

Environmental Exploration and Exploitation of Natural Resources in 17th-Century Taiwan under Dutch Colonization

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ABSTRACT

By examining two major archives, De Dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia and The Diaries of Batavia, this paper examines the deer hunting policies, discovery of gold ores, and development of sugar industry in 17th-century Taiwan to shed light on the environmental exploration and exploitation of natural resources by the Dutch East India Company. Under Dutch colonization, Taiwan served as a transit hub of the Dutch's commercial network in East Asia, particularly in their trade with China and Japan.

The analysis shows that on the one hand, the Dutch depended overwhelmingly on the Chinese immigrants from Mainland China to achieve both commercial and agricultural development; while on the other hand, they blamed them for exploiting the environment and natural resources. Nevertheless, the intention of Dutch colonizers was not to conserve the environment of Taiwan, but to protect commercial interests of the underlying structure of their colonization. In Dutch Formosa, Teyowan (near today's Anping area in Tainan City) was one of the major ports in the global business networks. Numerous ships commuted between Teyowan and other ports. Prosperous trade activities made 17th-century Taiwan a thriving island of business and species exchange in East Asia.

In sum, although the Dutch had helped develop the sugar industry in Taiwan, and contributed to opening it to global trade and species exchange, their deer hunting policies had driven Formosan sika deer to near extinction. Hence, the Dutch colonizers, with the assistance of Chinese immigrants, were the actual exploiters of the natural resources and species in 17th-century Formosa.

Keywords: The Dutch, Formosa, Ecology, Environmental History, 17th-Century