

Reviews in History

Published on *Reviews in History* (<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews>)

How Taiwan became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century

Review Number:

864

Publish date:

Sunday, 28 February, 2010

ISBN:

9780231128551

Date of Publication:

2008

Price:

£35.50

Pages:

324pp.

Publisher:

Columbia University Press

Place of Publication:

New York, NY

Reviewer:

Anne Gerritsen

In this book, Tonio Andrade tells the story of a wild and uncultivated island originally inhabited by aboriginal hunters and traders. From 1600, this island became the object of desire for a number of different cultural groups, among them migrants from the southern Chinese province of Fujian, representatives of the Spanish crown, Japanese and Dutch merchants, and pirates of various ilks. The island in question we now know as Taiwan, but for most of chronological period that forms the focal point for Andrade (1623 to 1662) and for most of the people whose records he has drawn on for this study, it was Formosa, from the Spanish 'La Isla Hermosa', the beautiful island. Andrade's choice of words in the title, asking how Taiwan became Chinese is, thus, perhaps slightly misleading. By the time it became more widely known as Taiwan, it already was Chinese, so the question Andrade really addresses in this book is how Isla Hermosa became Taiwan, or rather, how the island initially known only to its aboriginal inhabitants became Takasago or Takakuni to the Japanese shogun Hideyoshi, Formosa to the Spanish and the Dutch, and finally Taiwan to the Chinese.

The general point Andrade makes in telling us this story is that at times violent competition ensued amongst these different groups in their attempts to colonize the space, but that the influence that most shaped the eventual development of the island was not a conflict but co-operation between Dutch colonizers and Chinese settlers. Andrade proposes that we incorporate this type of colonization - he calls it 'co-colonization' - into Pearson's influential distinction between the land-based territorial expansion of Asian

states and the overseas expansion of states heavily reliant on trade for their income.⁽¹⁾ Without hard graft, the semi-wilderness could not be turned into fertile agricultural land, and the Dutch had neither the manpower nor the intensive agricultural technologies required. Migrants in search of land, mostly from Fujian, provided the answer. The Dutch advertised the available agricultural land in Fujian where the need for land was felt most acutely, and offered those prepared to settle there protection and regularity, in exchange for the payment of taxes. The difference between this way of colonizing new land and the way the Spanish and the English went about it is striking enough to merit that historians take note.

Although Andrade makes this point clearly enough, the strength of this book lies in the story he tells and the way he tells the story. The book is divided into 12 chapters, all of them short, and almost all of them organized around a striking individual or an unusual event. It makes for a highly readable text with rich detail that always adds colour and depth to the story. It is not a book that indulges in lengthy theoretical discussions, nor does he situate his arguments endlessly within the context of the work of other scholars; that aspect of the story is told in the notes, for those who wish to explore it. So we learn about the work done by Taiwanese scholars, about how Andrade incorporates but also sets himself apart from their work, and why he tells the history of the complex, occasionally fragile and always self-conscious national unit that is the Republic of China in this way. With all this hidden away in the notes, the reader has to make an extra effort to get at this story, and could at times be forgiven for thinking that the detail serves little other purpose than to tell a good story.

If the concept of co-colonization is one part of the reason why we need to understand the rich detail in which Andrade tells his story, a greater understanding of why Dutch rule on the island came to an end is another. With impressive command not only of a range of languages but of both published documents and unpublished archival materials across Europe and Asia, Andrade lucidly explores this question. This is not the first time historians have asked it; historians working in Taiwan have studied the early history of the island in great detail. But Andrade's command of the sources allows him to shed new light on this question. The relationship between the Dutch and the aboriginal communities, who worked together against the Chinese settlers, the decline in trade during the years of civil war on the Chinese mainland surrounding the fall of the Ming and the establishment of the Qing dynasty, and the effective block of trade issued by the Ming loyalist and powerful sea-merchant Zheng Chenggong are all part of the explanation for the decline and fall of Dutch Formosa.

