

Frenemy: Cooperation and Competition among Taiwanese Merchants, Japanese Colonizers, and Local Chinese Merchants in Early Twentieth-Century Shantou

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how Taiwanese merchants in Shantou applied business strategies to the management of the Dadong Ice-making Company in the early twentieth century. Under Japanese colonial rule, Taiwanese *sekimin* conducted business in Mainland China either on their own or through family ties. While their status as “Japanese nationals” endowed them with various privileges (such as tax exemption), it also caused them trouble under the anti-foreigner, in particular anti-Japanese, sentiment that gripped China in the early twentieth century. In face of imminent threats to their personal safety as well as inevitable economic repercussions, Taiwanese *sekimin* tried to strike a balance between their Japanese ties and Chinese roots.

The discussion in this paper begins with describing the economic status of Shantou in modern Chinese history and its significance in southern China, followed by the background of Taiwanese merchants and their business operations in Shantou. Specifically, the Dadong Ice-making Company, a joint venture of Xin Huang, an entrepreneur from Tainan, and a group of Taiwanese *sekimin* in Shantou, is presented as a case study illustrating the “frenemy” relationship of Taiwanese merchants with their Japanese and Chinese counterparts in Shantou. With adaptive application of business strategies that made use of nationality, ethnicity, and language, Taiwanese *sekimin* merchants protected their commercial interests, as evidenced in how Dadong Ice-making Company survived in the Order of Deportation Incident of 1930 and the growing conflict between Taiwanese and Chinese merchants in that period. This paper also traces and explores the evolution of the tripartite relationship under these two crises.

Keywords: Taiwanese *Sekimin*, Merchants, Shantou, Business Strategies, Dadong Ice-making Company