, which seems to have been designed to reduce the tax burden on the indigenous population and their resentment against Ming rule.

Huang Fu’s most aggressive measure to assimilate Jiaozhi into Ming Empire, also the one that has caused the most controversy among Chinese and Vietnamese historians, was his policy to “sinicize” the local population. In an attempt to “reverse barbaric habits and revive Chinese customs” (變蠻夷之習, 復華夏之風), Huang ordered the establishment of Confucian academies throughout the prefectures, sub-prefectures, and counties in Jiaozhi and appointed scholars to propagate Confucianism ideology.⁴⁹ According to the *Records on Annan (An Nam Chí Nguyên 安南志原)*, fourteen

⁴⁶ Huang Fu 黃福, “Yu Guangxi Siming fu zhifu Huang Guangcheng” 與廣西思明府知府黃廣成 [Letter to Siming Prefect, Guangxi Province, Huang Guangcheng], in *Huangming jingshi wenbian*, *juan 20*.

⁴⁷ Huang Fu 黃福, “Yi zhan shou zhiyi feng Chen Erqing” 以戰守之議奉陳貳卿 [Letter to Chen Erqing concerning offensive and defensive military affairs], in *Huangming jingshi wenbian*, *juan 20*.

⁴⁸ *Ming shi*, *juan 157*, *liezhuan 45*

⁴⁹ Ming *Xuanzong shilu* 明宣宗實錄 [Veritable Records of the Ming Xuanzong Reign] (1438; reprint, Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1982), 3: 洪熙元年秋七月戊寅 (July 25, 1425).

prefectural schools 府學 (*fixue*), thirty-four sub-prefectural 州學 (*zhouxue*) and a hundred and thirteen county schools 縣學 (*xianxue*) were put into operation.⁵⁰ The Ming colonial government in Jiaozhi, between 1417 and 1428, also selected outstanding tribute students 貢生 (*gongsheng*) each year and sent them to the Directorate of Education 國子監 (*guozijian*) in the imperial capital for further education. There were a hundred and sixty-one tribute students sent to the imperial capital throughout the colonial period.⁵¹ Thousands of local skilled craftsmen were also recruited and sent to the imperial capital. Besides spreading “orthodox” ideology in Jiaozhi, Ming officials exerted cultural influence on the indigenous population by regulating and sinicizing local ritual practices.

While Huang Fu proved dedicated to constructing a glorious colony in Jiaozhi as a testament to the greatness of the Ming Empire, the indigenous colonized people’s dislike for Ming rule led them to stubbornly resist Huang’s government. The most challenging rebellion, the one that brought an end to the Ming presence in Jiaozhi, was the Lam Son Uprising (Khởi nghĩa Lam Sơn 起義藍山) (1418-1427) led by Lê Lợi 黎利 (1385-1433).⁵² Initially a participant in Trần Quý Khoáng’s rebellion in 1409, Lê Lợi, a wealthy man from Thanh Hóa, later served as a Ming Local Inspector 巡檢 (*xunjian*). Ultimately, in 1418, Lê Lợi declared himself the Pacifying King (Bình Định Vương 平定王) and rose against Ming rule.⁵³ In response, Huang Fu coordinated with the Marquis of Fengcheng 豐城侯 Li Bin 李彬 (1361-1422), Ming highest military general in Jiaozhi after Zhang Fu was recalled in 1416, and nearly put down the rebellion in its initial phase. However, the complex terrain in Jiaozhi with its

⁵⁰ *An Nam Chí Nguyên* 安南志原 [Records on Annam] (1419; reprint, Hanoi: The École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1931), 107.

⁵¹ *An Nam Chí Nguyên*, 107.

⁵² *Ming taizong shilu*, 196: 永樂十六年春正月甲寅 (February 8, 1418).

⁵³ *Ming taizong shilu*, 196: 永樂十六年春正月甲寅 (February 8, 1418).

twisty mountains and maze-filled jungle provided Lê forces with enough hiding places to keep them from being annihilated. Over the next several years, Lê's forces continuously harassed Ming administrative offices and disrupted the operations of Ming garrison troops. When the tough Yongle Emperor passed away in 1424, Lê took advantage of the power vacuum left at the Ming imperial court and launched another series of assaults against Ming colonial control in Jiaozhi. Many indigenous people responded to Lê's call and the rebellion reached an unprecedented scale. In response to the turmoil, the new and indecisive Hongxi 洪熙 Emperor (r. 1424-1425) recalled Huang Fu to Beijing thus largely abandoning Ming efforts to incorporate the colony into the empire.⁵⁴

In his later years, in recognition of his dedicated service in Jiaozhi, Huang Fu was promoted to the Supervisor of the Household 詹事 (*zhanshi*) of the Heir Apparent 詹事府 (*zhanshi fu*), where he assisted the man who would later become the Xuande 宣德 Emperor (r. 1425-1435).⁵⁵ After the death of the Hongxi Emperor on May 29, 1425, the new emperor ordered his teacher to supervise the construction of a mausoleum for the dead emperor.⁵⁶ Unlike his tough grandfather, who was obsessed by passionate expansionism, the Xuande Emperor was indifferent to the idea of colonial expansion and felt little interest in continuing to engage with this stubborn and troublesome colony. Yet even so, in an attempt to save Ming credibility, the Xuande Emperor dispatched seventy thousand troops and cavalry to Jiaozhi, captained by the veteran Marquis of Anyuan 安遠侯 Liu Sheng

⁵⁴ *Ming Renzong shilu* 明仁宗實錄 [*Veritable Records of the Ming Renzong Reign*] (1430; reprint, Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1963), 3: 永樂二十二年九月丙子 (September 26, 1424).