How Taiwan Became Chinese makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the connections that shaped the 17th-century world. By situating the analysis of these connections on this island, Andrade reveals how crucial its location was. For the migrants from Fujian, it was within easy reach, so that links between the pioneers and the community at home could remain strong. Not only did that connection provide the Dutch with access to more manpower to work the new land on the island, but it provided the island Chinese with military protection from those based on the mainland. For the Dutch, Fort Zeelandia on Formosa was the ideal base to manage the highly profitable trade between China, Japan, and their base in Batavia. The Spanish saw Isla Hermosa as a 'strategic bulwark' (p. 81), necessary to protect their colony in the Philippines. Galleons laden with silks, silver, and porcelain sailed constantly between China and Manila, where they easily fell prey to merchants and pirates based on the island. The island's strategic location explains its appeal to so many competing groups, which makes the story of co-colonization all the more relevant for understanding its 17th-century development.

Of course every reviewer has his or her own quibbles with any given text. One of my quibbles, and it is a very minor one, relates to the way in which Andrade has chosen to reference his sources. Even though he states that 'E-books are not subject to the editorial parsimony of traditional books' (p. xix), Andrade has made certain decisions in indicating his sources' provenance 'to save space' (p. xviii). Materials related to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) held in the Dutch National Archives are simply identified with the usual abbreviation of VOC. For Chinese materials, the author has made use of the excellent collection of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan, which has made extensive materials available online, including the *Taiwan wenxian congkan* (erroneously referred to as *congkang* in Andrade's text). This database of materials, sometimes referred to as *The Encyclopedia of Taiwan*, brings together almost 600 books of a very diverse

nature related to the history and culture of Taiwan drawn from libraries all over the world, and was compiled between 1958 and 1972. When Andrade uses materials contained in this database, he offers his readers only a reference to the number in the series, and the year in which that part of the series was completed. This can be frustrating. Let me give an example. In chapter two, we are introduced to a pirate named Yan Siqi who features in the very early history of Taiwan. For the details of Yan Siqi's story, Andrade draws on "an important (but dubious) source known as the *Taiwan wai ji*" (p. 43). Apparently, this book reads "like a martial-arts novel." This sounds fascinating, but for the reader who would like to follow up on this "dubious" novel-like text and find out more about the original, the footnote offers only that it was added to the *Taiwan wenxian congkan* in 1960. Andrade tells us there are other "more reliable Chinese sources" (p. 43) that mention the same pirate, and here the footnote refers the reader to four or five other sources that mention the name of Yan Siqi. All of these are again only listed with their *Taiwan wenxian congkan* publication details. So we learn that the pirate's name comes up in Huang Zongxi's *Ci xing shi mo*, and we are given the date of 1958 for that source. The famous early Qing dynasty scholar Huang Zongxi (1610-95) is probably best known for his survey of Ming schools of thought, but had broad-ranging interests that included political philosophy, mathematics and literature. This little-known short text seems to have been included in one of two literary collections by Huang Zongxi that were left incomplete, and did not appear in published form until the very end of the 19th century.(2) Why would Huang Zongxi be a reliable informant about a pirate who was "based in Taiwan sometime in the late Wanli reign (1573-1620) or early Tianqi reign (1621-7)" (p. 54)? The fact that his name appears not only in Huang Zongxi's text but also in several others surely is not enough evidence to claim that this man "existed" (p. 43)? The fact that "these works are usually in close agreement in the few facts they offer" (p. 54) confirms very little beyond the well-known fact that authors of such texts frequently quote each other verbatim, especially when they have no other information to hand. I am not necessarily doubting the existence of Yan Siqi, but I am wondering whether Andrade has been critical enough of these early sources, especially when this same reference to Yan and to the source by Huang Zongxi that is said to confirm his existence appears more or less verbatim in several of Andrade's other works.(3)

Recently, a number of publications have appeared that discuss Gutenberg-e, the joint electronic publication project of Columbia University Press and the American Historical Association.(4) This is perhaps not the place, then, to embark on a discussion of e-publishing in general. Nevertheless, Andrade's book is an e-book, first and foremost, and as the instructions for the reviewer state, a book of which "the intellectual content [was] designed to be evaluated in online form." Yet, the journal sent me a printed copy of the book, and I brought it with me on a research trip to China to read. I do not own a Kindle or a Sony e-Book reader, so I was very glad to have the printed copy, as my access to the Internet was far too intermittent to be relied upon. Of course this affected my reading experience: only once I returned home did I have access to the maps, the illustrations, the hyperlinks, and the web-based facilities such as the search function that feature only in the e-book and not in the printed version. This is part and parcel of the transitional period we find ourselves in: publishing monographs is rapidly becoming too expensive and cumbersome to be available to all, while the technology that would make e-publishing widely acceptable to most (i.e. the facility to read web-based content in a quality and format that replicates the reading of a book) has not yet become widespread. So the circumstances are perhaps not yet ideal, but at least Gutenberg's e-publishing makes works of very high quality available for free to a wide audience.(5)

