

More Luzon Than Hainan:

Taiwan Before Qing Rule

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This paper builds on my long-term interests in the histories of Taiwan under the Dutch and the Zheng family and of “maritime China”, including its destination ports from Nagasaki to Banten. I am not much interested in contributing to contemporary discussion of Taiwan’s partial separateness from China, but will not object strenuously if participants in that discussion find my perspectives and arguments useful.

A quick look at the map I have distributed may provide a peculiar perspective on the world of the maritime Chinese. Within it, I hope the juxtaposition of three big islands, Luzon, Taiwan, and Hainan, is instructive. Hainan is slightly smaller than Taiwan, around 34,000-35,000 km². Luzon, if you chop off the long tail reaching southeast to Legaspi and Mount Mayon, is about 50,000 km². All have forested mountains and fertile plains. In our times, Taiwan and Hainan both are dominated by their Han populations and by the political heirs of twentieth-century Chinese nation-building. But that configuration of Taiwan is the result of its great transformations *since* 1683. From about 1620 to that date, Taiwan was more like Luzon than like Hainan.

The comparison of the histories of Hainan and Taiwan deserves much more attention than I can give it here. Hainan’s relation with the Chinese people and their empires is much longer, beginning in Han times, but for many centuries being only a

matter of a coastal enclave or two. It seems that around 1100 Chinese power and settlement reached around most of the coast of the island and in some places into the interior. The writings of the great Su Dongpo in his Hainan exile in the 1090's suggest that he found the place primitive but not dangerous. But then Su Dongpo was at least as much a cockeyed optimist as I am. By around 1500 Chinese settlers were really pushing into the interior and were meeting fierce and well-organized resistance from the Li people. Hainan was producing some members of the metropolitan elite, perhaps most notably Hai Rui. It was on the fairly well-known trajectory of a southern frontier, where the pressure of Han settlers stimulated non-Han assimilation, collaboration, resistance, and complicated mixtures of these.

Taiwan did not get on that trajectory for another two hundred years. In 1500-1600, or 1650, it was much more like Luzon than like Hainan. In both Taiwan and Luzon, Han Chinese were present in small numbers as traders, raiders, and fishermen, but had no political power. In both, the indigenous people lived fairly comfortably from hunting and farming, although Taiwan had nothing to compare to the Ifugao rice terraces of northern Luzon. Only a hundred miles of ocean separate Luzon and Taiwan, and there are very substantial linguistic and cultural similarities among their peoples. On both, Han Chinese settlers were recent arrivals, mostly urban merchants and craftsmen but some turning to frontier trading and farming. On both, as we will see, trade and tax-farming under European rulers offered important new opportunities for the Chinese. There were dissimilarities. Luzon is the northernmost of an archipelago of tropical islands that offered substantial possibilities for trade. Almost certainly there were more Chinese trading among these islands than voyaging to or settling on Taiwan in 1500 or 1600.

Much closer to the south China coast, Taiwan was more likely to be a destination for Chinese fishermen. Their operations, and occasional naval patrol outposts, had reached the Penghu Islands, which the Portuguese later called Pescadores, “fishermen,” by 1200 or so. Japanese trade and power were a major factor in the Taiwan situation, a very marginal one in Luzon. Trading and raiding were not conspicuous on the Taiwan coast until the late Ming.

The Spanish encountered Chinese ships and traders as soon as Magellan reached (and died in) the future Philippine archipelago. The Spanish had reasonable luck treating them as potentially important trade partners. Once they were established at Manila, Chinese trade and settlement there grew very rapidly. But to more aggressive elements among the maritime Chinese, the Taiwan and Luzon coasts presented rather similar opportunities for raiding and for building temporary bases. At different times two famous late Ming pirates, Lin Feng and Lin Daoqian, anchored their fleets on the Taiwan coast, built temporary fortifications ashore, and terrorized the local people. Lin Feng went on to do the same on the Luzon coast, almost taking Manila within a year of its founding and then fortifying himself for some months farther north on the west coast of Luzon.

