CHAPTER 7

The Changing Landscape in Rural South Fujian in Late-Ming Times: A Story of the “Little People” (1)

Changing Socioeconomic Conditions in Rural Fujian

In 1506 for the first time the local gazetteers recorded that a small band of “Guangdong plunderers” had raided Zhangzhou prefecture. They came very likely from the Chaozhou area of eastern Guangdong bordering southern Fujian. Perhaps, the incident itself was insignificant. However, the successive intrusions of Guangdong plunderers into Zhangzhou and also Quanzhou shortly thereafter in the years that followed signal a turning point in local socioeconomic conditions. All these events marked the beginning of a new chapter in the socioeconomic development of southern Fujian.

There is a surprising amount of information about the hard time experienced by the ordinary peasants, known as “little people” (xiaomin), a term used by contemporary writers to mean the mass of the commoners. Somewhat unexpectedly, the descriptions of their hardships are found in compilations or writings by high- and low-ranking officials as well as the literary gentry who assisted in compiling local gazetteers. In line with the emerging scholarship on statecraft, whose writers were most concerned with people's well-being, the local gazetteers are windows on the current conditions in local society.

The late Ming era saw the rapid development of China's commodity economy and monetization. In the 1950s and the 1960s Mainland Chinese scholars used to describe the phenomenon as “budding capitalism” in Chinese history. Nevertheless, the opposite side of the coin revealed a great contrast to the favorable picture of the socioeconomic conditions in Ming China. In this and the next chapters, the intention is to understand Ming society through the lens of the ordinary agriculturists.
The discussion examines 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. It begins with the most frequently raised issue of "population pressure" and scrutinizes the assumption that "the hilly terrains and scarcity of arable lands" in southern Fujian contributed to the poverty of the rural population.

Population
Quanzhou was first mentioned in Chinese history around AD 600. At that time the Fujianese population was still sparsely distributed. In the mid-eighth century, the Yangzi region and the areas farther south had only 40 to 50 per cent of the country’s population. The distribution had changed by the end of the thirteenth century, when the population of southern China rapidly rose to 85 to 90 per cent of the total. No fewer than 20 per cent of it lived in the valleys of Fujian and eastern Zhejiang along the southeast coast. In terms of the total number of hu (households), Fujian’s figure increased from two million in 1102 to 2.8 million in 1162. The population figures for the various prefectures of Fujian from the Tang to the Ming periods are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefecture</th>
<th>Tang</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Yuan</th>
<th>Ming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fuzhou</td>
<td>34,084 hu</td>
<td>308,529 hu</td>
<td>199,694 hu</td>
<td>94,514 hu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>福州</td>
<td>75,876 kou</td>
<td>595,946 kou</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>285,265 kou</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. In counting population, the Chinese census uses different units such as: (1) hu 户 (households), that was a customary Chinese extended family rather than a “nuclear” family in the Western sense; (2) kou 口 (mouths), which was identical to “head-count”. In the Confucian way of thinking, enough food was the most essential prerequisite for daily life. Hence, the word kou became the numeral coefficient in population counting; (3) ding 丁, an adult male between 16 and 60 years old who paid the ding tax. One should be aware that such official definitions are sometimes over-simplified.
Although the gazetteer from which the figures are taken does not specify any exact dates for the census, there is reason to believe that they were taken during the early South Song period and during the Ming around 1502. After the fall of the North Song capital, Kaifeng, into Jin hands in 1127 and the shift of the Court to the south, the Chinese population, as stated above, poured into the region south of the Yangzi River. Therefore, the sudden increase in the Fujianese population during that period is not surprising. What does attract our attention is the general decline in the population of the prefecture from the Yuan to the mid-Ming periods. The following figures show the tendency:  

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5. Funing Subprefecture was considered to be a part of Fuzhou prefecture during the Song and Yuan periods.

6. The conclusion is arrived at after comparing the following sources: (1) A Song gazetteer compiled between 1241–52, quoted in Quanzhou fuzhi [Gazetteer of Quanzhou Prefecture] (1870 ed.), 18: 16; and (2) Wei Qingyuan’s work (see fn 7). The Fujianese population in 1502 given in Wei’s work is about the same as in Bamin tongzhi (506,315 hu and 2,046,604 kou).

When reading a traditional Chinese census, the nature of Chinese population data and the factors affecting population registration should be borne in mind. Ho Ping-ti indicates several aspects to be considered, including the population-land ratio, interregional migrations, land utilization, food production, catastrophic deterrents and other economic and institutional factors. In short, the fluctuations in the figures in the population registration can be read as reliable indicators of the socioeconomic conditions prevailing in the different periods. Rapid growth might well reflect social stability and economic development. On the other hand, natural or man-made disasters might account for a decline. Since the Chinese census served as a basis for land distribution and taxation, its figures are more accurate when the society was stable. Nevertheless, under-registration and depopulation were by no means uncommon even when the actual population was not necessarily in decline. Several factors explain these phenomena. With the passing of the strong rulers of the early Ming, for example, the gentry families gradually reverted to various practices by which, in connivance with the local officials, they often succeeded in shifting a part, or all, of their burden of labor services and land tax onto the poor. Their illegal methods of effecting such evasions became increasingly shrewd and varied. Unable to bear the extra burden, the victims eventually resorted to desertion. Another factor, to be discussed later, in the failure of later Ming registrations to cover the entire population was the under-reporting by people with the protection of the powerful rural interests. Even under such conditions, it is amazing to note the exceptionally large increase in the Zhangzhou population. The development of that prefecture, located in the southernmost part of Fujian, was much later than that of Quanzhou. Considering the dubious character of the population registrations, the actual number of the Zhangzhou population must have been much greater than what was recorded. In any case, the figure does show a continuous trend of interregional southward migration and the fully exploited condition of the waste land in Zhangzhou.

9. Ibid., p. 10.
10. Ibid., p. 13.
Agricultural production would have better chances of yielding enough surplus for an increasing population provided that extortion and exploitation were still within a tolerable limit. More labor-intensive cultivation and the introduction of advanced agricultural technology would bring additional returns. Students of this field often take much for granted when they use the term “population pressure” to explain social changes in Fujian and its people’s massive migration to Southeast Asia in this period. The charm of such an oversimplification has proved so irresistible that commentators easily ignore the basic factors without which a simple net increase in population would not have created pressure or led to an explosive situation. The following discussion, therefore, attempts to establish the relative importance of “population pressure” examined from a broader perspective.

Land Conditions and Natural Catastrophes

The discussion commences with a brief examination of the condition of the land. In 1542, the total area of cultivated land for Fujian as a whole, was 135,475.331 qing. The average holding was 6.4 mu (0.97 acres) per kou, or about 25 to 26 mu per family. The surplus, if there was any, was severely limited by the nature of its small size. Furthermore, the deterioration in the quality of the soil reduced the yield. Before the massive southward migration in the early South Song period, agrarian problems were a minor issue. At that time, Fujian was a wilderness with an abundance of rich land. Irrigation works were well maintained. Therefore, famine was uncommon. When the population grew, land was no longer as abundant as it had been, even when lower quality arable land was included. During the Yuan period, people were only just able to meet their daily needs by toiling hard ceaselessly throughout the year. Because of its southernmost location in the province, the more intensive land exploitation in Zhangzhou occurred much later; consequently, it was the last to feel the impact of the waves of migration from the north. While land was fully exploited in the central and northern parts of Fujian during the Song period, Zhangzhou still consisted of a large amount of uncultivated land. The same was true on the outskirts

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 2: 18b.
of the coastal plains. For instance, the land situation in Yongchun, an
inland district of Quanzhou, began to be affected by population growth
much later than other places. A gazetteer published in 1526 describes
in favorable tones how the area as a whole was arable, fertile and well
irrigated. As a result, the population was well fed and decently clothed.16
Even a bad year would not cause a disaster.17 However, a prefecture
gazetteer edited about a century later (1612) that includes Yongchun
paints an entirely different picture. Quanzhou prefecture, it states,
had become an economically backward area with only a few products.
Arable land was not available in sufficient quantities. The land there was
so barren and the people were so poor that even an abundant harvest
did not assure a surplus. One season of failure was enough to cause
starvation.18 Poor agriculturists in Yongchun at that time were so hard
pressed by living conditions that they were sometimes forced off their
cultivated land and had to look for a new occupation.19 In Zhangzhou,
which was once considered to be a “paradise” in Fujian, the production
was no longer sufficient to feed the growing population.20 Everywhere
in Fujian, the peasants developed terraced fields reaching from the edge
of the plains to the hill-tops.21 The populous condition and the extreme
land exploitation greatly surprised a foreign eyewitness, Fr Martin de
Rada, who was on an official mission from Manila to Fujian in 1575. His
narrative vividly describes what he saw during his journey from Amoy to
Fuzhou, the provincial capital:

We arrived at a town called Tangua (Tong’an).... We were greatly
astonished to see so many towns on both banks of the river, and
so close to each other that it could be said they were rather all one
town than many. And not only there, but as we found along the
whole way to Hogchiu (Fuzhou) ..., it was populated in the same
way.... The natives of these other towns through which we passed
have cultivated their land to such an extent, that even the tops of
crags and rocks were sown, although it seemed as if no result of

