

THE 13TH CENTURY SOUTHERN CHINA IN “PING ZHOU KE TAN”

Song epoch left many diverse literary monuments for us, which at times contain unique materials of history, spiritual and material culture, and everyday life of Chinese society of that time. But the so-called collections of *biji* particularly stand out among such monuments, the rise of which falls on the 10th—13th centuries: these amazing and yet little-studied works of art are characterized by absolute author's liberty, both in form and in content — and their authors, not bound by government service (and many *biji* emerged in the afternoon and at the evening of author's lives) and living in peace, could allow themselves not to look back at official dogmas and not burden themselves with self-censorship, writing in the way they deemed necessary and about that, which they considered necessary. In this regard, *biji* is living testimony of the contemporaries, relating to us such de-

tails about the life of Song China, which are not contained in any other historical sources. And one of these sources is the collection of Zhu Yu (1075? — after 1119) titled “Pin zhou ke tan” (“From Conversations in Pingzhou”). The data recorded in the second *juan* of “Pin zhou ke tan” were of great significance for researchers. They speak of the south of the Song China, specifically of Guangzhou and the so-called “foreign quarter” located on its territory and mostly populated by Muslims. It also contains data on trade with overseas countries. The importance of such fragments is reinforced by the following circumstance — all these data are personal observation of the author or vivid impressions on account of his father's stories. This is the Song south through the eyes of the witness. Below is given translation of four of such excerpts with commentaries.

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From of old in the Guangzhou administration of Shibosi there was a position *tiju shiboshi*, which was subject to [local] governor-general. At the time of the founder of the dynasty this position was called *shiboshi*. Shibosi existed in the seaside regions — in Quanzhou, which is in Fujian Province, in Mingzhou and Hangzhou, which are in Liangzhu.

In the first years of Chonging the position of this type of officials — *tiju shibishi* — were established in

these three provinces. The most flourishing port was Guangzhou. When some official would begin to fleece [merchants], tradespeople would go to a different location, thus these three provinces new both — times of prosperity and times of decline. Then the Emperor's court joined Quanzhou and Guangzhou Shibosi and transferred both to Guangzhou. Not all tradespeople considered it comfortable.

Annotations. Shibosi — management of merchant shipping. It is known that an establishment with such a name existed back in the Tang Dynasty — it was in Guangzhou only and it controlled all seaside trade of the south of China. According to the history of the Song Dynasty, under this dynasty Shibosi was established in Guangzhou in 971, and then, following the development of maritime commerce, analogous Managements were established in other cities — in Hangzhou, Mingzhou (modern Ninbo in Zhejiang), Quanzhou, Mizhou (Shandong) and in many other locations. At the head of Shibosi was an official known as *tiju shiboshi* (also known as simply *shiboshi* or even simpler — *boshi*, governmental representative of the Management of merchant ships); this office at first was held either by one of the highest local officials or *zhuanyunshi* of the province; later other officials were appointed for this office, who had a staff of subordinates necessary for the implementation of work. Among main functions of Shibosi were: supervision of maritime commerce, examination of cargo and duty levying, only after the payment of which cargo-owners obtained authorization to trade; centralized storage and sale of goods obtained in the capacity of duty, for which Shibosi had governmental storehouses under his jurisdiction as well as forces and means necessary for delivering certain goods to the capital (certain goods, however, were sold right there, without sending those off anywhere); supervision of export — in particular of those categories of goods, which in the Song times was prohibited to be exported beyond Tianxia (copper coins, weapons, etc.), as well as issuing authorization for foreign commerce; obligation to receive and send off arriving and departing seagoing vessels observing all established orders and procedures; besides, another indispensable obligation of Shibosi was supervision of foreign settlements on the territory of Tianxia, maintenance of relationships with their elders and chiefs, settlement of economic and

other issues, deciding the issues of belongings of foreign merchants who passed away on the territory of Tianxia, etc. Gains from the activities of Shibosi were not the least part in the Song treasury: the overall duty comprised one tenth of all imported goods.

Three provinces — referring to the Song provinces of Zhedong, Zhexi (Liangzhu) and Fujian.

The years of Chongning — 1102—1106.

