Miscellany of the South Seas
Zhao Lu, Baldanza, Kathlene, Cai Tinglan

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Miscellany of the South Seas: A Chinese Scholar’s Chronicle of Shipwreck and Travel through 1830s Vietnam.

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"A marvelous account of travels through Vietnam in the 1830s. Beautifully translated and expertly introduced, this unique Asian travelogue provides insights into Vietnam at a crucial time in its history and takes the reader into a world of fascinating coastal connections." — Christopher Goscha, author of The Road to Dien Bien Phu: A History of the First War for Vietnam

"A superb translation and a virtual treasure house of information on Vietnam as seen through the eyes of a Chinese writer." — James M. Hargett, author of Jade Mountains and Cinnabar Pools: The History of Travel Literature in China

"A major contribution to the fields of overseas Chinese history, travel studies, Southeast Asia studies, and Sinosphere studies." — Bradley Camp Davis, author of Imperial Bandits: Outlaws and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands

In 1835 young Chinese scholar Cai Tinglan was caught in a typhoon while sailing across the Taiwan Strait. He and his shipmates spent a harrowing week at sea before drifting to the coast of central Vietnam. With an escort of Vietnamese soldiers, Cai traveled north along the famous “Mandarin Road,” meeting governors-general of each province he passed through along his overland journey to Fujian Province in China. Cai documented his experiences in Miscellany of the South Seas (Hainan zazhu), a vivid account of clothing, food, religious practices, government affairs, and other aspects of daily life in early Nguyễn dynasty Vietnam.

Cai’s encounters with diasporic Chinese show the Hokkien merchant community’s penetration into Vietnamese society, while his warm embrace by Nguyễn officials illustrates a shared elite world of classical culture across international borders. In this first English translation, Kathlene Baldanza and Zhao Lu provide a comprehensive introduction that puts Cai’s account in social, political, and economic context, along with extensive annotation and a glossary.

Cai Tinglan 蔡廷蘭 (1801–1859) was a scholar from the Penghu Islands in the Taiwan Strait. Kathlene Baldanza is associate professor of history and Asian studies at Pennsylvania State University and author of Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia. Zhao Lu is assistant professor of global China studies at NYU Shanghai and author of In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture.