

A Practical Land-Reclaiming Family in Ch'ing Taiwan:

The Case Study of the Chiang Family of Hsin-chu

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Abstract

The Chiang Ch'ao-feng family of Hsin-chu is important in the history of Taiwan due to its achievements in frontier land reclamation in the Ch'ing dynasty.

Chiang Ch'ao-feng and his family moved to Taiwan between the Yung-cheng and the Chien-lung periods. They settled at Hung-mao Port (today's Hsin-heng Hsiang, Hsin-chu Hsien) and worked as tenant farmers. In pursuit of prosperity, his sons including Sheng-chih and others moved to Chiu-chiung-lin (today's Chiung-lin Hsiang), a remote mountainous area first opened up to the Han immigrants, during the mid-Chien-lung reign.

The Chiang family prospered with this new opportunity of land reclamation: Chiang Sheng-chih became the tenant head of Chiu-chiung-lin and his nephew Hsiu-luan participated in the reclamation of Chiu-chiung-lin and Hsu-chi-lin (today's Chu-tung City) and organized the famous "Chin-huang-fu Land Reclaiming Service," a cooperative organization joined by Fukienese merchants in Chu-chien (today's Hsin-chu City) with the Ch'ing government's support for reclaiming the lands in today's Pei-pu, Pao-shan and other areas. Since then, the offsprings of the Chiang family had been actively involved in the reclamation of mountainous area and became a large

land-reclaiming family in Hsin-chu.

Through their efforts in land reclamation, the Chiang Ch'ao-feng family accumulated a significant amount of wealth and privileges. Making use of their wealth and status, they actively participated in public affairs and earned the recognition of the local government to establish their local leadership as an influential landing family in Hsin-chu.

Within several generations, the Chiang family has developed from tenant farmers to a leading land-owning family. The major reason for their success may be attributed to the capable leadership of their family heads who not only integrated the different needs of frontier environment and established a sound relationship with the government, but consistently maintained an aggressive spirit in progressing the reclamation efforts.

On the other hand, the Chiang family remained to be a local family without further development due to the following limitations: (1) there were not enough family members and many of which died young; (2) while continuing developing the new reclaimed areas, they neglected to win higher imperial ranks and reputations; (3) the moving to the remote Pei-pu area resulted in the limitation of their development due to the mountainous geographical setting; (4) they failed to adapt to the late Ch'ing governmental policy changes and thus lost the new opportunity for development.

In conclusion, the case of the Chiang family illustrates the success as well as the limitations of a practical land-reclaiming family that continued to pursue development and earn profits in newly reclaimed area of frontier Taiwan and has thus become an important example of the Han Taiwanese entrepreneurship in the Ch'ing dynasty.