By 1590 or so, with the rapid development of Manila as a Chinese colonial town with a thin Spanish superstructure, our knowledge, or perhaps just my knowledge, of the Chinese presence in the rest of Luzon fades. Manila could have fulfilled its prime economic functions even if it had been located on a much smaller, less fertile island. It was imply the intersection point of the new American supplies of silver, China’s enormous demand for silver, and the demand of Spanish America for Chinese silks and other fine handicrafts. The Spanish brought the silver across the Pacific and waited. The

Chinese had by far the more challenging tasks of procurement and quality control of the goods they brought to Manila. In the early decades of the trade they helped to shape a system of sale of all of a year's cargoes at agreed-on prices, called the *pancada*, that very much suited their need to complete their sales and get away while the winds were right without being forced to sell their goods at a discount late in the season. (Later this system seems to have collapsed, probably as a result of competition among Chinese importers.) We find references to a headman appointed over all the Christian Chinese as early as 1590, and by 1600 it was accepted practice that the Spanish delegated authority over all Chinese residents – 10,000 of them already – to a Chinese Christian *capitan*. The Chinese monopolized all forms of craft production, even European-style bookbinding and bread-baking. Fairly soon, but I don't know just when, they were the main tax-farmers, contracting with the Spanish governors to collect given categories of tax and deliver an agreed-on quota. By 1639, there were over 30,000 Chinese in the Manila area, the majority of them out in rural areas. The Manila-area Chinese were at the center of intense religious encounters and struggles. The Dominican missionaries respected their intelligence, sought to turn their religiosity from inherited Minnan channels into those of a fervent and narrow Iberian Catholicism, and succeeded in quite a few cases. The triangular relationship among the Spanish, the Chinese, and the indigenous people had many sources of stress. The village merchant or tax-farmer rarely is a beloved figure. The religious antagonisms were very real. The collection of head-tax from the Chinese remained a venal practice delegated to a Spaniard, subject to much abuse and deeply resented. The results, as is well-known, included two rebellions of the Chinese followed

by major massacres of them, and then by Spanish realization that they couldn't get along without them.

Everything in that description of the situation of the Chinese at Manila, except for the importance of the religious encounters and conflicts, also was true of the Chinese living ;under the authority of the Dutch East India Company in southern Taiwan after 1624. (The Dutch were not devoid of missionary activity, but on Taiwan almost all of it was directed toward the aborigines, not the Chinese.)

If there were any Chinese living on Taiwan in 1500 in any fashion more permanent than that of a seasonal fishing camp or temporary pirates' retreat, we have found no documentation on them so far. Trade through the Taiwan Strait expanded rapidly after 1540 as a result of the synergies of daimyo seeking revenue, the merchants of early Macao, and Chinese merchant-pirates. Taiwan still was not a major destination, not a major market or source of trade goods. We often are told that the people of maritime Fujian were desperately short of land, forced to seek less comfortable livelihoods on the sea. Certainly "push emigration" of this kind was important after about 1750, but most earlier Chinese maritime activity was driven by the pull of commercial opportunity, not the push of over-population. Otherwise it would be hard to understand why the mariners who had terrorize Sri Lanka and brought a giraffe from Somalia in the 1400's didn't cross a hundred miles of ocean and start reclaiming rice-paddies on Taiwan in the 1500's.

One major catalyst of change in the Taiwan Strait around 1600 was an extraordinary amount of Japanese activity. Satsuma took control of the Ryukyu Archipelago in 1609. There were Japanese expeditions with serious intent to take and

hold bases on Taiwan, but without success, in 1609 and 1616. As the Dutch blundered into the area in the 1620's they found on the Taiwan coast a substantial and well-organized Sino-Japanese trade, and a network of Chinese organization, somewhat conciliar in structure and quite beyond the reach of the Ming state, reaching back to Li Dan, captain of the Chinese in Hirado, Japan. Li Dan's key henchman on Taiwan was Zheng Zhilong, who engineered the Dutch withdrawal from Penghu to Taiwan, arranged for and taxed big shipments of Chinese goods to them, kept his hand in the organization of the Chinese community under the Dutch, and controlled several centers of fishing, raiding, and trading on the Taiwan coast beyond Dutch control.

