Boundaries and Beyond

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PART THREE

Pushing the Traditional Boundaries

Part Three consists of five chapters illustrating attempts to push the traditional boundaries.

Chapter 7 studies the changing socioeconomic conditions in rural southern Fujian in late Ming times, how the changes affected the life of the common agriculturists and in what ways the peasants were responding to the challenges.

Chapter 8 depicts how the smuggling activities of the Portuguese, the Japanese and the Chinese maritime adventurers created new offshore enterprises that involved both wealthy gentry investors and humble seafarers. The rampant piratical activities were often connected to the contesting interest groups.

Chapter 9 presents a case study of the enthusiastic response of the littoral people to the new trading opportunities created by the presence of the Portuguese and the opening of Spanish Manila to trade. The development of the domestic commodity economy and extensive maritime opportunities provided two forces that tended to shake the traditional and state-stipulated boundaries.

Chapter 10 surveys how Chinese merchants in late imperial times identified themselves with the traditional Confucian culture and value system. One clear effort of theirs was made through liturgical services for the common good. It enabled them to become more acceptable and their commercial activities better appreciated by the state and Confucian scholars.

Chapter 11 explores the issue involving large-scale shipments of Chinese coolies mostly by British local agencies and their vessels to foreign countries from the treaty port of Amoy causing the riots of 1852 by the contract coolies in the port city. Embarrassed by the incident, the British government instigated an enquiry into the affair, while the local Chinese officials refrained from further complicating the bilateral relations.