

THE TAIWANESE ARE NOT HAN CHINESE

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Taiwanese and Chinese: no shared ethnicity

You may think you know quite a bit about Taiwan, but you are probably wrong. Many people think the Taiwanese belong to the same ethnic group as the mainland Chinese. Not only ordinary people, but also scholars and researchers studying Taiwan labor under this false impression. They believe what they've heard, i.e., that 2% of the Taiwanese population are aborigines, 13% are natives of the mainland who fled to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-Shek in 1949 (and their descendants), and the remaining 85% are natives of the mainland who arrived in Taiwan prior to World War II. Therefore, they reach the conclusion that 98% of Taiwanese are Han Chinese.

This impression, however incorrect, is widely embraced. And it does not help that Taiwanese born in the postwar period were taught that we are Han Chinese. But we are not.

Taiwan's first appearance in the arena of world history was rather recent, in the 17th century. But it is not true that Taiwan was only sparsely populated until then.

Taiwan's historical debut was in 1624, when it became a transit point for traders plying the seas between the Netherlands and Asia. At the time the Dutch were excellent seafarers, and trade was flourishing. The archetype of today's corporations, the Dutch East India Company, was established during that era. Traders sold Western goods in Japan and China, and Far Eastern goods in Europe. As a transit point the Dutch selected the Penghu (Pescadores) Islands, an archipelago 100 square kilometers in area located between Taiwan and China.

Ming China and the Netherlands clashed over the Penghu Islands. Hostilities ensued but ultimately peace was established. The Chinese told the Dutch to return the Penghu Islands, offering Taiwan in its place. China had no use for Taiwan at the time. In 1624 the Dutch rule over Taiwan began. This was the first time for the people of Taiwan to experience the power of a state.

According to *What Everyone Should Know About Taiwan* by statistician Shen Jiande, Assistant Professor at National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan's population was 500,000 at that time. Until about 10 years ago, Taiwanese aborigines were referred to as *shanpao*, or "people who live in the mountains. Two-thirds of Taiwan's land mass is mountainous, but the other third is plains. Life is easier on flat land, so there was no particular reason for the aborigines to

live in the mountains. The fact is that in the 17th century 200,000 Taiwanese lived in the mountains, and 300,000 on the plains.

Taiwan shunned by Chinese

To administer Taiwan, the Dutch imported 7,000-8,000 workers from China. They accounted for only 1.6% of the population.

When Zheng Chenggon (Koxinga) was defeated by Qing forces in 1661, he fled to Taiwan. At that point the Dutch had ruled the island for 38 years. Today we are told that the Taiwanese are descendants of Chinese because Zheng brought a great number of Chinese to Taiwan with him. But Taiwan's population in 1661 was 620,000. Zheng could not have brought many more than 30,000 Chinese (family members and soldiers) with him.

Zheng Chenggon's people ruled Taiwan for 22 years, after which they were defeated by the Qing. At that time the population was 720,000, and the influx of Qing soldiers couldn't have been greater than several thousand. The Chinese avoided Taiwan in those days because tropical diseases were rampant there. The list of contagious diseases endemic to Taiwan then is long, including malaria, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, and whooping cough. The risk of contracting disease there gave rise to a Chinese aphorism: If 10 people go to Taiwan, seven will die, and one will manage to escape and return home alive. Only two will stay.

The Qing Chinese ruled Taiwan for 200 years. But during that era, the governors were transients serving three-year terms. Only a few of them managed to return to China alive — not more than 10. Since they were rulers, they enjoyed the best food, the best living conditions, and the best houses available, they should have been able to maintain good health. But Taiwan's endemic diseases were merciless, and most of them died.

When Japan acquired Taiwan in 1895, the population was 2.5 million. But by then most residents with a connection to the Qing dynasty had returned to the Chinese mainland. All one has to do is trace the path of history to learn that the conventional wisdom (the Taiwanese are Han Chinese) is mistaken.

Aborigines become Chinese to lighten tax burden

The Qing rulers established a class system on Taiwan. Only Han Chinese were permitted to have names. The aborigines were called *fan* (barbarians), and were further classified as “wild barbarians” and “civilized barbarians.” This system persisted until the Japanese took control of Taiwan.

By civilized barbarians the Chinese meant aborigines who lived among the Han Chinese, and refrained from killing others. Aborigines who lived in the mountains were headhunters. We call them *chuciao* (people who come out of the grass) because of their habit of hiding in the grass, then jumping out and decapitating their enemies. The men attach a shelf to the front of their houses. There they display the heads of men they have killed. The more heads on the shelf, the more respect a man commands. I sometimes feel restless and agitated, and at such times wonder if I have inherited that murderous instinct.

Wild barbarians were the most heavily taxed, civilized barbarians less so, and the Han Chinese the least of all. Naturally, civilized barbarians were eager to become Han Chinese. During the Qing era, aborigines who expressed a desire to become Chinese were given names like Lin or Wang. The wild barbarians made efforts to become civilized barbarians. Therefore, the notion that the Taiwanese are Han Chinese is a fiction created by the policies of those who ruled them. Taiwanese may have adopted Chinese names, but they were only *superficially* Chinese.

Hematological evidence

Between 1624 and 1945, Taiwan's population swelled from 500,000 to 6 million. Considering the physical environment and other factors, such a growth rate is quite reasonable. During the 200-year period of Qing rule, a prohibition against traveling to Taiwan was in force. The reason for that was piracy. Taiwan had long been a breeding ground for pirates. The Chinese did not want the number of pirates to increase, and therefore made every effort to prevent Chinese from going to Taiwan.

When Japanese rule of Taiwan began in 1895, Taiwan's population was 2.5 million. During the subsequent 50-year period, there was almost no influx of Chinese from the mainland. The population increased in a normal way, reaching 6 million by 1945. When the Japanese withdrew from Taiwan that year, there was an exodus of 400,000 Japanese nationals. Before their departure the population was 6,400,000. That figure may have included some Chinese, but not many. Dr. Lin Mali, professor of hematology at Mackay Memorial Hospital in Taipei, conducted a hematological survey. By analyzing human lymphocytes, she discovered that the genetic makeup of Taiwanese is completely different from that of Han Chinese.

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