

“Home Was There, Shop Was Here”: The Decisions of Xu Zangchun, a *Jiao* Merchant of Tainan during the Qing-Japan Regime Transition

Yu-ju Lin

ABSTRACT

During the Qing Dynasty, at the very latest, a group of commercial immigrants appeared whose homes were in Fujian but who conducted business in Taiwan and frequently travelled between the two places. In response to global trade, Xu Zangchun from Jinjiang in Quanzhou, Fujian, first entered the Xingjingxiang firm in Taiwan Fucheng, Taiwan (Tainan) in the 1870s, to serve as apprentice and accountant, but later was promoted to manager in charge of business affairs. In 1903, he became the second director of the *Sanjiao* merchant association, succeeding Wang Xuenong, Tainan’s giant sugar merchant, in that role. Yet, Xu not only smoked opium and identified as a Chinese merchant, but also formed dual families on both sides of the strait between Quanzhou and Tainan, with himself at the center.

Although Xu was one of the few Chinese merchants who did not return to his hometown after Taiwan was ceded to Japan, he experienced the contradictions and impact of Japanese foreign rule more profoundly than Wang Xuenong, who was born in Taiwan and had Japanese experience. In 1917, Xu moved his family back to his hometown, leaving only his second son to settle in Tainan and maintain his core enterprise. Xu Zangchun’s life history exactly reflects the character and family management strategies of overseas trade merchants during the late Qing Dynasty. Previous historiography has paid greater attention to the activities of the so-called “Taiwanese citizens” in China or Southeast Asia, while devoting much less attention to this group of China-centered commercial immigrants with dual-nationality status, and how they and their families frequently traveled between both places and maintained their family lineage while adapting to the changes and difficulties associated with the transition from Qing to Japanese rule. In his role as the leader of Quanzhou residents in Tainan, Xu Zangchun also attracted Fujianese workers to Taiwan,

and tried his best to revive traditional religious activities, thereby revealing yet another aspect of commercial immigrants in Taiwan during the early days of Japanese rule in Taiwan.

This article takes Xu Zangchun, a first generation dual-national in Taiwan, as a case study, to illustrate how Xu evolved from firm manager to director of the *Sanjiao* merchant association after immigrating to Taiwan in the 1870s, and how he clarified the relationship between firm owner and manager. Secondly, the article explains how Xu formed dual families in Quanzhou and Tainan, and how his self-identity developed from transnationalism to nativism, thereby highlighting the operations and dilemmas of dual-nationality families during changing times. The final section of the work analyzes the contradictions of Xu's social and political roles under colonial rule.

Keywords: Dual Nationality, *Sanjiao* Merchant Association, Manager, Cross-straits Dual Families, Nativism, Chinese Workers