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In Guangzhou from Xiaohai to the sandbar of Ruzhou — 700 *li*. On the sandbar there is Wangbo xunjiansi, the Inspectorate [of Supervision] for arriving ships; it is also called *yi wang* — the First Inspectorate. A little northward are the Second and Third Inspectorates. And once you pass by the sandbar — you are on the high seas.

When merchant vessels intend to set sail, on reaching the sandbar of Ruzhou they linger there for the final farewell and only then they are given permission to sail off. It is called “to release into the sea”. On returning, vessels are moored by the sandbar, joyously celebrate their safe arrival and treat guards to wine and meat; then the vessel heads to Guangzhou under escort. In Guangzhou vessels are moored by the watchtower of Shibosi, and soldiers are dispatched from the Inspectorate for the purpose of examination. It is called “to place in the enclosure”. Then tax officer along with Shibosi officer arrive unto the ship. They inspect merchandise and identify the amount of tax. It is called “to levy

a part”. Out of ten parts of pearl and “dragon's brain” of high quality one part is levied, and tortoise shell or hoffmansaggia wood of low quality — three parts. Surplus is recovered in favour of government commerce, and in regards to the rest of the goods merchants may make arrangements according to merchants' understanding. All elephant tusks that weigh thirty *jins* and more as well as mastic come into the government market, since these goods are under monopoly regulations. The merchants who brought in somewhat large elephant tusks must weigh them, and those that weigh less than three *jins*, may be sold freely, but since prices at the government market are low, merchants meet great losses on account of this trade and it upsets them. Those merchants, who having sailed up and not yet gone through [the procedure of] “levying a part”, dare to silently put goods into circulation, are considered to be criminals, even if they sell only a little of their goods, and everything is confiscated. Thus, no merchant dared to do what they will.

Annotation. “Dragon's brain” — a Chinese name for camphor.

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Here's the order: on large vessels, which take several hundred people aboard, and on small crafts, where a little over a hundred is taken aboard, the head is appointed out of the richest merchants and so are his deputy along with assistants. Shibosi then issues a written authorization for the head to subdue his travelling companion to obedience and make an inventory of belongings of those who died [en route].

Merchants say that if the vessel is large and many people are on board, then it is permissible to set out on a voyage — there are too many robbers overseas and they grab everyone who is not a guest of their country. If the sea sails up to Zhancheng or, losing their course, they mistakenly find themselves in Zhenla, all goods are taken [there], and travellers are bound with ropes and sold, saying at that: “You shouldn't have come here!” And although in overseas countries commercial duties are not levied, they yet demand what they call “bringing gifts” and then they take [these gifts] away, regardless of whether there are many goods [on the ship] or not. Therefore, it is disadvantageous to set sail on small crafts.

Vessels are several tens of *zhangs* in length. Tradespeople share their merchandise into small parts and distribute among their people. Those guard the goods and at night they sleep on top of them. Among goods there is a lot of chinaware, small are packed into larger ones in such a way that there is no room to spare.

When at sea [travellers] are not afraid of storms, but rather — and only — of striking aground. If, as they say,

one “draws near to shallow waters”, the ship cannot get afloat again. If it begins leaking and the leak cannot be done away with, then “devil's slaves” *guinu* are sent in with knives to close up the gap from the outside. *Guinu* are superb swimmers and can see clearly in the water.

Captain of a ship is knowledgeable in geography, at night he observes stars, in the daytime — the sun, in bad weather he orients himself by means of compass or with the help of a hook tied to ten *zhangs* long rope, when he gets some soil from the very bottom, smells it and thus identifies where his vessel is.

There are no rains at sea; but if it does rain all of a sudden, it then that land is nearby. Merchants say that when it is calm, seawater resembles mirror.

Seafarers catch fish. They take a gigantic hook of the size of one's arm, tie a chicken or a duck to it as bait, in order for a big fish to bite it. For half a day this fish leads the vessel after it until it grows weaker, and it becomes possible to draw somewhat near to it. But then another half a day needs to be spent in order to catch it. If wind suddenly gets up, the fish is given up on. The fish caught might turn out to be uneatable, then its belly is disembowelled looking for small eatable fish, which were devoured by the big one. Commonly there are several tens of them in its belly, and each weighs many *jins*! Big salt-water fish always swim behind ships and devour everything that gets thrown overboard.