16. Yongchun xianzhi 永春縣志 [Gazetteer of Yongchun District] (1526 ed.), juan 1,
“on custom”.
7: 3b–4a.
18. According to a gazetteer edited in 1612; cited in Quanzhou fuzhi (1870 ed.),
20: 3b–4a, 5a.
38: 3.
21. Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, Wu zazu 五雜俎 [Miscellaneous notes on five aspects]
any kind could be achieved there; whence it appeared to me that this country is the most populous one in the whole world.\textsuperscript{22}

The exhaustion of arable land in Fujian was reflected in the stagnancy of the cultivated acreage as shown by the following figures:\textsuperscript{23}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>AD 1391 (qing)</th>
<th>AD 1502 (qing)</th>
<th>AD 1542 (qing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>146,259.69</td>
<td>135,259.92</td>
<td>135,475.331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No new lands were brought under cultivation, even in the following centuries, as shown below:

**Usable Land of Quanzhou Prefecture\textsuperscript{24}**

(Unit: qing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subprefecture</th>
<th>AD 1562</th>
<th>AD 1582</th>
<th>AD 1752</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jinjiang</td>
<td>4,252.30</td>
<td>5,733.19</td>
<td>3,979.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nan’an</td>
<td>3,609.91</td>
<td>3,615.85</td>
<td>3,047.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tong’an</td>
<td>2,596.72</td>
<td>2,243.4</td>
<td>2,431.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hue’an</td>
<td>2,469.55</td>
<td>2,476.74</td>
<td>2,482.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchi</td>
<td>1,401.65</td>
<td>1,129.6</td>
<td>1,420.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14,330.13</td>
<td>15,863.08</td>
<td>13,361.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table includes all types of cultivated land, ponds, dams and land used for other purposes.

**Usable Land of Zhangzhou Prefecture\textsuperscript{25}**

(Unit: qing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1512</td>
<td>12,380.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1552</td>
<td>12,114.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(cont’d overleaf)


\textsuperscript{23} Wei Qingyuan, *Mingtai huangce zhidu*, p. 250.

\textsuperscript{24} *Quanzhou fu zhi* (1870 ed.), 20:21a, 35b, 47b, 57a; 21:6b, 7a, 21b, 35b, 47b, 57a.

\textsuperscript{25} *Zhangzhou fu zhi* (1877 ed.), 14:22b, 23, and 15:12b.
Year | Area
--- | ---
1571 | 12,038.94
1612 | 12,453.87
1711 | 12,744.84
1767 | 10,213.74

Remedies for the lack of arable land were sought in every possible direction, among them an improvement in unit productivity. Some progress was made by improving agricultural implements. Manure was also widely applied as fertilizer in the late Ming. On account of shortages of fertilizer, Fujianese cultivators in the hilly areas resorted to the slash-and-burn method, setting alight grass and bushes on the hills when spring came and then waiting for rain to sweep the ashes down to the rice-fields. In the more barren and hilly lands in Zhangzhou, there was even shifting agriculture, so that cultivators came to till their land once in three years.

Irrigation works in southeast China had very much deteriorated by the late Ming, the infrastructure falling victim to maladministration and social turmoil. Only a slight drought would bring disaster on the peasantry. The condition of the rice-fields in northern Fujian was described as not so critical. Thanks to the Min River, the longest and the largest in capacity in the province, better irrigation works were constructed and maintained. In the south, the capacity of the waterways was proportionately smaller. In most cases, the rice-fields in southern Fukien depended mainly on rain. Agriculturists in Zhangzhou and

27. The scene was captured by an eyewitness, a Ming mandarin, who, as an enthusiastic lover of scenery, complained that what he saw in the countryside was not the expected beauty of nature, but fire everywhere, set by the cultivators among the hills; see Wang Shimao 王世懋 (1536–88), *Mingbu shu 閩部疏 [An account of Fujian]*, 14b. The preface of the account was written in 1585. In the gazetteers, we often find a term *huogeng shuinou 火耕水耨*, that literally means “cultivate by fire and hoe by water”. This refers to a similar method; see, for example, *Quanzhou fuzhi 縣志 (1870 ed.)*, 20: 8b; also Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–82), *Tianxia junguo libing shu 天下郡國利病書 [Problems and Challenges in Various Regions of China]* (hereafter *TXJGLBS*), Vol. 26, p. 84a.
30. Ibid., 15: 1b.
Quanzhou often had to lift water from the wells by means of pulleys.\textsuperscript{31} The watering was much more difficult in the hilly areas such as in Hue’an District, because the cultivators used a more complicated technique to pump water up to the terraced fields.\textsuperscript{32} The apparatus consisted of a chain of water paddles that fitted into a trough and then pushed the water uphill. Without a breakthrough in agricultural technology, such limited improvements did not provide a total solution. Hence, the southern Fukienese people could only resign themselves to Heaven’s will, especially during the dry seasons.

Natural calamities plunged them into greater grief. People suffered severely from this kind of disaster. What happened in Zhangzhou during the Jiajing reign (1522–66)\textsuperscript{33}, as recorded in one of the local gazetteers, allows one to appreciate the tragic grievances:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Calamity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1530</td>
<td>Zhangpu</td>
<td>starvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1535</td>
<td>Pinghe</td>
<td>drought in summer; floods in autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1536</td>
<td>Nanjing</td>
<td>disaster caused by drought &amp; locusts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1537</td>
<td>Zhangpu</td>
<td>starvation caused by drought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1538</td>
<td>Changtai &amp; Pinghe</td>
<td>drought &amp; earthquake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1543</td>
<td>Longchi &amp; Changtai</td>
<td>earthquake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changtai</td>
<td>damage from frost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1544</td>
<td>Longchi &amp; Pinghe</td>
<td>starvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changtai</td>
<td>drought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zhangpu</td>
<td>starvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1545</td>
<td>Zhangpu</td>
<td>starvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changtai</td>
<td>flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Longchi &amp; Changtai</td>
<td>drought &amp; starvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1546</td>
<td>Zhangpu</td>
<td>starvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole prefecture</td>
<td>starvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Longchi &amp; Changtai</td>
<td>damage from hailstorm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{31} Wang Shimao, \textit{Minbu shu}, 16b–17a.
\textsuperscript{32} Quanzhou fuzhi (1870 ed.), 20: 8b.
\textsuperscript{33} Zhangzhou fuzhi (1877 ed.), 47: 4a–10a.

(cont’d overleaf)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Calamity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1548</td>
<td>Zhangpu</td>
<td>floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1549</td>
<td>Whole prefecture</td>
<td>earthquake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1557</td>
<td>Zhao’an</td>
<td>damage from hailstorm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1558</td>
<td>Zhangpu &amp; Haicheng</td>
<td>damage from hailstorm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1560</td>
<td>Nanjing</td>
<td>floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1561</td>
<td>Longchi &amp; Nanjing</td>
<td>drought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1562</td>
<td>whole prefecture</td>
<td>drought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1563</td>
<td>Longchi &amp; Nanjing</td>
<td>floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1564</td>
<td>Nanjing</td>
<td>floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1565</td>
<td>Nanjing</td>
<td>damage from hailstorm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1566</td>
<td>Zhao’an</td>
<td>drought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remedy was sought by introducing new crops to suit the geographical conditions. As a maritime province, Fujian benefited from new knowledge obtained through contacts with foreign lands. As early as the eleventh century, a new crop—early ripening rice—had been introduced into Fujian from Champa. It brought revolutionary economic consequences such as double-cropping and terracing.\(^{34}\) In the late fifteenth century, the Zhangzhou people brought back another new rice variety from Annam.\(^{35}\) The introduction of the sweet potato (\textit{fanshu}), literally “foreign potato” into Fujian was also an important event in Chinese agricultural history. It came, it was said, from Luzon around 1594 when there was a widespread crop failure in Fujian. Governor Jin Xuezeng issued pamphlets about how it should be cultivated and exhorted its extensive cultivation in order to stave off famine.\(^{36}\) The many advantages of the sweet potato were pointed out by both He Qiaoyuan, a scholar from southern Fujian, and the Court minister-cum-agriculturist Xu Guangqi. These benefits included its unusually high yield per acre, its nutritiousness (in terms of calories second only to rice), pleasant taste, preservability, value as an auxiliary

\(^{34}\) Ho Ping-ti, “Early Ripening Rice in Chinese History”, \textit{Economic History Review} 9 (1956–57): 200–18; also \textit{Yongchun xianzhi} (1526 ed.), \textit{juan} 1 “on products”.

