

Armed Symbiosis: The Government-General, Local Elites, and the Pacification of “Bandits” in the Jianan Foothills

Ryuki Nitta

ABSTRACT

This article reexamines the pacification policies implemented by the Government-General of Taiwan in the early Japanese colonial period, focusing on the Jianan (嘉南) foothills and the role of local elites. Existing scholarship has largely framed this period through a binary opposition between the colonial government and armed anti-Japanese resistance. By contrast, this study adopts the perspectives of colonial war and militarized society, positioning local elites as a third set of historical actors alongside the colonial authorities and the so-called “bandits.”

Following the Yunlin Incident (雲林事件), the Government-General’s policies toward “bandits” (土匪) underwent a significant transformation. What was broadly described as a “pacification policy” in fact comprised two distinct strategies. The first, negotiated surrender (招降), involved ad hoc negotiations targeting specific bandit leaders. The second, induced submission (歸順勸誘), was a more institutionalized policy directed at groups and accompanied by mechanisms of surveillance and disciplinary control. After Kodama Gentarō and Gotō Shinpei assumed office, these measures were reorganized around a key distinction: “bandits of Japan’s own making” were to be managed through negotiated surrender or induced submission, whereas “genuine criminals,” were to be eliminated through punitive military force.

This article examines negotiated surrenders involving figures such as Huang Guozhen (黃國鎮), Lin Tianding (林添丁), and Ruan Zhen (阮振) in the Qian-Dapu (前大埔), Hou-Dapu (後大埔), and Zhongpu (中埔) areas, as well as the induced submission of the Fanzaishan (番仔山) group. Local elites including Lin Wuchen (林武琛), Mao Rongsheng (毛榮生), and Chen Xiangyi (陳向義) played pivotal roles in these processes. By mobilizing their armed forces and kinship networks, they not only mediated negotiations

but actively shaped the terms of surrender. Negotiated surrender typically entailed troop withdrawals, promises to establish local administrative offices (公局), and monetary payments. Induced submission relied primarily on financial compensation combined with the mediation of local disputes. In both cases, negotiations were conducted through non-public channels. In the Fanzaishan case, local elites even resorted to armed intimidation to compel Lin Qichun (林其春) to submit.

Overall, this study argues that the Government-General's surrender policies functioned as a ceasefire-like governing technique at a moment when colonial rule had yet to fully penetrate local society, colonial war remained unresolved, and social disarmament was incomplete. The result was a distinctive form of armed symbiosis among the colonial state, local elites, and "bandits," enabling the latter to temporarily reenter local society while remaining within a deliberately maintained gray zone of the foothills. Marked by the instability of regime transition and the marginal geography of the foothills, this liminal condition not only left "bandits" suspended between the categories of "outlaws" (匪) and "law-abiding subjects" (良), but also drew local elites into the same liminal predicament.

Keywords: "Bandits", Local Elites, Militarized Society, Colonial War, Chiayi, Tainan