

and whose leaders drew their inspiration from the Communist Party's larger vision. What she does not demonstrate is that the communists' analysis possessed enduring value, infused the union's campaigns in any distinctive way, or held any attraction to the union's membership. Nor does she fully recognize how the Party's policies constrained or hampered the union, or demonstrate that the union's top leaders' break with the Party in any way damaged the institution as a progressive, activist force. *A Renegade Union* offers a valuable account of an important union whose story has not yet been told fully, but it does not make the case for the superiority of communist-led unions in the realms of labor and race relations.

Eric Arnesen

Department of History, George Washington University
Phillips Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Washington, DC 20052, USA
E-mail: arnesen@gwu.edu

CHENG, WEI-CHUNG. War, Trade and Piracy in the China Seas (1622–1683). [TANAP Monographs on the History of Asian-European Interaction, Vol. 16.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2013. xxiii, 365 pp. Ill. € 88.00; \$114.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000091

This book provides a solid overview of a fascinating period, combining research in Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and Dutch sources to interweave many different perspectives on a complicated picture of trade, warfare, and diplomacy. Its avowed purpose is to describe the rise and fall of the Cheng dynasty of merchant warlords, principally Cheng Chih-lung (alias Nicolas Iquan), his son Cheng Ch'eng-kung (alias Coxinga), and grandson Cheng Ching, between them spanning most of the seventeenth century. This family story is, however, set against the broader background of the fall of the Ming dynasty and the rise of the Manchus in China, the interests of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), and the sometimes technically illegal but nevertheless constant trade in various commodities, including Chinese silk and gold, Japanese silver, Taiwanese sugar, Siamese deerskins, and of course pepper, which came increasingly under the control of the Dutch. Cheng Wei-chung uncovers the delicately balanced web of commerce which stretched from the Chinese coast to Japan, Java, and Manila, but which was regularly disrupted by competition and outright conflict. As the leaders of the Cheng dynasty typify, this was a fluid situation where aggression and diplomacy, trade and violence, could be and often were simultaneous activities. For the merchant warlords, this seems to have been cyclic: trade created their opportunities and their wealth, which made them powerful, and with that power they were able to exert more control over trade.

In fourteen quite short but well-paced chapters, Cheng Wei-chung traces this process from the beginnings of Chih-lung's career serving the Ming dynasty against other similar "maritime mercenaries", to Ch'eng-kung's negotiations with both the Ming and the Manchus, leading ultimately to his retreating from China and seizing Taiwan from the Dutch in 1662 before his sudden death. Ching's "tight grip on the China trade" (p. 225) during the later 1660s had collapsed by the end of the next decade, and after Ching's death in 1681 the Cheng forces surrendered to the Manchus in 1683. Though generally well-written, the many strands of the narrative are sometimes integrated a little clumsily; and occasionally there are colourful phrases rather than cogent analysis. When Chih-lung's comrade Li K'uei-ch'i abandoned him in 1628, this was apparently because Chih-lung's

accommodations with local officials “almost verged on the betrayal of his pirate brethren” (p. 51), though at no point is the nature of the relationships between Chih-lung or his successors and their subordinates discussed.

More thought could have been given to the non-specialist audience likely to use this book; the three facsimiles of contemporary charts are less useful than a general map would have been, and some subjects are insufficiently explained. The structure of local officialdom in Ming China is not introduced, meaning that titles like “Grand Co-ordinator” (p. 48), “Regional Inspector” (p. 79), “Coastal Defence Circuit”, “Provincial Military Commander”, “Assistant Regional Commander”, “Mobile Corps Commander”, “Deputy Squadron Leader”, “Defender” (all listed on p. 83), and “Navy Commander” (p. 142), carry little significance. Indeed, the linguistic policy throughout the whole book is not explained; sometimes, the Dutch, Chinese, or Japanese versions of titles or personal names are introduced, but not systematically. Sticking to one language in the text would ensure more clarity, and as Appendix II provides translations of official titles, personal, and place names, this would have made a more appropriate place for this information. Nor is it clear why Chih-lung is usually named as “Iquan”, or Ch’eng-kung as “Coxinga”. Is this simply an issue of convenience, or making some more serious statement about their personal identity, or their position between the Chinese, Japanese, and European worlds?

It is on this sort of deeper analytical question that *War, Trade and Piracy* is weakest. The text is heavily descriptive, and while it admirably mixes events in many locations, and discusses both political and economic dimensions to the Cheng’s (and many others’) activities, Cheng Wei-chung rarely steps back to review the implications of these developments. Historiographical discussion is confined almost entirely to the succinct introduction (pp. 1–9), and only in the (very good) conclusion does the author review the larger picture that he has presented in such detail, suggesting that the Cheng dynasty moved from a “defensive” to an “aggressive” monopoly, and arguing that, though similar to regional warlords in other Chinese periods, the Cheng’s involvement in maritime trade makes them unique (pp. 247–252).

For all that this is a wide-ranging study, it proceeds in a surprisingly conventional narrative of powerful men, diplomacy, and war, with a great deal of statistical material about trade added, though often presented in a slightly bewildering flood of commodities and prices which the author delights in listing, with a limited account of the larger trends. We learn surprisingly little about the personalities of the Cheng leaders besides their military prowess. An intriguing mention that Chih-lung was a baptized Roman Catholic, possibly associated with the Italian Jesuit Giulio Aleni, is never followed up (p. 789). It might explain why his grandson employed another Jesuit, Victorio Riccio, as an ambassador to Manila (p. 225), though neither Ch’eng-kung’s nor Ching’s religious beliefs are examined.

We learn even less about the many others involved in the dramatic events chronicled by Cheng Wei-chung. Rulers, government officials, and merchants from various places make appearances, but the soldiers and sailors in the Cheng forces are merely numbers; how the Cheng recruited them and maintained their loyalty (or failed to do so) is overlooked. The short- and long-term impact of this warfare and trade upon the regional economy, and its role in the “new wave of globalization” which the author mentions only in his conclusion (p. 252), certainly deserve more attention. This book, then, provides a useful introduction to its chosen topic, but the detail and narrative could have been balanced with more analysis. The result is an impressive but at times ponderous work.

Richard J. Blakemore

Department of History, University of Exeter
Exeter, EX4 4RJ, UK
E-mail: r.blakemore@exeter.ac.uk