

Between Legend and Historical Fact :

A Tentative Study of The Taiwanese Aborigines in Early Modern History

James Kaim Ang

Abstract

Today there are still some positive reminiscences of the so-called red hair barbarians among Taiwanese aborigines throughout Taiwan, although the Dutch colonists left Formosa more than three hundred years ago. Interestingly, the Dutch colonial territory of that time, insofar as some researchers have indicated, was primarily situated in the southwest part of Taiwan. Why do people beyond this area up till now still possess such remembrances? How can we interpret this matter then?

In this article, I first analyze a certain Dutch song, which some Paiwan aborigines claim was taught to their forefathers by the Dutch. I then prove the lyrics of this song actually originated from a song written in 1887. Nevertheless, I do not think that the Paiwan people are purposely fabricating the story. They really experienced contact with the Dutch in the early modern era.

In addition to employing the VOC archives, I deliberately devote a great deal of space to identify the antecedents of contemporary place names, which are impossible to discern today. After doing this, I can not but state that many aborigine legends regarding the Dutch are not all fiction. With the help of these legends, we can reconstruct the history of a people without history.

Finally I also go further to agree with an extant thesis: If Taiwan aborigines began to possess their idea of an imagined community prior to the present century, it might be traced back to the year 1644, the first regular convening of *Landdag*, the land assembly day which took place that year, when most aboriginal Taiwanese headmen initially got together to encounter the foreign ruler.