⁵⁵ *Ming Renzong shilu*, 5: 永樂二十二年冬十月壬寅 (October 22, 1424).

⁵⁶ *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, 9: 洪熙元年九月壬寅 (October 17, 1425).

柳升 (d. 1427).⁵⁷ After the disastrous defeat of these Ming troops in 1427, when tens of thousands of Ming elite soldiers died and Liu was killed in battle, the Xuande Emperor officially abandoned any further Ming ambitions in Jiaozhi, acknowledged the legitimacy of Trần Cáo 陳爨 (d. 1428) as the new monarch, and granted the late Lê regime (Nhà Hậu Lê 後黎朝) tributeship.

Conclusion

Twenty-two years after the Ming loss of Jiaozhi, the indecisive Zhengtong 正統 Emperor (r. 1435-1449, 1457-1465), who was swindled by the vain eunuch Wang Zhen 王振 (d. 1449) to lead troops to subjugate the Mongols, was captured at the Tumu Fortress in 1449. The Tumu Crisis nearly wiped out Ming elite bureaucrats such as Zhang Fu, the Duke of Ying, Minister of War 兵部尚書 (*bingbu shangshu*) Kuang Ye 鄺埜 (1385-1449), and Minister of Revenue 戶部尚書 (*hubu shangshu*) Wang Zuo 王佐 (1384-1449) and resulted in the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of elite troops.⁵⁸ The imperial succession crisis that followed came after a long and inconclusive series of campaigns in the borderlands, including the Luchuan-Pingmian Campaigns 麓川之役 (1436-1449) against the Mau-Shan chieftain Tho (Si 思) in Yunnan, clashes with the Shan states along the modern Burma-Tai frontier, and the end of expeditions by the Jurchen eunuch Ishiha 亦矢哈 as the Ming envoy in north-eastern Siberia.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ming shi*, *juan* 157, *liezhuan* 45.

⁵⁸ *Ming shi*, *juan* 10, *benji* 10, *Yingzong qianji* 英宗前紀 [Record of Yingzong].

⁵⁹ See Liew Foon Ming, "The Luchuan-Pingmian Campaigns (1436-1449) in the Light of Official Chinese Historiography," in *Oriens Extremus* 39, no. 2 (1996): 162-203; Jon Fernquest, "Crucible of War: Burma and the

In the eighty-one years between the beginning of the Hongwu Emperor's reign and the capture of the Zhengtong Emperor, the Ming undertook a massive territorial expansion, one not repeated until the middle of the eighteenth century under the Manchu Qing dynasty. To maintain control over this vast territory, the Ming applied different imperial strategies based on local conditions, people, and geography to flexibility construct the Great Ming Empire as an early modern colonial state. In Liaodong, the Ming appeared as a "garrison state" ruling northeastern Eurasia under regional military commission.⁶⁰ In the mountainous southwestern, modern-day Guangxi, the Ming government promoted and cooperated with obedient native chieftains 土司 (*tusi*).⁶¹ In Jiaozhi, colonial bureaucratic institutions were put into place and formal provincial-style administration was implemented.

Huang Fu's imperial career in Jiaozhi presents historians with a new image of the early Ming empire. Huang's attempt to transform this new colony into a Ming province—conquest through military domination, administration through formal provincial institutions, and incorporation through cultural sinicization—represent just one manner in which the Ming empire attempted to prove itself an heir to the Great State model in Inner and East Asian history. This essay is not the culmination of my studies of Huang Fu, however, but simply a first step in a larger project about the dual careers of Huang Fu and Zhang Fu, one a famous civilian administrator and one a remarkable military strategist—who are representative of an overlooked group of Ming colonizers in

Ming in the Tai Frontier Zone (1382-1454)," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 4, no.2 (2006): 27-81; Morris Rossabi, "Two Ming Envoys to Inner Asia," *T'oung Pao*, vol. 62 Livr (1976): 1-34.

⁶⁰ David M. Robinson, "Chinese Border Garrisons in an International Context, Liaodong under the Early Ming Dynasty," in Peter Lorge and Kaushik Roy, ed. *Chinese and Indian Warfare—From the Classical Age to 1870* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 57-73.

⁶¹ Leo K. Shin. *The Making of the Chinese State Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. If we are to take seriously their careers and accomplishments—and the nature of the empire they created—we must give some considerable thought and study to the idea of the Great Ming Empire as one of the colonial powers of the early modern world.

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