

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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several sources to retreat from their base in the Pescadore (Penghu) Islands to the “stateless area” of Taiwan. Thus, only in 1624 did the Dutch establish the first colonial regime in Taiwan.

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