Chinese settled under the Dutch profited from tax-farming practices much like those under the Spanish on Luzon. The Dutch were more interested than the Spanish in finding profitable exports from their island holding. Deer hides for the Japanese market were their big winner; Chinese bid for monopoly licenses for the trade of one or more aboriginal villages, with the export of deer hides the main source of profit. Chinese entrepreneurs opened up substantial areas of rice and sugar cane cultivation. And in striking parallel to the troubles in Luzon, the rough practices of poll-tax collectors were one of the causes of a major revolt under one Guo Huaiyi in 1652, that was put down with much slaughter of the Chinese, in which aboriginal troops participated with enthusiasm – just like in Luzon.

The Zheng Chenggong menace is a final parallel. There had been rumors of Zheng support for Chinese rebels in Manila in 1639 and at Casteel Zeelandia in 1652. And of course Zheng Chenggong finally did invade and conquer Taiwan. Then he sent a letter to Manila telling the Spanish they were next. He died before he could carry out his

threat, but the Spanish took it very seriously; some of the wall still to be seen around the Intramuros were built at this time. Chenggong's heirs were too divided to make any effort to carry out the threat. So the common trajectories of Luzon and Taiwan in the seventeenth century might have gone another stage but didn't. (It's probably just as well that Filipino nationalists don't see the Taiwan investors at Clark Air Base and Subic Bay as heirs of would-be conquerors.)

It was the presence of a Chinese resistance regime on Taiwan that made it imperative that the Qing finally seize and keep control of the island. And if there also had been a Zheng base at Manila in 1683, what would the possibilities have been? A Qing Luzon? A base from which an anti-Qing regime could reconquer Taiwan? This is too much even for my free-wheeling counter-factualism. But it does make the point in spades that this was a history of highly contingent and rapidly shifting trajectories.

Let me conclude by suggesting another odd comparison or two. I have indicated on my map some other centers of maritime Chinese activity that pose further instructive contrasts to the three with which we began. The Ryukyu Islands had functioned in the fifteenth century as a major entrepot for Chinese-Japanese trade, but there the interaction was not with European intruders or with Southeast Asian peoples who had little connection to the great traditions but with the Japanese. "Cochin China", the Nguyen kingdom in the Hue/Faifo area of what is now called Vietnam, was an entrepot for Chinese and (until the 1630's) Japanese traders remarkably like Manila or Zeelandia but without the European domination, not on an island, and in the long run a major part of the complicated interlinked evolutions of China's southern frontier and north and south

Vietnam. Of interest or involvement with the “Nansha” islands and reefs in between that today are such bones of contention I have found not a trace.

One of my gifted American history colleagues, Steve Ross, at some point in the discussion after any job talk or guest lecture asks “So what? What makes all this really important?” Do these comparisons suggest that it’s right to deny that Taiwan is Chinese? I don’t think so, but certainly they provide an argument, if any is still needed among academics, against the essentializing of a nation and its boundaries, and for what historians always have to teach: the sense of continuity and discontinuity that we find so strikingly present in the trajectory of Taiwan’s history in 1650 and in 2000.

Finally, I think it is important to notice that as we pursue these eccentric comparisons we have crossed a sub-disciplinary barrier between East Asian and Southeast Asian studies. Barbara Andaya in the newsletter of the AAS early this year advocates more crossing of this barrier, and cites several recent books that do so. I could not agree more. The history of the maritime Chinese has to cross it constantly. As the south Chinese borderlands filled up in the eighteenth century, cross-border processes and conflicts became more important both for Yunnan and for Guangxi. Annam/Vietnam and Siam experienced in the late eighteenth century huge collapses of traditional law and order followed by the emergence of new and more competent dynastic regimes. They seem to me to be ripe for comparison with the great troubles and near breakdown of late Qianlong. And there were interactions. The 1787 invasion of Annam was a major piece of late Qianlong mismanagement. The emergence of the Bangkok Dynasty in Siam and of the Nguyen regime that accepted the name Vietnam when the Qing suggested it surely

contributed to the monumentally mistaken Qing notion that nothing fundamental was changing in the Southern Seas. But that's another talk and another agenda.

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