

A History of Pre-Invasion Taiwan*

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ABSTRACT

In Taiwan's long and contested history, we know least about the first and most extended period, which began over six thousand years ago and lasted until the invasion of the Dutch in 1624. Since Taiwan's aboriginal peoples lacked writing, the analysis first relies on recent archeological evidence, which shows the increasing sophistication of Taiwan's culture over the millennia. As early as 2800-2200 BCE, Taiwan's peoples had trading networks with the Pescadore (Penghu) Islands. From 1500 BCE Taiwan's peoples became the source of migrations to virtually every inhabitable island in the Pacific Ocean and across the Indian Ocean to Madagascar. From 500 BCE to 500 CE Taiwan's peoples were part of a large trading network that included what is now the Philippines, eastern Malaysia, central and southern Vietnam, peninsular Thailand, and eastern Cambodia. Trade within Taiwan was also widespread. This trade and imports, such as metal technology, all came from Southeast Asia; no evidence of contact with China exists.

Early Chinese writing confirms Taiwan was "foreign." In addition, early 17th century Chinese accounts of Taiwan aborigines mesh with early Dutch accounts. These accounts demonstrate that Taiwan's aborigines had healthy and prosperous societies and that village construction demonstrated considerable sophistication.

Chinese had little to do with Taiwan in part because Fujian was the last part of the Pacific coast inhabited by Han Chinese. Although the Ming Dynasty basically withdrew from foreign trade, Taiwan became a place for trade among Chinese merchant-pirates, Japanese and later Westerners within the wider trading networks of East and Southeast Asia. Yet, none of these groups established a permanent base in Taiwan. Only in 1624, did the Dutch accept advice from

* This article is a draft of the first part of my current project on a History of Taiwan. I hope that readers will feel free to send comments to Bruce.Jacobs@monash.edu. I also wish to express appreciation to the Australian Research Council for a Discovery Grant to research "A History of Taiwan." Romanization of Taiwan terms is difficult for scholars of Taiwan. For this article I have used pinyin for all Chinese-language publications, the romanization of Chinese terms, for all Chinese place names and for most Chinese personal names. I have used basic Wade-Giles for Taiwan personal and names. Thus, I use normally Taipei, but use Taibei to romanize 臺北 when it is a place of publication.

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來稿日期：2015年12月30日；通過刊登：2016年10月21日。

Others believe that with the arrival of the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) in 1945, Taiwan did not come under the rule of another of colonial regime, but rather became a “settler state” (*qianzhanzhe guojia* 遷佔者國家). I would argue, however, that Taiwan did not become “settler state” as a “settler state” means the arrival of substantial numbers of outsiders who subjugate the indigenous peoples, but who then run the state themselves. Thus, good examples of “settler states” include the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. When substantial numbers of people migrated from southeast China to Taiwan and subjugated the aboriginal peoples, at least to some extent, these very same migrants were still subject to rule by Dutch, Spanish, Chinese, Manchu, Japanese and again Chinese rulers who separated themselves from society at large. When the Chinese Nationalists arrived after 1945, they systematically oppressed both the aborigines and the Taiwanese who had arrived before 1895. Outsiders controlled the locals for the benefit of the outsiders. Thus, the writer strongly disagrees with the arguments of Ronald Weitzer that Taiwan is a settler state.² Rather, until early 1988, it was a colonial state under foreign rule.³

Another key contested issue of modern Taiwan revolves around the role of Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) in establishing Taiwan’s democratization. The writer has no difficulty conceding that Chiang Ching-kuo enabled two periods of “liberalization” (*ziyouhua* 自由化 or *songbanghua* 鬆綁化) during the early 1970s and the late 1980s, but how does one account for the oppression of the

² Ronald Weitzer, *Transforming Settler States: Communal Conflict and Internal Security in Northern Ireland and Zimbabwe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 24-27, 31-32, 255. Zimbabwe, like Algeria, was a colonial state, not a “settler state,” because the vast majority of people remained under white rule until independence. Northern Ireland is perhaps a more difficult case, but if one considers Northern Ireland a part of the whole of Ireland, then it too was not a settler state. For a recent discussion of whether Taiwan is a settler state or a former colonial regime, see Huang Zhihui, “Zhonghua Minguo zai Taiwan 1945-1987: ‘Zhimin Tongzhi’ Yu ‘Qianzhanzhe Guojia’ Shuo Zhi Jiantao [Republic of China in Taiwan 1945-1987]: An Analysis of ‘Colonial Rule’ and ‘Settler States’],” in Taiwan jiaoshou xiehui, ed., *Zhonghua Minguo Liuwang Taiwan 60 Nian Ji Zhanhou Taiwan Guoji Chujing* [The Republic of China’s Sixty Years of Exile in Taiwan and Taiwan’s Difficult Postwar International Situation] (Taipei: Qianwei Chubanshe, 2010), pp. 161-192.

³ The writer has discussed these issues in a number of places including J. Bruce Jacobs, “Whither Taiwanization? The Colonization, Democratization and Taiwanization of Taiwan,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14: 4 (Dec. 2013), pp. 567-586.