

Vanished Hâ-pau-sū Lake: Water Governance and Commercial Management of Lakes on Jianan Plain (1640s-1910s)

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on Hâ-pau-sū Lake that had vanished for nearly a century, this article discusses the franchise system adopted for water governance on Jianan Plain before the early 20th century. Examining the impact of this system on how people managed and transformed Hâ-pau-sū Lake sheds light on factors leading to its disappearance. Although Hâ-pau-sū Lake finally vanished in the 1920s upon construction of the Jialan Great Ditches for irrigation, water governance and commercial management had long sown seeds for its eventual doom.

On the water-stressed Jianan Plain, static lake water has always been a precious resource. People use lakes for different economic activities such as fishing, irrigation, animal husbandry, and aquaculture. Lakes are also important to human settlements, transportation, and even beliefs. Hence, lakes are of great significance in agricultural development as well as life and living. However, since the 17th century, many lakes and shallow waters along the coast of Jianan Plain, including Hâ-pau-sū Lake, were controlled under franchise. To maximize commercial profits and benefits, franchised merchants introduced transformations to the lakes. Take the case of Hâ-pau-sū Lake, the commercial operations of franchised merchants not only had negative impact on its ecology and landscape, but also jeopardized its diverse relationships with the surrounding inhabitants.

After Taiwan came under Japanese rule, Hâ-pau-sū Lake was taken over by the government. In addition to their competitive advantage, the franchised merchants also had the support from the authority of the colonial rulers, and were thus able to promote more wide-ranging commercial operations. In line with the government policy of modernizing the sugar industry, their commercial strategy shifted from fishery and aquaculture to land development and sugarcane cultivation, foreshadowing the tragic disappearance of Hâ-pau-sū Lake in the 1920s.

Keywords: Hâ-pau-sū Lake, Franchise System, Jianan Plain, Aquaculture, Commercialization