\(^{35}\) Guo Bochang 郭柏蒼, \textit{Minchan luyi} 閩產錄異 [The typical products of Fukien] (1886 ed.), 1: 1a.

food, relative immunity to locusts, greater resistance to drought and the fact that it adapted well to poorer soils, hence competing with no other food crops for good land. It cost less than one qian: (a copper cash) per catty (1 catty = 1 1/3 lb). Usually two catties of it were more than enough for one meal. Peanut (luohuasheng) was another food plant introduced into China, probably by the Portuguese, who arrived in the Guangzhou (Canton) area in 1516 and subsequently traded in southern Fujian ports and Ningbo. It was first grown in Fujian. The result was “a revolution in the utilization of sandy soils”. With the nitrogen-fixing rhizomes on its roots, the peanut plant even helped to preserve soil fertility.

Given sound social conditions, the quick response of the Fujianese to challenges could have helped them to improve their living standard. Unfortunately, they still had to contend with social ills beyond their control and, therefore, the agricultural remedies failed to achieve a permanent solution.

Deteriorating Social Conditions and Tenant Uprisings

From the last decade of the sixteenth century and thereafter, funds in the national treasuries steadily dwindled away. Their depletion was partly attributable to the military campaigns that the Wanli Emperor (r. 1573–1620) ordered in the 1590s against the Mongol rebels in the northwest, against the aboriginal tribesmen in the southwest and to contribute to the struggles in Korea with Japanese invaders under Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Eventually, another long military contest was to bring down the Ming dynasty. This was China’s struggle with the rising Manchus. When Emperor Xizong (r. 1621–27) came to the throne in 1620, the situation was worse than ever. He permitted the ruthless eunuch, Wei Zhongxian, to extend his influence over the central administration, the provinces and the frontier marches. Social and economic dislocations increased in severity.

The Ming government had no other solution but to resort to immediate relief. Taxes were increased to meet the financial crisis. One of the measures was the imposition of a land surtax that had become a

38. He Qiaoyuan, Min shu, “on southern products”; see also Yongchun zhouzhi (1787 ed.), 7: 9b–10a.
common government practice to balance the annual budget. As early as AD 1551, a land surtax amounting to 1.2 million liang (taels) had already been sought from the southern provinces.\textsuperscript{41} The southeastern areas, especially Zhejiang and Fujian, were badly affected by different forms of additional levies.\textsuperscript{42} During the Wanli reign, military spending emerged as the main item in the budget. A successive, nationwide increase in land surtax, that was called liaohsiang (Liao military payments), came into effect in 1618. The additional amount was 3.5 li (1 liang = 1,000 li) per mu for the first year, 7.0 li the second year, and 9.0 li the third year;\textsuperscript{43} or approximately an increase of 3, 6 and 8 per cent respectively.\textsuperscript{44} Another 3.0 li was added in 1630\textsuperscript{45}—a 10 per cent increase within 12 years. Fujian had its share of 161,069.0 liang in the total surtax for its 13,422,000 mu of cultivated land.\textsuperscript{46}

Other forms of additional taxation were also introduced. The following figures indicate the total amount levied from each form of additional tax between 1619 and 1627: (unit: liang)\textsuperscript{47}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Surtax</th>
<th>Salt Surtax</th>
<th>Customs Surtax</th>
<th>Miscellaneous Surtax</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31,217,841</td>
<td>1,756,020</td>
<td>677,794</td>
<td>5,765,487</td>
<td>39,417,144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The whole nation had a population of 51,655,459 kou. The average additional Liao tax for each kou during that period was 0.76 liang. A pre-calculated amount of the land surtax was assigned to the local administration according to the total acreage of rice-fields under

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ming shi 明史 [Standard dynastic history of the Ming], 78: 10a.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 78: 10b.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 78: 11b.
\item \textsuperscript{44} The percentage is based on the rate given as 1.2 liang (various levies of service besides the land tax itself) for 10 mu of rice-field in 1571; see Zhangzhou fuzhi (1573 ed.), 5: 7a. The rate itself, evidently, was already too great a burden, even for the rich. See Ming shilu: Chongzhen changbian 明實錄:崇禎長編 [Veritable records of the Ming Dynasty: A long account of the Chongzhen Reign (1628–44)], 43: 9a–9b (Peiping Library Collection; reprint, Taipei, 1966).
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ming shi, 78: 12b; also Ming shilu: Chongzhen changbian, 41: 1a–1b.
\item \textsuperscript{46} The mu figure is taken from Li Wenzhi 李文治, \textit{Wanming minbian} 晚明民變 [The rebellions in the Late Ming] (Hongkong: Yuandong tushu gong si, 1966), p. 23. According to Chongzhen changbian, 38: 14b–16b, Fujian originally had 120,802.0 liang as its share. The proposed increase in land tax in 1630 assigned an additional amount of 40,267.0 liang to Fujian.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Li Wenzhi, \textit{Wanming minbian}, p. 22.
\end{itemize}
its administration. Since tax inequities resulted from the privileged exemptions of the scholar-gentry and from evasions by landlords with large holdings generally, the rest of the people had to share the amount. This must have placed an intolerable burden on the shoulders of the common people. The officials and the gentry were legally entitled to exemptions on certain amounts of property and on this basis many devices were employed to evade taxation. In Zhangzhou, for instance, the officials and the gentry put all the land-holdings of their relatives and followers under their own holdings to avoid taxes. A large part of their share fell also upon the shoulders of the poor. It is estimated that the actual per capita increase rose to one liang or about 32 per cent more than originally calculated. Considering only that the actual size of small-holdings was mostly far below the average of 6.4 mu per kou, the yield could hardly cover the taxes. Taking into account only the land tax per mu in the late Ming, it was almost 200 per cent higher than that in the early years of the dynasty and this did not include the increases resulting from fraudulent practices. In the most general terms, the evenly distributed system also had its defects. It did not take into consideration the different productivity and economic conditions in each area.

Labor services were another nuisance. Under Ming laws, every ding, or adult male, was obliged to serve in the militia. In the mid-Ming period, a certain amount of payment to support local administrative spending was required in addition to the militia service. The corvée was another type of labor service which required every adult male to take part in road, bridge and other civil construction work. However, he could choose to pay for replacements. No matter what the alternatives were, the ordinary folk who were poor just could not afford either the payment or the time spent in labor services. Among the labor services, perhaps the courier service (yichuan) caused the most suffering. In Zhangzhou, there were

50. It was 0.033 dan of rice per mu for the public land in the early Ming; see *Ming shi*, 7B: 4a. In 1571, it increased to 0.0963 dan; see *Zhangzhou fuzhi* (1573 ed.), 5: 7a.
51. Among the many malpractices, it was reported in 1572 that local administrations used to maintain two sets of land registries to facilitate their corruption. See *Ming shiliu: Muzong chao* 明實錄: 穆宗朝 [Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty: Muzong Reign], 68: 5a–5b. In one fraudulent case, a 53 per cent overcharge in land surtax was reported by two Fujianese Censors in 1631. See *Chongzhen changbian*.
52. *Zhangzhou fuzhi* (1573 ed.), 5: 34.
eight post-stages (yi) at which couriers took their rest or shift.\textsuperscript{53} It was a government service for the transmission of dispatches and various types of official transportation services. Although small allowances were paid to the couriers, they never amounted to a substantial income compared with the loss they incurred by leaving their farm-work unattended. As pointed out by a Censor in 1622, their bitterness “was intolerable for the observer to behold and hear about”\textsuperscript{54}. Courier expenses actually came from another surtax at the rate of 0.12 liang on every dan of rice paid as tax in kind (approximately taken from the yield of 10 mu)\textsuperscript{55}. The long list of taxes does not end with those mentioned above. Expenditure on wars and palace construction work during the 1590s, for example, caused the Wanli Emperor to send out eunuch collectors to supervise tax matters and to levy a variety of special new taxes on mines, shops, boats and so forth. The common people were exhausted, lamented the celebrated mandarin Xu Guangqi\textsuperscript{56}.

As a result, for the “little people” the possession of rice-fields was nothing but an extra burden. To escape from this burden, the agriculturists often abandoned their holdings and moved out to seek new fortunes. It was estimated that 90 per cent of the land in southeastern China was abandoned by people in this situation\textsuperscript{57}. Whether or not this remark is an exaggeration, the percentage does paint a disastrous picture.

