

Academy of Chinese, History, Religion and Philosophy – Department of History

2024-25年度章群教授紀念公開學術講座
Prof. Chang Chuen Memorial Public Lecture Series (2024-25)

歷史系主辦
Presented by the Department of History

THE INVENTION OF ZHANG BAOZAI (張保仔), THE PIRATE

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ABSTRACT

Undoubtedly Zhang Baozai 張保仔 is the most famous, or notorious, Cantonese pirate in Chinese history. Everyone in Hong Kong and Macau seems to know some story about him. But for all that has been written and said about him, the fact is we know very little about the real Zhang Baozai. What we know for sure is that he was a pirate leader in the early nineteenth century and that he surrendered to the Qing government in 1810. Afterward he served in the Qing military and died relatively young in 1822. The earliest documentary evidence that mentions Zhang Baozai is in a Palace Memorial (奏摺) dated 1808. But the first important, and extensive, information on him only appeared in 1830 in a Chinese book entitled *The Pacification of the Seas* (靖海氛記) by Yuan Yonglun; a year later this book was translated into English. With these books, I argue, we see the start of the “invention” or “cultural construction” of Zhang Baozai. After 1830 more and more stories began to appear in print and orally handed down from generation to generation. In this presentation I discuss how the pirate Zhang Baozai was “invented” as a hero and even as a deity. I examine legends and stories collected from Macau, Hong Kong, and the Canton Delta, as well as historical “facts” in archives and other historical texts, surrounding his life and deeds. While many writers and scholars today have dismissed legends as unimportant, I argue to the contrary that they are important historical and cultural sources, especially for understanding the popular culture and mentality of ordinary people.

Bio

Before retiring in 2019, Robert Antony was distinguished professor at Guangzhou University and recently visiting scholar at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton. His latest books are *The Golden Age of Piracy in China, 1520-1810: A Short History with Documents* (2022), *Rats, Cats, Rogues, and Heroes: Glimpses of China's Hidden Past* (2023), and *Outlaws of the Sea: Maritime Piracy in Modern China* (2024).




Date	March 5, 2025 (Wednesday)
Time	9:00 am - 10:30 am (HKT)
Venue	AAB205, Academic and Administration Building Baptist University Road Campus, Kowloon Tong
Language	English
Zoom Meeting ID	983 2441 4495
Passcode	370923



<https://hkbu.zoom.us/j/98324414495?pwd=La4rjuU1ND1in7Onp5absxshZrkYXo.1>

歡迎參加
All are welcome

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