

A Study of Liu Mingchuan's Abolition of the Guard Posts in the Late Nineteenth-century Taiwan —A Case of Xinzhu County, North Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

In the late Nineteenth Century, Taiwan Governor Liu Mingchuan performed many reforms to improve Taiwan's defense capability and modern infrastructure. One of them was to abolish all guard posts and to use the rents that were originally collected for supporting guard posts as funds for pacifying mountain aborigines. However, due to the historical complexity of the guard-post system, its abolition created a ripple effect on state tax, frontier defense policy, and the interests of big land owners in the frontier.

To help understand the relationship between the society and the state during the late Ch'ing period, this paper investigates the four stages of the guard-post abolition: 1) original guard-post registry, 2) rent collection by guard posts, 3) abolishing the guard posts, and 4) land taxation originally under guard-post jurisdiction.

The paper finds that persistent resistance by the frontiersmen stemmed from crude local governance rather than from the policy itself, evidencing the incapability of the local government to perform the task. Even though the information transmission at all administrative levels was fluent in the 1880s, local governments failed to carry out the policy efficiently. County governments had yet undertaken corresponding administrative and fiscal reforms as did the provincial government. In the final analysis, county governments relied heavily upon local strongmen and gentry as agents to accomplish the mission. As a consequence, local governmental jurisdiction was substantially weakened while the power of the gentry grew stronger and stronger until they dominated the local society.

Keywords: Liu Mingchuan, guard post, land survey, *kaishan fufan* (opening up the mountains and pacifying the aborigines), fiscal reform