Apart from land desertion, the agriculturists were also caught up in the peculiar “three-lord holding” pattern (yitian sanzhu). This was a common practice in southern Fujian, especially in Longchi, Nanjing, Zhangpu, Changtai and Pinghe. Sometimes, it could even occur in the form of the so-called “four-lord holding”\textsuperscript{58}. In the early Ming, Emperor Taizu’s insistence on the successive counting of the entire population arose from his eagerness to make an equitable distribution of land as well as of labor service. So, every ding who became a small-holder was called the “grand leaseholder” (da zuzhu) as soon as he was swallowed up in the pattern. His holding right was recorded in the official land-registry and this meant that he was simultaneously required to pay land tax and be responsible for labor services. When land-holding became a burden rather than a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 5: 38b.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Quoted in Li Wenzhi, \textit{Wanming minbian}, p. 24.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{Zhangzhou fuzhi} (1573 ed.), 5: 38b. 1 dan = 1 picul or 100 catties. The word dan is written as 石 in Chinese.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Xu Guangqi, \textit{Nongzheng quanshu}, 16: 29b.
\item \textsuperscript{57} \textit{Chouhai tubian} (Sea strategy illustrated: A work on coastal defense), comp. Hu Zongxian and Zheng Ruozeng, et al. 胡宗宪 (1510–65), 鄭若曾 (1503–70) 等編撰 (1624 ed.; first printing 1562), 11: 56b; 12: 31a.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Gu Yanwu, \textit{TXJGLBS}, Vol. 26, pp. 85–6, 88–9, 119, 122–4.
\end{itemize}
privilege, the "grand leaseholder" sold his holding at a very low price to someone who, besides the purchase price, was required by an agreement to pay annual rent in kind. The new holder, who was called the "secondary leaseholder" (xiao zuhu), did not pay any tax at all even though he was the one who actually held the land. The government tax collectors went to the original holder whose name was still in the land register. The new proprietor soon employed some tenants (dianhu) to work for him. He became a middleman between the "grand leaseholder" and the tenants. Finally it was the tenants who not only engaged in cultivation but also provided both the proprietor and the "grand leaseholder" with their fixed income. Although in name they did not have to pay the land tax, the tax that finally went to the government was derived from their rent. These people were pressed at the bottom and suffered the most. Ironically, the tenants were also called "landlords". The reason is that a tenancy was not legally transferable during the Ming period. Nevertheless, the transfer was made whenever the tenant was so desperately in need of money he had no other alternative but to give away his "life bowl" for instant relief, although such an action was economic suicide. The whole process of land transfer became more complicated when the "grand leaseholder" decided to get a "tax-farmer" (baidui, literally, to trade with empty hands), who became the "fourth landlord". Evidently, the "grand leaseholder" often could not afford to pay taxes from the income of the rent alone. Written contracts always existed between the parties to such an agreement. The following example is intended to give a clearer picture of the malpractice. Say there was a holding of 10 mu with a yield of 50 dan of rice. The tenants kept 40 per cent of the harvest and paid the rest (30 dan) to the proprietor, the "secondary leaseholder", as rent. In turn, the latter gave 10 dan to the "grand leaseholder" as required by the terms of the sale. The "grand leaseholder" duly paid the land tax, both in kind and in cash, that would amount to slightly less than 1 dan of rice plus 1.2 liang of cash. But more often, he would choose to keep 3 or 4 dan for his own consumption and give the rest to a tax-farmer. In around 1573, ten dan of rice was worth 2.5 liang of taels. Therefore, the tax-farmer was still able to make a little profit. However, should he choose

59. Also called xiao shuizhu 小稅主 (minor tax-receiver) or yezhu 業主 (proprietor).
61. The example is given in Zhangzhou fuzhi (1573 ed.), 5: 6–8. The late Ming scholar Gu Yanwu gives a figure ranging from one to three dan of rice as yield per mu. Cited in Fu Yiling 傅依凌, Fujian diannong jingji shi congkao 福建佃農經濟史叢考 [An examination of the economic history of the Fukienese tenants] (Fujian, 1944), p. 54.
a “shady” transaction with local officials it would finally free him from paying anything.62

**The Three- (or four-) Lord Pattern**

(An ideal distribution of a yield of 50 dan of rice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>(tax: 1 dan + 1.2 liang of taels)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand leaseholder</td>
<td>(income: 3–4 dan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax-farmer</td>
<td>(pay tax out of 6–7 dan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary leaseholder</td>
<td>(income: 20 dan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants</td>
<td>(income: 20 dan)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the “three- (or four-) lord” pattern, the “grand leaseholder” was usually the independent small-holder who could only narrowly escape bankruptcy. It was the “secondary leaseholder”, who, as a tax-free proprietor, benefited most. A slip of the pen in a contemporary gazetteer reveals that these people were “mostly well established with property”.63 Together with the tax-farmers, they belonged to the category of *shihao* (the rich and powerful), a term that frequently appears in the source materials.

Who actually was a *shihao*? Let us first look back to the structural setting of Chinese traditional society. Confucian scholars denied that there could be a society of uniformity and equality. It was clearly pointed out by Mencius that, “Those who labor with their minds govern others; those who labor with their bodily strength are governed by others.” The officials, the backbone of the ruling class, were the superiors, commoners the inferiors. Therefore, the peasant farmed the gentry’s land and the rents supported the gentry in their leisure. Since China was a huge agrarian country, the tremendous majority of the people were peasants. The gentry was small in number but of immense power, dominating Chinese society for more than two thousand years. In Fujian, the gentry played a predominant role in local affairs. They controlled not only the local economy but also the administration. They again relentlessly

63. *Zhangzhou fuzhi* (1573 ed.), 5:8b. See also this comment in the Guangxu edition of the gazetteer as follows: “The rich and powerful people privately enjoy land-proprietorships without taxation. But the poor and weak suffer from paying land-tax without proprietorships.” (14: 32a)
exploited people of the lower social classes. Their members consisted mainly of the heirs to prominent government officials (called shijia), the successful candidates in the various levels of the imperial examination 64 and the retired officials 65 who, with their relatives, took advantage of their prestige and special privileges. They found it easy to oppress the common people by extortion, by violence and by disruption of the judicial process. 66 These people were in a favorable position to associate with the government officials. Not only were they surrounded by a large group of flatterers and followers, even the local minor officers, whose salaries were usually nominal, came to make their bow. The tax-farmers mentioned belonged to the gentry or became their protégés almost without exception. As a consequence of the perpetration of malpractices or, in certain extreme cases of squeezing, proposing false taxes, nothing went to the government. The little people, consequently, groaned under the weight of their coercion and exploitation.

In the Ming period, the unprecedented concentration of landholdings in fewer and fewer hands was a long-recognized tenancy problem. Besides the distribution of land to every ding, garrison forces throughout the country, in the proportion of seven-tenths of the whole, were given lands to cultivate, each soldier being granted 50 mu. 67 Princes and nobles were also granted lands. Furthermore, officials had a right to official lands. Land during the Ming period either belonged to the category of official land (guantian) or of public land (mintian). The former mainly included royal estates (wangzhuang), service land (zhitian) and military colonization holdings (tuntian).

The degree of land concentration can be seen from the large number of royal holdings. Such grants were most popular during the period 1488–1521. The Jiajing Emperor once prohibited further grants but, in the late sixteenth century, the practice resumed. 68 In the early years, only unoccupied lands were granted to members of the royal family. In the late

64. Li Wenzhi, Wanming minbian, p. 2.
65. Referring to a local turmoil, the Quanzhou fuzhi mentions a landlord called Shi xiangguo 史相國 (Premier Shi). He was probably a retired official with the title of Premier. See 20: 13b.
66. Xie Zhaozhe, Wu zazu, 4: 37a. The author, a contemporary eyewitness, states that it was hopeless to think of obtaining justice over the rich.
67. In Quanzhou, the ratio was 4:6; it means that 40 per cent of the garrison troops stood on guard over the walled cities, whereas the rest were assigned land amounting to 24–26 mu each soldier (see Gu Yanwu, TXGLBS, Vol. 26, p. 66a). The Zhangzhou ratio was 3:7 with 27–30 mu each (see ibid., Vol. 26, p. 105a).
68. Li Wenzhi, Wanming minbian, p. 4.
Jiajing period, the royal holdings were largely expanded by encroaching on the public lands.\(^\text{69}\) In connivance with eunuchs, officials, local gentry, big brokers and merchants sped the course of land alienation. The fertile lands were all falling into the hands of a few.\(^\text{70}\)

The public land was still not in the commoners’ hands for the most part. Let us return again to the tradition. Every family had its ancestral hall (citang) with common land to cover its ceremonial expenditures. Accordingly, a clan had its common land for different functions, including school-land (xuetian), temple-land (miaotian), lineage-land (zutian) and tea-land (chatian). All these lands were common property and they constituted quite a high percentage of the public land. The control or supervision of the common property was entrusted to the pre-eminent family of each clan. Even the income drawn from the common land benefited them mostly. For example, the yield from the school-land became a reserve fund to support the candidates for the imperial examinations. Without doubt, they were mainly drawn from the rich families. The presence of ceremony and relief funds was an effective means of maintaining the gentry’s special social status and keeping the clan members under control.\(^\text{71}\) Hence, the so-called common lands were a disguised form of land concentration.

The gentry’s control of the local economy, especially the rice market, gave it a better device to foreclose land. The simplest method was to stock-pile rice until the price rose.\(^\text{72}\) At the same time, they monopolized fisheries, ferries and transportation. The prices of daily necessities climbed without any limitation being imposed.\(^\text{73}\) Eventually people had to give up their land.