One might have thought e-publishing would make the publication process faster than the production of a traditional print edition, but that does not seem to be the case. Andrade quotes works as "forthcoming in 2005" (p. 19), which suggests 2004 was the cut-off date for materials consulted. Of course we all have to stop reading material at some point and start writing, otherwise we would never get anything "out", but the gap of four years seems greater than I would have thought necessary in the case of e-publishing.(6) Another advantage of e-publishing with Gutenberg-e is the possibility for readers leaving comments, including replies by the author, although it seems readers have not availed themselves yet of this option.(7) Clearly, Gutenberg-e has committed substantial resources to the production of this work, but perhaps someone in the know could shed light on the need for this delay. Overall, however, Gutenberg-e and Tonio Andrade are to be commended for their commitment to this enterprise: the e-book is easy to read, beautifully illustrated and

fully annotated, and an important resource for scholars and students alike.

Notes

1. M. N. Pearson, 'Merchants and states', in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 41-116. [Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912), ed. Arthur Hummel (Washington, 1943). The entry on Huang Zongxi is on pp. 351-4. [Back to \(2\)](#)
3. See Tonio Andrade, 'The Company's Chinese pirates: how the Dutch East India Company tried to lead a coalition of pirates to war against China, 1621-62?', *Journal of World History*, 15, 4 (2004), 415-44. The reference to Yan Siqi and the text by Huang Zongxi are in note 24, page 425. See also Andrade's 'Chinese under European Rule: the case of Sino-Dutch mediator He Bin?', *Late Imperial China*, 28, 1 (2007), 1-32. The reference here appears in footnote 18 on page 6. [Back to \(3\)](#)
4. These include Mark Herring, 'Review of *Gutenberg-e*, a program of the American Historical Association and Columbia University Press' (review no. 792) < <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/herringm1.html> [2]> [accessed 24 September 2009]; Patrick Manning, 'Gutenberg-e: electronic entry to the historical professoriate?', *The American Historical Review*, 109, 5 (December 2004), 1505-26; and Margaret Stieg Dalton, 'The publishing experiences of historians?', *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 39, 3 (April 2008), 197-240. [Back to \(4\)](#)
5. From November 2007, all the titles in the Gutenberg-e history monograph series were made available for free access. [Back to \(5\)](#)
6. I am only guessing, of course, about the end point of Andrade's new reading. The fact that the 2005 study by Emma Jinhua Teng on the ways in which Taiwan appears in the Chinese imagination as illustrated by travel records and maps only merits one brief mention in the conclusion and is not listed in the bibliography suggests Andrade did not have the chance to incorporate her study fully into his. See Emma Jinhua Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography* (Cambridge, 2005). The PhD thesis on which this study is based was completed in 2001. [Back to \(6\)](#)
7. I consulted the pages on 26 September 2009. The only visible comment was left by the author himself. Another advantage of e-publishing might be the option of correcting typographical errors in the text, but this is not the case (and there are some rather glaring ones in the first chapters that mar the text). See pp. 10, 11, 14, 23, 32. [Back to \(7\)](#)

Other reviews:

muse 1

<http://muse.jhu.edu/login> [3]

muse 2

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ens/summary/v010/10.4.chang.html> [4]

oxford journals

<http://ahr.oxfordjournals.org/content/115/1/204.full> [5]

Source URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/864>

Links:

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/4538>

[2] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/.../paper/herringm1.html>

[3]

http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/journal_of_military_history/v073/73.4.bo

[4] <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ens/summary/v010/10.4.chang.html>

[5] <http://ahr.oxfordjournals.org/content/115/1/204.full>