

LIU'S FOREWORD

When [Su] Dongpo lived in Dan'er, he wrote this poem: "I would not regret dying nine deaths in the southern wastes / Traveling to exotic places is the crowning glory of my whole life."¹ That is why among his exceptional writings, the masterpieces are the ones about foreign places. Dan'er is part of Qiongzhou [Hainan Island] in Guangdong, across the ocean.² In the Song, it first became part of the Southern Tang; however, the gentry who stop their oars there now would not consider it exotic.

Without treading the world's wild edges, one cannot gain a full view of the world. Mr. Cai Tinglan of Penghu whetted his moral integrity and enriched his literary ability. At both the annual examination and the imperial examination, he was always the champion of his class. Unfortunately, although he was repeatedly recommended, it never worked out. After the autumn examination in the *yiwei* year of the Daoguang reign [1835], he sailed from Xiamen and suddenly encountered a storm. He drifted through ten dark and stormy nights and arrived in Vietnam. The king of Vietnam gave him resources to return overland, and he only returned the following year in the summer. When I read in his "Record of Danger on the High Seas" about the hurricane whipping between the islands, the churning tides, the waves as high as mountains, the boat's mast snapping and the rudder bending, the way the boat sank and then bobbed back up, and about how he cried out to the spirits on his hands and knees, begging for his life, I sighed and wondered how heaven could endanger him like that. Afterward, I read in his "Travelogue to the Fiery Wastelands" that the king highly regarded Confucian teachings; their civil and military officials of high and low rank all said, "We were not expecting to meet a scholar from

the Heavenly Court today!" Wherever he went, there was never a day without a feast. Once tipsy, they always requested poems from him, and those who could responded in verse, alternating rhymes. When it was time to part, they clasped his hand and wept, saying, "From the northern to the southern ends of the world, times of parting are easy to find but times of meeting are difficult to come by." I could not help but sigh and yet felt happy, saying that although heaven had threatened his life, the people of distant lands loved him to this extent. When I finished reading his "Record of Vietnam," [I learned that] Vietnam, in the past called Yuechang, was through the Qin, Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming sometimes united with China and sometimes divided, sometimes in order and sometimes chaotic, and about the changes in districts, counties, and prefectures, the depths of the mountains, rivers, and valleys, the characteristics of the flora and fauna, the different customs for rites and music and caps and gowns, and about their unique customs. He meticulously wrote about [these topics] that are not recorded in the biographies of foreigners in the Twenty-seven Histories, but he still called it a "brief chronicle." I could not help feeling happy and surprised, astonished and appreciative. He indeed managed well the heaven-sent danger and well deserved the people's affection. Now his record will take its place with Dongpo's overseas essays and narratives. Truly, he traveled to "exotic places" without the regret of "nine deaths."

With that said, I have even more with which to recommend him. When one's state of mind is fixed, then one can endure extreme circumstances; when one's experience is broad, then one can investigate the situation of all things. If one has confidence and a calm heart, then even in the face of disaster after disaster, one will come out unharmed. A respectful and faithful scholar can walk among the barbarians. Admittedly, if not for the fact that his whole life he has been recommended but has not achieved his due, wouldn't we still say his character is like that of Dongpo's from beginning to end? Now I can see it from his travels. This is my foreword.

On the sixteenth day of the first month of autumn, the sixteenth year of Daoguang reign (1836), which is the year of bingshen, Liu Hong'ao [1778–1849], a friend from the Surveillance Commission of Shaanxi and the Military Defense Circuit of Taiwan and Penghu, style name Cibai, wrote this.

