Chapter Five

The *Haiguo tuzhi* and *Shengwu ji* by Wei Yuan

In Japan, the most stimulating and influential Chinese-language work in the field of world geography and topography was doubtless the *Haiguo tuzhi* (Illustrated Gazetteer of the Sea Kingdoms). That is to say, the *Haiguo tuzhi* was not simply a work that conveyed knowledge of geography and topography. It was also a study of defensive military strategy and tactics in the face of the foreign powers then exerting considerable military pressure on East Asia, including gunboats and artillery. Wei Yuan (1794–1856) wrote the *Haiguo tuzhi* from an indignation borne of China’s defeat in the Opium War and with that experience as an object lesson. Because of the concrete quality of their arguments concerning naval defenses, the *Haiguo tuzhi* and the *Shengwu ji* (Record of August [Manchu] Military Achievements), written at about the same time, were packed with suggestions for Japan at that time. This was a time when naval defense was being actively debated in Japan, spurred by the arrival of vessels, commanded by Admiral Matthew Perry (1794–1858) and Admiral E. V. Putiatin (1804–83), along the Japanese coast and by the stringent diplomatic posture assumed by Townsend Harris (1804–78).  

The *Shengwu ji* was, for the most part, a chronicle to that point in time of the Qing dynasty’s ‘august’ (sheng) military victories in which the rebellions of border peoples, gangs of pirates, and rebellious religious insurgents had been suppressed. Although it did not concern the geography or topography of foreign nations, Wei Yuan did insert an appendix entitled ‘Wushi yuji’ (Personal notes on military matters) after his recounting of the military victories. The material found in this section on strategy and tactics, based on the historical facts described, proved useful as a reference for naval defense in Japan at that time. Thus, it was this section of the *Shengwu ji* (three editions, see below) that was reprinted in Japan with reading punctuation. (One tiny portion of the original text, without Japanese reading punctuation, was also reprinted as part of a longer series).

Similarly, what many critics and analysts in Japan raised for discussion in the *Haiguo tuzhi* was not the portions of the text dealing with the geographical or
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topographical information recorded for the various continents and countries of the world, but the very first *juan* of the text entitled ‘Chouhai pian’ (Coastal defense preparations), namely that part of the text which analyzed coastal defense strategies and the like. This portion of the original was first reprinted in Japan in Kaei 7 or 1854. Thereafter, a number of different men successively reprinted the main part of the text on geography; these reprintings appeared for each section on a given continent or country either with Japanese reading punctuation added to the Kanbun text or with a mixture of *kana* inserted into the text. Hence, the conditions in the countries of the world were ultimately conveyed to Japan at the same time [as in China].

In the section on ‘source materials’ in his *Edo jidai ni okeru Tōsen mochiwatarisho no kenkyū* (A Study of the Books Brought on Chinese Vessels in the Edo Period), Öba Osamu collected, primarily for the *bakumatsu* period, the ledgers of the Nagasaki Commercial Hall in which were recorded the titles of Chinese texts and the numbers of copies transported to Nagasaki, as well as such information as the purchase prices and the bidding prices of these texts. In comparison to other works, there are an extraordinary number of entries concerning the *Haiguo tuzhi* and the *Shengwu ji*. In all likelihood, this would indicate that members of the shogunal Council of Elders were buying up the available copies, but in addition the *Haiguo tuzhi* also made its way into the Momijiyama gakumonjo (Momijiyama Institute) and Shōheizaka gakumonjo (Shōheizaka Institute), facts which would indicate that this work was considered to be highly important at the time in Japan.

Each time the *Shengwu ji* and the *Haiguo tuzhi* were imported to Japan, the price shot way up. Professor Öba’s investigation indicates that, in the first year of the Kōka reign period or 1844, when *Shengwu ji* first appeared in Japan, Abe Ise no kami (Abe Masahiro, 1819–62) of the Council of Elders purchased it for 25 *monme*; in the sixth lunar month of Ansei 6 or 1859, Motoya Keitarō made a successful bid for 160.3 *monme*. The *Haiguo tuzhi* was first imported to Japan in Kaei 4 or 1851 and fetched a price of 130 *monme*, but a record of a bid for the seventh month of Ansei 6 (1859) indicated that Motoya Keitarō successfully bid the high price of 436 *monme* to obtain this work. These points provide evidence to show that people in Japan vied to get their hands on these books to read them.

Biographies of the author of these two works, Wei Yuan (Wei Moshen), can be found in the *Qing shi gao* (Draft History of the Qing Dynasty) (*liezhuan* [biographies] 273, ‘wenyuan’ 3) and *Qing shi liezhuan* (Biographies in Qing History) (*juan* 69, ‘Rulin,’ *xia* 2). He was well known as a scholar and author. In addition, in his *Qingdai puxue dashi liezhuan* (Biographies of Great Teachers of Pure Scholarship in the Qing Period), Zhi Weicheng (1899–1928) includes Wei among his ‘biographies of historians,’ and perhaps on the basis of his writings he deserves to be recognized as a historian. When Wei passed the *juren* or second stage of the imperial civil service examinations [in 1822], the Daoguang Emperor saw his examination paper and praised it highly. This high evaluation is recorded in both the *Qing shi gao* and the *Qing shi liezhuan*. His name was thus