The privileged holdings of monasteries also became their target. In his youth, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty had been a monk. After he came to the throne, all the monastery holdings were granted tax-exemption. However, the monasteries lost that privilege in the mid-Ming era when the government found itself in financial difficulties. Fujian had the highest percentage of monastery holdings in the nation and Quanzhou ranked top in the province. The larger holdings consisted of several

\(^{69}\) Ibid.
\(^{70}\) See Yongchun xianzhi (1684 ed.), 2: 1b; Chen Mauren 陳懋仁, Quannan zazhi 泉南雜志 [Miscellaneous notes on southern Quanzhou] (Chongzhen [1628–44] ed.), pt. I, p. 20a; and Xie Zhaozhe, Wu zazu, 4: 36–7. Chen was a minor mandarin in his native region of Quanzhou.
\(^{71}\) Fu Yiling, Fujian diannong jingji shi, pp. 25–6.
\(^{73}\) Fujian tongzhi (1871 ed.), 56: 22–3.
thousand mu and even the smaller ones possessed several hundred mu. In actual fact, the monastery holdings in the second half of the Ming period were so vulnerable that they fell an easy prey to ruthless land-hunters. Even more unfortunately, the monasteries also became the target of tax squeezing. Their holdings were then nothing but nominal and their position was no different from that of the "grand leaseholder". As non-temporal institutions, they had never conducted direct supervision of their lands. They did not even want to bother about the unauthorized transfers of land among the cultivators, provided that rents were paid. With the lapse of time, their holdings had spun beyond their control. However, in the land registry, their proprietorship remained the same and, fired with fierce avarice, the authorities were always casting envious eyes on their property. When increasing tax rates were imposed upon them after the mid-sixteenth century, the monasteries wallowed in a miserable situation.

Perhaps it is surprising to find that the monasteries also turned to mortgagees to raise money for taxes. Since mortgage and foreclosure always come together, in the end the monastery holdings were trapped in the "three-lord" pattern. A heavier land tax was imposed in 1564. Besides its financial purpose, it was put in place to prevent the bulk of the monastery holdings from slipping into land-hunters' hands. The outcome was the bankruptcy of the monasteries and the grievous suffering of the cultivators. Furthermore, "the corrupt officials and the powerful families ... [continuously] took away the sources of the monastery income by compulsory means". A local official who witnessed the decline in monastic fortunes described it with an air of melancholy by quoting a poem: "The prosperity had gone with the royal tax, when the old monk returned from his begging, he heard neither the evening bell nor the drum, only the temple's empty hall teeming with bats."

74. Fu Yiling, *Fujian diannong jingji shi*, p. 4.
75. *Zhangzhou fuzhi* (1573 ed.), 10: 33b. A different work cited gives the figure of 7/10; see 10: 42b. In 1631 the Board of Revenue mentioned that the powerful local people in Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong used to register their landed property as religious properties. The confusion paved the way for tax evasions. See *Chongzhen changbian*, 45: 20a–21a.
77. Ibid., 5: 52b.
78. Ibid., 5: 53–54a.
Around the mid-sixteenth century, sources also indicate that, under the guise of “monks”, the followers of the shihao were in actual control of the monastery property.\textsuperscript{81} Petitions against the shihao are often found in the source materials, accusing them of immorality, encroachment on others’ land, collusion with officials to seize land and acting coercively toward the ordinary people.\textsuperscript{82}

Land alienation also did not spare the military colonization holdings which occupied 3.6 per cent of the total in Zhangzhou\textsuperscript{83} during the Jiajing reign between 1522 and 1566. This land was either foreclosed on account of indebtedness or “voluntarily” offered to the shihao for protection. Some soldiers simply resorted to desertion;\textsuperscript{84} their abandoned land was subsequently commandeered by the shihao. Holdings of even this size met with a disastrous end and the authorities floundered in a helpless position:

When the shihao are asked by the authorities to pay taxes, they disclaim the holdings. But when the administration intends to redistribute them, they refuse to give up…. It results in great confusion in the land records.\textsuperscript{85}

Occasionally, malpractices were checked when honest, incorruptible officials were in office. If one studies the figures given in the table of usable land in Quanzhou prefecture carefully, one finds a sharp increase in acreage in Jinjiang, namely: from 4,252.30 qing in 1562 to 5,733.19 qing in 1582. The reason is simply that Magistrate Peng Guoguang took the 1582 land survey seriously. He personally went to the fields to guarantee their proper measurement. An additional 1,480.89 qing were found to have been unreported or falsely reported. This was almost 35 per cent of the preceding figure obtained two decades earlier. As a consequence, the amount of rice production reported also increased by two-fifths.\textsuperscript{86}

Owing to land concentration, the actual size of small-holdings for each family in Zhangzhou was far below the average\textsuperscript{87} of 25 mu for both

\textsuperscript{81} Zhangzhou fuzhi (1573 ed.), 5: 52b–54a.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.; also Ming shilu: Shizong chao 明實錄: 世宗朝 [Veritable records of the Ming Dynasty: Shizong/Jiajing Reign] (hereafter MS: SZ), 155: 2a.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 5: 28b.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 5: 29–30.
\textsuperscript{85} Quoted in Li Wenzhi, Wanming minbian, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{86} Gu Yanwu, TXJGLBS, Vol. 26, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{87} This was especially true in the case of tenants who constituted a large portion of the local population in the final decades of the Ming dynasty. Each tenant
the prefecture and the province, not to mention the national average holding per household, that amounted to 116 mu during 1573–1620 and 76 mu during 1621–27. Most of the small land-holders could not even reach the standard of self-sufficiency after a whole year of unceasing labor. It was often the case in Fujian that smallholders, such as the colonization soldiers, transformed themselves into tenants by offering their holdings to the shihao. This was a common practice especially during the last two decades of the Ming dynasty. So, the protectors annexed additional holdings in due course without difficulties, but the protégés had suffered a different fate.

The presence of an increasing number of “secondary lease-holders” signaled the rapid development of land alienation. It is estimated that 70 to 80 per cent of the land in Nanjing fell under the shihao’s control. The same must have been true in other more developed areas. In Yongchun, “the fertile land mostly belongs to the officials’ estates”. In southern Quanzhou, prominent families were many, their average holding per household ranging from 500 to 1,000 mu. In summing up the situation, an eyewitness said:

The officials and the rich families compete with one another for more land. The land of the corrupt officials and the powerful is so vast that it sometimes extends to the neighboring districts. They annex not only the lands next to their holdings but also those abandoned by the original occupants. The income of the temples is also seized by them. Golden crops are growing everywhere all over the vast countryside; junks are crammed with precious grain. What a pity that nine out of ten belong to the prominent families! This is why the rich become richer while the poor [become] poorer.

Ground down by such harsh conditions, the Fujianese were so desperate that they had no other option but to drown their baby daughters as a cultivated fewer than 2–3 mu of rice land. See Fu Yiling, Fujian diannong jingji shi, p. 54.

88. The Zhangzhou average of holdings in 1571 was about 25 mu; see Zhangzhou fuzhi (1573 ed.), 5: 3a, 5b; the population was 48,863 households, and the land 1,203,893 mu. Also Wei Qingyuan, Mingdai huangce zhidu, pp. 248–51; the population in 1542 is given as 519,878 households and the cultivated land as 13,547,533 mu.

89. Li Wenzhi, Wanning minbian, p. 6.
90. Fu Yiling, Fujian diannong jingji shi, p. 65.
92. Yongchun xianzhi (1684 ed.), 2: 1b.
last resort. Since they could not take care of their own livelihood, any additional consumers would only bring more hardship on the family. This tragedy happened even in well-to-do families when the concubines gave birth to baby girls because they feared that the new-born baby might interrupt the work in the fields and also that they might not be able to afford its dowry in the future. This sinful practice was said to be most common in Zhangpu.

All these evils naturally damaged social stability. They created an untenable relationship between the landlord and the tenant. Furthermore, the absence of essential incentives suffocated agricultural productivity. The landlord oppression was the immediate reason for the outbreak of tenant uprisings and subsequent social turmoil.

A tenant’s life was worst among the agriculturists. They were subject to the payment of all taxes (other than the land tax) and labor services. The contract between the two parties tied the tenant to the land, and served the landlord as a strong guarantee of maintaining sufficient man-power. The landlord was in a position to dominate the will of the tenant who was often obliged to ask for loans from his landlord to cover the costs of cultivation, household expenses and the purchase of cattle. The maintenance of the irrigation works also fell upon his shoulders. As a landlord tended to squeeze as much out of his tenant as possible, the latter became ever more entangled in the web of indebtedness. A harvest could never satisfy his financial needs. The landlord frequently kept an eye on his tenant and supervised all his production activities. Instructions such as the following were issued from time to time to direct the tenant’s work:

It is now cultivation season,... the elders should instruct and advise their juniors to begin sowing seeds....

97. Absentee landlords from other subprefectures in Nanjing controlled almost 70 to 80 per cent of local cultivated land. Consequently, “most of the native agriculturists became tenants”. See Gu Yanwu, Tianxia junguo libing shu, Vol. 26, p. 122a. In Pinghe, the tenants suffered greatly because they were obliged to supply rents to the other three “landlords”. See ibid., Vol. 26, p. 123b.
98. Sources like Gu Yanwu, TXfGLBS, Vol. 26, p. 86a; and Zhangzhou fuzhi (1573 ed.) (5: 8) mention the existence of such contracts.
99. The tenants’ frequent failure to pay rent and the landlords’ heavy-handed tactics resulted in an official notice advising both parties to adopt a cordial relationship. Quoted in ibid., 10: 26b.
Irrigation work is the principal support of agriculture. The users should get ready for construction works.

