

The Evolution of Qing Taiwan Border Security Policy in the Eighteenth Century: A Case Study of the Making of “*Ai*” System

Tsung-jen Chen

ABSTRACT

When the Qing Empire took control of Taiwan in 1683 and then established administrative regions in western Taiwan, the boundaries, especially those near the mountain areas in the east, were not clearly demarcated. Disorder and turmoil of border regions in subsequent decades forced Qing officials to pay attention to border security.

Using official records of the eighteenth century, this article examines border management strategies, enforcement policies, and technologies adopted by the Qing Empire for maintaining border security. Moreover, this article focuses on the emergence of “*Ai*” (隘, local defensive fort), as a case study, in the context of the evolution of Qing Taiwan border policy in the eighteenth century and argues that the *Ai* system was gradually established after 1754. In the majority of cases, *Ai*, as frontier defense stations, were guarded by plains aborigines of different villages and had been expanding along the border near the mountain areas for some decades. The *Ai* system had assumed an important role in Qing border administration in the second half of the eighteenth century, but its effectiveness was still questioned by modern scholars.

Keywords: *Ai* System, Frontier Defense Station, Frontier Policy, Borders, Plains Aborigines