

Nationality Choices and Commercial Disputes between Taiwanese and Fujianese Merchants in Early 20th Century: The Case of Lin Mou-chang

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ABSTRACT

Past research on *sekimin* focused mainly on government diplomacy; there has been little discussion on the commercial objectives behind nationality choices, and scarce attention has been paid to the trade network behind commercial disputes. Using the case of a Taiwanese *sekimin* Lin Mou-chang, this paper reviews the nationality choices and commercial disputes between Taiwanese and Fujianese merchants in early 20th century.

In 1906, Lin, who ran a firm called “Yen Quan Hao”, was arrested in Amoy because of a commercial dispute with a French firm “Wan Bao Yuan”. The dispute broke out because both firms expanded their scale of business under booming trade activities at Amoy that became a treaty port in late Qing era. The two firms sued each other under the Qing legal system. Following diplomatic mediations of both China and Japan, Lin was finally released. His case involved commercial interests of both Japanese and French governments, as well as the local politics in Fujian. In such complicated commercial setting, *sekimin* running businesses in East Asia (Japan, China, and Taiwan) had to choose or change their nationality so as to reap commercial benefits and avoid political disputes.

Keywords: Overseas Chinese, Sekimin, Chinese Merchant, International Trade, Commercial Disputes