The tillage depends greatly upon cattle, ... their slaughter should be prohibited.... Millet, beans, hemp [ramie], wheat, vegetable, egg-plant, taro and etc. ... should also be planted during their slack hours of farming. They should also try to plant ... mulberry trees. 

In case this is not successful, they should, then, plant cotton or hemp-producing plants.\textsuperscript{100}

Before the tenancy disputes became serious, the landlord used to collect rents personally in spring and winter. By custom the tenant was required to provide a meal and present a fowl and other items for a feast. In return, the landlord gave him napkins, fans and the like.\textsuperscript{101} Such offerings actually had become a compulsory portion of the rent.

Probably ceremonial donations (xiangshui, literally, village tax) were also collected in the name of the temples. As they were related to superstition, this kind of expenditure was far more distressing than the regular taxes themselves.\textsuperscript{102}

Last, but by no means the least, was the scourge of the irregularity of the measurement system. Landlords took full advantage of it. The capacity of a local peck (xiangdou), for example, was sometimes only between four-fifths and two-fifths as large as that of the official peck (guandou).\textsuperscript{103} While collecting rents, the landlord would make extra profit by using larger capacity measures. When he sold, the smaller one was used.\textsuperscript{104} The use of fraudulent measuring baskets (doulao) was one of the major reasons that led to frequent violence disturbances. In the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, tenants often took action in defiance of such tyrannous practices.\textsuperscript{105} Several cases that happened in the last few years of the dynasty are referred to in the Gazetteer of Quanzhou Prefecture. In one outbreak in Nanjing, for example, several landlords were killed on the first day of the uprising. The rebellious tenants built up their resistance in the hills, while others remained in the villages but on rent strikes. The rebels also made an unexpected attack on the junks carrying grain. During the turmoil landlords had to hide in fear of their lives. Other districts, including Yongchun and Anchi, responded to the uprising soon after. The case of Yongchun is the most

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 10: 26; 11: 43b–44b.
\textsuperscript{101} Quanzhou fuzhi (1870 ed.), 20: 13b.
\textsuperscript{102} Such was the case in South Song. See Zhangzhou fuzhi (1573 ed.), 10: 141–2.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 5: 53.
\textsuperscript{104} Cited in Fu Yiling, Fujian diannong jingji shi, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{105} Quanzhou fuzhi (1870 ed.), 20: 13.
surprising. A Jiajing gazetteer (1526 ed.) still boasted of its fertility, saying that, “people here are well-fed and well-clothed.”

But in the last decade of the Ming dynasty “the poor tenants were in debt, homeless and vagrant.”

The disturbances went on for several years. Walled cities in the area suffered greatly from price inflation. When government troops arrived, they found only deserted villages inhabited solely by the aged. With tears in their eyes, the older people told the commander a woeful story. They claimed that the villagers were all law-abiding citizens, but the intolerable bitterness caused by the cruelty of the rent-collecting servants had incited the rebellion. The situation did not allow the commander to resort to strong military action, even though he was pressured to do so by the local gentry. On account of the restraint exercised by the military officers, peace was slowly restored. Finally, the authorities promised not to take any reprisals against those rebels who came back. As a further concession, their leaders were permitted to supervise rent-collection. The extortion of unauthorized taxes was also entirely banned.

Tenancy uprisings of this type persisted throughout the second half of the Ming period, although the protestors were labeled differently in the local gazetteers, as “robbers”, “plunderers”, “rebels”, “bandits” or “evil people”. Whatever the term, they all tell almost the same story. The outlaws occupied a shanzhai (a hill fortress) and launched attacks on the walled cities whenever they were strong enough to do so. It is reminiscent of what is told in the famous classical novel, the Shuihu zhuan (Water Margin) about a North Song uprising. In Chinese history, one can almost rely on these occurrences as indicators of social conditions. Although local uprisings were by no means uncommon throughout the history of southern Fujian during Ming times, the frequency and intensity of the rebellious violence in the later part of the dynasty, as shown in the local gazetteers after 1506, clearly points to deteriorating social conditions.

The local uprisings in southern Fujian listed below are taken from a few gazetteers. One might want to take note that in most cases the participants or the supporters were former tenants:

109. The cases indicated by “*” are cited from the Quanzhou fuzhi, 73: 21–2, while the rest are taken from Fujian tongzhi (1871 ed.), juan 278. In the 40th year of the Jiajing reign (1561), it was recorded that all eight prefectures in Fujian were seriously infested with “bandits”. See MSL: SZ, 503:3a. Another reference for 1563 also mentions that “… all the Fujianese people are connected with bandits (Minmin jie dao 閩民皆盜).” See ibid., 519: 2a.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Locality of Uprisings</th>
<th>Identity or Origin of the Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1506</td>
<td>Zhangzhou, Anchi</td>
<td>Guangdong plunderers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1507</td>
<td>From Nan’an to Jinjiang</td>
<td>Guangdong plunderers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1508</td>
<td>Anchi &amp; Nan’an</td>
<td>Guangdong plunderers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1510</td>
<td>From Anchi, Nan’an to Jinjiang</td>
<td>Guangdong plunderers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1522</td>
<td>Anchi, Nan’an, Dehua, &amp; Yongchun</td>
<td>Guangdong &amp; Zhangzhou plunderers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1523</td>
<td>Zhang(zhou), Quan(zhou), &amp; Yongchun</td>
<td>Guangdong plunderers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1524</td>
<td>Zhang(zhou) &amp; Quan(zhou)</td>
<td>Guangdong &amp; Zhangzhou plunderers attacked by joint troops of 6 districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1533</td>
<td>Changtai &amp; Anchi; Zhang(zhou) &amp; Quan(zhou)</td>
<td>Yongding plunderers*; local bandits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1538</td>
<td>Anchi</td>
<td>Yongding plunderers*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1546</td>
<td>Zhao’an</td>
<td>local bandits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1547</td>
<td>Anchi &amp; Tong’an</td>
<td>local bad men*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1560</td>
<td>Zhao’an</td>
<td>villager rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1561</td>
<td>Longyan, Yongchun, Nan’an, Zhangpu, Nanjing, &amp; Zhangping</td>
<td>villager rebellions or plunderers from neighboring areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1562</td>
<td>Tong’an, Pinghe, Zhangping, Longyan, &amp; Yongchun</td>
<td>villager rebellions or plunderers from neighboring areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>1563</td>
<td>Longyan</td>
<td>local rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1564</td>
<td>Zhangping &amp; Zhangpu</td>
<td>Longyan &amp; Guangdong plunderers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1565</td>
<td>Longyan</td>
<td>Longyan plunderers attacked Shaowu in the far north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Longchi</td>
<td>local rebellion</td>
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<tr>
<td>1590</td>
<td>Zhangzhou</td>
<td>Uprising staged by famine victims</td>
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<tr>
<td>1592</td>
<td>Changtai</td>
<td>local rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1624</td>
<td>Zhao’an</td>
<td>bandit attack on the walled city</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(cont’d overleaf)
Earlier the plunderers had come from the neighboring areas. However, in the later period more “local bandits” were involved. As a local gazetteer comments:

Whether or not the disturbances in Fujian can be coped with successfully depends largely on the conditions in Zhangzhou and Quanzhou. If their people are starving, assuredly the number of plunderers will enormously increase.110

The first intrusion into Fujian by Guangdong plunderers occurred in 1506, on which occasion the intruders were said to have numbered fewer than 90.111 But, this “bandit” band was soon able to recruit many participants and supporters from Zhangzhou. Another disturbance caused by them in 1524 could barely be quelled by the joint forces of six districts. Thereafter, outsiders looked upon southern Fujian as an outlaws’ haven.

The story will never be complete without mentioning the fate of numerous salt-producers. Salt revenue constituted the second largest item of state income.112 Under the state salt monopoly system, all salt-producing areas were organized into 13 distribution commissions and superintendencies.113 In the first century of the dynasty, the public consumed salt sold by the government on a rationed basis. Although the

### Table: Year, Locality of Uprisings, Identity or Origin of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Locality of Uprisings</th>
<th>Identity or Origin of the Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1639</td>
<td>Changpu</td>
<td>bandit attack on the walled city</td>
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<tr>
<td>1642</td>
<td>Nan’an, Pinghe, Zhangzhoufu, &amp; Nan’an</td>
<td>tenant uprisings</td>
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<tr>
<td>1643</td>
<td>Changpu &amp; Zhao’an</td>
<td>disturbances begun by local bandits</td>
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<tr>
<td>1644</td>
<td>Pinghe, Longyan, Zhangping, Nan’an, &amp; Yongchun</td>
<td>turmoil staged by bandits</td>
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</table>

110. *Fujian tongzhi* (1871 ed.), 87: 10b; see also *Minbu shu*, 16b-17a, the content runs: “The Zhangzhou people frequently resort to breaking the law if they are starving.”