If any traveller on board, having fallen ill badly, gets his call, usually he, before he even breathes his last, is

wrapped in heavy mat and thrown overboard. In order for the body to go under and down to the very bottom, clay jugs with fresh water are tied to the mat. But as soon as the body is in the water, a shoal of fish immediately rips the mat open and the body never gets to sink.

There is sawfish in the sea. It is hundred and ten *zhangs* long, and where its nose is it has a bone saw. On meeting a vessel this fish cuts it in two with its nose with such an ease as though it uproots [a dead tree].

It happens that during a voyage all of a sudden mountains upon mountains covered with dry trees emerge in the distance. If, according to captain's

opinion, no mountains were there before, then it is a dragon. [A lock of] hair needs to be cut and burned along with fish scale and bones. Then mountains begin disappearing under water. But [this] danger is rather great, not many were lucky enough to be spared from it.

Tradespeople revere foreign Buddhist monks and say that if one addresses them in prayer in trying hour during a voyage, then monks appear from out nowhere and always help. Having arrived to Guangzhou, tradespeople treat monks of that place and give offerings. It is called "offering to *arhats*".

Annotations. Zhancheng — the state of Tiampa (or Champa, 192—1697), founded by Tiams (or the Chams, whose descendants mainly in Southern Vietnam and in Campuchea), which originally was named Lin Yi in Chinese sources, and later — Chem Thanh it was located on the territory of central and southern parts of modern Vietnam.

Chenla — Khmer state education of Kambujadesa, which was in existence on Zhongnan peninsula from the 7th to 17th century CE.

"In bad weather orientates himself by means of compass" — this, in fact, is the earliest Chinese written testimony of compass use in seafaring.

Arhat — devoted Buddhist monk, who reached the lowest level of holiness and standing on the threshold of crossing into the state of Bodhisattva.

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All those that come from overseas countries live in Guangzhou's "foreign quarter". From among them the head over them is appointed. This head manages administrative issues in the quarter, and particularly watches that foreign tradespeople render their tributes. For this purpose he has foreign officials in his charge. Dress, footwear, memorial boards of these officials are exactly like the ones that the inhabitants of Tianxia have. If a crime is committed in the foreign quarter, an investigator is invited from Guangzhou — and the criminal is banished from the

quarter. The one who is guilty is tied to the wooden ladder and struck with cane sticks — from heels to crown. Cane sticks break after the third strike. Foreigners do not wear pants and stockings, they seat right on the ground. Strikes on their buttocks are rather painful for them, but when it comes to strikes on their back these they do not fear. If the crime committed is a serious one, the case then is examined in Guangzhou.

Foreigners dress differently than the inhabitants of Tianxia do, but they drink and eat the same.

Annotations. "Foreign Quarter" (*fan fang*) — as it is clear from the aforementioned, it is a location where foreigners compactly dwell. As a rule such quarters were located in the city suburbs: thus, during the Song times a foreign quarter in Guangzhou was on the north coast of Zhujiang, in the south-western suburb, and in Quanzhou — not far away from Jinjiang, to the south of the city. There were a lot of foreigners in these quarters: thus, over ten thousand foreigners lived in Guangzhou at the same time, most of them were natives of Arabic countries; some of them lived there permanently, others came and went depending on a season, along with craft caravan. The Song authorities, interested in commerce, treated foreign quarters quite tolerantly, allowing visitors to profess their religion, keep to their own traditions, including in architecture (thus, Guangzhou preserves one of the oldest mosques in the PRC, built back at the beginning of the Tang Dynasty rule; although in 1343 it burned down, but seven years later it was restored; and since 1996 it is an object of cultural heritage protected by the State). For the purpose of maintenance of order and supervision of lawfulness in foreign quarters a so-called *fanzhang*, which was chosen out of the quarters' number, holding an office akin to *yamen* — *fanzhangsi*. This man, however, could not administer justice on his own; he was obliged, as it is spelled out in this excerpt, to hand criminals to local Chinese administration. It, having examined case circumstances and found that this crime is not ranked among grave ones, as a rule returned criminals back so that he would be punished in accordance with the laws of his country. If on the other hand a grave crime was committed, the violator fell into the millstones of Chinese justice. Also *fanzhang* was obliged to assist Chinese authorities in everything — first of all, in the matters of commerce — and, since this man carried authority with his fellow people, to supervise religious matters of his foreign quarter.