Abstract

Merchants, seafarers, pirates: the maritime societies of Southeast Fujian played a crucial role in maritime activities during the Ming Dynasty. Regarding the traditional discourse, scholars have discussed the elimination of wokou and local petty pirates during the late Ming period. This study proves otherwise via an extensive examination of the governance and management of the maritime societies implemented by the Ming regime and its local officials. This study considers how the local officials formed their judgements on the cases of seafaring population by examining court opinions and other historical materials. This study also reveals the identities and the cultural habits of the maritime societies. The findings show that the identities of the societies mentioned above were not formed in an arbitrary manner. In addition, wokou and local petty pirates still posed a great threat to the Southeast coast of Fujian during the closing decades of the Ming Dynasty and that the severity of pirate issues was mainly related to cultural habits of the maritime societies and the regime’s governance.
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