111. *Yongchun zhouzhi* (1787 ed.), 15:4b. Reference is also found in *Ming shilu: Shizong shilu* saying that, “those bandits are of Guangdong origin”. See 25: 3a.


113. Ibid.
Court discontinued salt distribution in 1474, the collection of payment for rationed salt from the population was not suspended. Fujian was not included in any of the official distribution regions but payment for the salt ration was required. Consequently, salt consumption in Fujian had long been more burdensome than in other regions. In fact, the monopoly of the private salt-farmers had created a worse situation than the state monopoly had done. The salt trade was a profitable business. Zhangzhou merchants used to transport salt to the upstream interior districts such as Longyan, Zhangping and Ningyang where they could profit tenfold. The large profits had led the powerful people to exercise their influence over the local authorities to gain more stringent control of private selling so that they could effectively manipulate prices. The gazetteer of Tong’an records that in 1546 the local authorities took rigorous measures against the salt-peddlers. Many “xiaomin” were arrested or harassed by government officials. The salt-farmers were then in a good position to monopolize the market and proceeded to take the salt-producers “by the throat.” Bear in mind that the coastal people depended largely on fishing and salt production, especially in southern Zhangzhou where there was very little cultivated land. As fishing was badly affected by the seafaring prohibition, salt production became even more indispensable to the people. “The coastal population would starve were they to stop selling salt for just a single day,” tells a gazetteer. Protected by the corrupt administration, the salt monopolists often refused to buy in order to wait for lower purchasing but higher selling prices. After working in the blazing sun the whole day long, the destitute producers could only produce two dan of salt for an unreasonably low selling price of 2 or 3 fen ($1/10 qian = 1/100 liang/tael$) per dan. Under such circumstances, the livelihood of the salt-producers and the free flow of salt supplies were both cut off. The xiaomin’s suffering is told as follows:

We see the old and the weak [from the interior] crawling over hills and valleys for whole days, carrying with them firewood and

118. “Only 20 to 30 per cent of the land is arable”, stated in Gu Yanwu, *TXJGLBS*, Vol. 26, p. 84.
120. Ibid., 15: 21–2.
rice, just to exchange for a few catties of salt. [The monopolists’ followers] relentlessly take away all the salt and even their other belongings. Then they bring the confiscated evidence to the salt-sellers as a threat. Only after squeezing every single thing they possess will they be satisfied... For merely a part of the revenue benefit, the Court let the evil merchants squeeze a hundredfold profit. While the evil merchants gain a profit of a hundredfold, the xiaomin suffer [a] thousand times worse than ever.

Without a sufficient supply of salt, the interior of Zhangzhou erupted into an uprising in the late sixteenth century. Obviously, the administration had not learned a lesson from all the troubles caused by such a private monopoly. In 1598, when a eunuch was assigned to Fujian to exact more revenues, the local powerful people saw it as an opportunity to collaborate with the administration for personal gain.

Unleashing the Potential for a Better Livelihood

While becoming social outcasts was a desperate recourse of the distressed peasants, others attempted to find economic solutions to their plight. Eventually this trend was to lead to a changing landscape in southern Fujianese society. It was by no means a smooth process of improvement if the strength of the traditional resistance to any change in the status quo is taken into account.

The Chinese peasantry was characterized by the smallness of the basic functional units. The family in a peasant community was a self-sufficient unit, striving to provide the necessities and minimum social solidarity in everyday economic pursuits. The traditional ideology in China suppressed individualism in favor of familism in which all values were determined by reference to the maintenance, continuity and functioning of the family group. Extended organizations were formed on this basis. They gathered on ceremonial occasions associated with kinship and helped each other when they were in need. The family’s very small piece of farm-land, which was only a few acres on average and made capital

121. Ibid., 15: 22–3.
122. Ibid., 15: 25a.
123. Ibid., 15: 24b.
125. Ibid., p. 2.
accumulation impossible, left no room for any individualistic ambition that could jeopardize the collective interest.\footnote{126}

In the economic sphere, the Chinese family was able to carry self-sufficiency to surprising lengths. Its members produced and consumed on a family basis. Only a few staples were bought or exchanged. Ideally speaking, society ranked merchants at the bottom of the social ladder, whereas artisans were only a grade below the peasants, and the latter were ranked well below the gentry. There were even periods in which attempts were made, though never successfully, to create a closed class of the merchants by forbidding them or their sons or grandsons to sit for the imperial examinations. The low prestige of their role was closely connected to the fact that families were expected to be highly self-sufficient and in such a situation exchange activities were a threat to the ideal patterns.\footnote{127} However, if the bureaucracy and the gentry, who did not actually produce, were to be maintained as groups, exchange services were required. And the manner in which social conditions developed only enlarged and accented the scope of this need. The latter was what happened in Fujian in the second half of the Ming period.

Before the land problem and the concomitant undesirable social conditions worsened, people attended to what was thought to be fundamental—self-sufficient agriculture—and kept away from the inferior pursuits of trade. Although for a long time Quanzhou had enjoyed commercial intercourse with foreign countries, and Zhangzhou also had an active part in the early seafaring adventures in the Nanhai (the South Seas), most of the rural people who resided beyond the walled cities did not waver in their daily routine and lifestyle. In actuality, the \textit{shibo} trade (the tribute-trade or state-trade institution) had long been a state monopoly in which the common people at large were not involved. As late as the early sixteenth century, when the prefectures were not yet badly plagued by pirates, such places as Nan’an, a district of Quanzhou, still observed the old way of life. There were some peddlers but they never strayed beyond the village boundary.\footnote{128} Zhangzhou underwent social and economic changes even much later. As late as the mid-Ming period, according to a gazetteer of 1490, its sub-prefecture of Longyan was seldom visited by merchants from outside; the people of Changtai “never attend to trading”; the people of Nanjing lived off the land; Zhangping

\footnote{126. Ibid., p. 6.}
\footnote{128. \textit{Quanzhou fuzhi} (1870 ed.), 20:8a.}
was “not accessible by waterways and rarely visited by traders”. In Quanzhou prefecture, as recorded in a gazetteer of 1526, “the people of Yongchun were familiar with neither commerce nor skills other than the fundamental ones. Only non-residents attend to occupations other than farming. As for the local people, they value the fundamental and hold the inferior in contempt.” Only slowly “did a few occasionally take up a job as trader”. In other words, with the exception of the larger cities along the sea-coast, southern Fukien was still generally characterized by its autarkic economy up to the first half of the sixteenth century. Men cultivated the soil and women spun and wove. The soil provided them with staple foodstuffs and the family manufactured its own clothing. They raised pigs and poultry for ceremonial use in their backyards. Fish were quite abundant in the ponds. Vegetables were grown in the small empty spaces nearby. There were some fruit trees grown around the house for the family’s consumption. There was scarcely any thought of making a living by selling these products. Having said this, the existence of some limited commercial exchanges cannot be denied. For example, the inland people had to rely on salt supplied from the outside. Some peddlers did travel to and fro between the walled cities and the villages. Nevertheless, this small-scale peddling trade was under the landlord’s control and limited to the supply of basic economic needs.

A change got underway in the one hundred years following the mid-sixteenth century. Sources from the last decade of the Ming dynasty describe the trend as follows:

(In Quanzhou) only 40 per cent of the population who reside on the sea-coast take up jobs as rice-field cultivators, and 60 per cent live by fishing. On the hillsides, only 30 per cent belong to the first category and the rest depend on hill products.

By this time, commercial activities were no longer the monopoly of the larger coastal cities. Even in the remote interior people were participating in trade more frequently and in larger numbers. In the first half of the sixteenth century, only merchants from Jinjiang, the largest city in Quanzhou, had ventured as far into the remote interior as Dehua. However, people from Hui’an soon caught up and traveled

129. He Qiaoyuan, Bamin tongzhi, 3: 9a.
130. Yongchun xianzhi (1526 ed.), juan 1.
131. Cited in Yongchun zhouzhi (1787 ed.), 7: 3b.
much farther, not confining their peregrinations to areas within the
boundaries of Quanzhou, but also venturing into Xinghua, a Fujian
prefecture north of Quanzhou, not to mention many other parts of the
country.\textsuperscript{135} Some might go far west to Sichuan.\textsuperscript{136} Late in the century, it
was estimated that 50 per cent of the Fujianese people had to live from
activities performed outside their homeland.\textsuperscript{137}

Probably the first major commercial activity undertaken by the South
Fujianese in the outside world was the grain-supply business. Sources
during the period of this study show that they depended on the provinces
of Zhejiang in the north and Guangdong in the south for their supplies
of grains and textiles.\textsuperscript{138} They shipped rice in large quantities from
Wenzhou in Zhejiang and from Huizhou and Chaozhou in Guangdong.\textsuperscript{139}
The following quotation is characteristic in this respect:

\textit{The unproductivity of the land and the poverty of the people have
promoted commercial activity. People no longer feel sad to leave
their homeland for the Lower Yangzi and Guangdong areas.}\textsuperscript{140}

The grain trade was essential to their livelihood, especially after the
mid-Ming period. A contemporary work written during the Wanli reign
(1573–1620) substantiates this point:

\textit{In recent years (after the mid-sixteenth century), the population
(in Quanzhou) has grown rapidly. Even hill products have ceased
to be produced and fish stocks are exhausted. People have to
rely on sea-going vessels (for their grain shipment from other
provinces).}\textsuperscript{141}

Toward the end of the dynasty, food shortages grew even more severe.
Just a few months’ discontinuity in rice supplies would ineluctably result
in starvation.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{135} Cited in \textit{Quanzhou fuzhi} (1870 ed.), 20: 8b.
\textsuperscript{136} See Song Yingxing 宋應星, \textit{Tiangong kaiwu 天工開物} [The exploitation of the
works of nature] (1637 ed.), pt. I, “on clothing”, p. 12; He mentions merchants
brought raw silk back from Sichuan.
\textsuperscript{137} Xie Zhaozhe, \textit{Wu zazu}, 4: 35.
\textsuperscript{138} Cited in \textit{Quanzhou fuzhi} (1870 ed.), 20: 3–4; \textit{Zhangzhou fuzhi} (1877 ed.), 38: 3.
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Quanzhou fuzhi} (1870 ed.), 20: 13.
\textsuperscript{142} Cited in \textit{ibid.}, 20: 13b.
The emergence of the monetary economy facilitated the development of trade. Different currencies were used in Fujian in the later decades of the Ming dynasty, including Song coins, Spanish silver coins and others. A Spanish eyewitness, who has been quoted above, tells of the commercial activity that he saw in Tong'an in 1575:

We passed along a street that was over half a league long, and which throughout its length on both sides was a veritable fish-market of different kinds of fish, although there were likewise some meat and fruit, but most of it was stocked with fish, and in such quantity that it seemed as if there would never be enough people to consume what was there. They told us that this was the ordinary state of that market, and I can well believe it; for we found it as plentifully stocked on our return trip as if nobody had taken anything.

The nationwide development of a commodity economy gave a significant impetus to commercial development. In the second half of the Ming period, the specialization of the handicraft industry reached a new stage with many new fields being developed. For instance, cotton-weaving, silk-work and metalworking became increasingly specialized and divided into several independent manufactory departments. As did other industries such as the sugar, paper and pottery manufacturing industries, they spread to different regions. Along with the growth of industrial productivity and the expansion of marketing, handicraft industry centers emerged in their early stages.

Agriculture became more commercialized to suit new demands; people began to convert consumer articles into commodities. Especially after the mid-Ming period, more food plants were replaced by commercial crops. The planting of sugar-cane, tobacco, tea and cotton were a few crops in this category. The planting of such fruit trees as litchi, longan (both were grown in southern China), olives and banana were also aimed at commercial profit. Even grains, as mentioned above, were commercialized. Going beyond the scope of agriculture, rice-

143. As told by Wang Shengshi 王勝時, in his Manyou jilue 漫遊記略 [A brief travel account], juan 1. The author spent almost two years traveling through seven out of the eight prefectures in Fujian in 1652–53, shortly after the fall of the Ming dynasty.
144. Fr Martin de Rada, "Narrative of the Mission to Fukien", p. 250.
145. Zhongguo renmin daxue 中国人民大學 [People’s University of China], Mingqíng shèhuì jìngjì xíngtài de yánjū 明清社會經濟形態的研究 [A study of the socioeconomic patterns of the Ming-Qing Dynasties] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1957), p. 7.
hulling mills became an independent industry. Gradually, this form of production and commerce broke down the regional economic isolation. Economically speaking, the people were more dependent on one another than ever before.

With the combination of this national economic background and the desperate local living conditions, it is not surprising to see a trade-oriented development in South Fujian. Before the sixteenth century, South Fujian had few local products for export. However, it did re-export non-indigenous commodities, especially to Southeast Asia. The highly celebrated porcelain from Jiangxi was one of these re-exported products. Sometimes the Fujianese brought back raw materials including silk yarn from Zhejiang and wove it themselves.\footnote{146}

They took pains to improve their handicrafts industry to suit a wider market. Their gauze work was excellent and was considered as valuable as silk.\footnote{147} The silk-weaving in Quanzhou also enjoyed a fine reputation. Even the gentry families had a taste for these products.\footnote{148} The Quanzhou people were good at imitating all kinds of skills\footnote{149} and quick at learning all sorts of crafts.\footnote{150} A contemporary record shows that people of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou learned their satin-weaving skills from Japan. Although their product was less durable compared to those from Japan, its glossy black color entranced even the foreigners on the northern frontier.\footnote{151} Women were active in the handicraft industry. In Jinjiang, for example, they took part in the manufacture of straw shoes.\footnote{152} Nevertheless, the most outstanding industry of the Fujianese was probably the manufacture of bamboo-paper. In the mid-Ming period, it had already won the reputation for being the best in the country.\footnote{153}

Besides their long-standing and famous export of fruit, including litchi, longan, olives and oranges,\footnote{154} in the second half of the Ming period South Fujianese people had begun to grow even more commercial crops. Sugar-cane was one of the most popular as indicated in the following source:

\footnotesize

149. *Quanzhou fuzhi* (1870 ed.), 20: 4b.
154. Wang Shimao, *Mingbu shu*, pp. 3b, 6a and 17a, mentions that the oranges from Zhangzhou were the best in Fujian.
People manufacture sugar, and sell it to other places transporting it by sea. The profit to be had from the rice-crop there is so small that people often turn their rice-fields over to growing sugar-cane since it can fetch [a] considerably higher price.\(^{155}\)

In the sixteenth century, sugar-cane was grown in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. The production from these two areas occupied 90 per cent of the nation’s total acreage.\(^{156}\) In Fujian, “sugar-cane is planted all over the valleys (in South Fukien) and all the cultivators are people of southern Zhangzhou”.\(^{157}\) Tobacco was also introduced, probably from Jiaozhi (northern Vietnam), and first grown in Zhangzhou and Quanzhou in the early seventeenth century.\(^{158}\) The large profits earned from tobacco led to the widespread cultivation of the plant in other new areas, first in the Lower Yangzi region at the end of the Ming period and throughout the whole country by the early Qing period. Tea has a long history in China, but it was not until the Ming period that its cultivation spread from Sichuan to most parts of the Yangzi Valley and its southern region. Fujian tea soon became famous and tea-growing became more widespread in the hilly areas where the rice-crop became a subsidiary during the late Ming period.

Another commercial crop was cotton. It was called \textit{jibei}. When pronounced in Fujianese dialect, it resembles the Malay word “kapas” which was a common term in Southeast Asia. Cotton cloth had long been a famous tributary item. On account of their close contact with foreign countries, Fujian and Guangdong in the southeast together with the northwest regions of China were among the first to introduce the plant in the thirteenth century. It did not become an important product until the Ming period because neither the \textit{Song shi} (Standard dynastic history of the Song) nor the \textit{Yuan shi} (Standard dynastic history of the Yuan) mentions it.\(^{159}\) In his account an eyewitness in the late sixteenth century says that cotton was grown in quite a large area between Tong’an and Longchi.\(^{160}\) Despite the fact that Fujian was one of the first areas to grow it, cotton cultivation there did not achieve a prominent position in


\(^{160}\) Wang Shimao, \textit{Minbu shu}, 8a.
China’s economy because of geographical conditions. Nevertheless, the South Fujianese did try to spread the planting of it on the best soil in the area, on which they were supposed to grow rice-crops. Its cultivation is of great significance because of the way the people sought assiduously for every possibility to improve their economic conditions, even if they had to replace their rice-land to do so.

Dyeing works also flourished, keeping pace with the expansion of the textile industry. Indigo planting was developed to meet the great demand for the dye. The country’s best indigo came from Quanzhou. The Fujianese grew it in the ravines and made great profit by selling it all over the country.

Summing up the plurality of the local economy, a gazetteer editor observes: “People grow rice, millet and wheat ... in the lowlands, and nettle-hemp and cotton in the hilly areas. Sugar-cane is also cultivated. A large amount of tobacco is exported to other provinces.” Every day, without any breaks, the local products were carried out along the narrow paths through the mountain passes to neighboring provinces, resembling nothing so much as “a flow of water”. More were shipped out by sea. Again the South Fujianese were quick to find ways to meet the testing challenges imposed on them by the living conditions in their native villages.

The story of the “little people” will continue. Meantime, a few words will suffice to conclude the present discussion. What has been shown is the willingness of the South Fujianese to adapt themselves to changes and respond to possibilities as they arose. What has not been pursued in the discussion is that this same dynamic character is what spurred many of the South Fujianese people to take to the sea: a change of status from that of peasants to seafarers and merchants. This latter aspect will be the focus of the following chapter.

161. Ibid., 17a.
162. Wang Yingshan, Min daji, juan 2, quoted in Fu Yiling, Mingqing shehui jingji shi, p. 13.
164. Wang Shimao, Minbu shu, 17a.
165. Ibid.