

The Ambiguity of Aboriginal Tribes/Villages (*she*): A Case Study of the Nankang and Peikang *she* in Northern Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

In Chinese documents about Taiwan during the Ch'ing dynasty, the word *she* (tribe or village) is an important term referring to the organization of the plains aborigines (*p'ing-p'u tsu*). Research to-date, however, has not determined adequately what a *she* refers to: is it a village or a tribe of plains aborigines? Some twentieth century scholars have come to define *she* as a village and, as I will argue, misinterpreted the *she*'s actual significance.

Through a case study of the Nankang and Peikang *she*, this paper attempts to clarify our understanding of the term. I argue that the establishment of these two *she* in the eighteenth century was due to the creation of a tax system for aborigines who submitted to the authority of the Ch'ing dynasty. Out of imperial concern for its aboriginal subjects, the government applied a new system of reduced taxation known as the *fan-ting-yin* in the mid eighteenth century. The Nankang and Peikang *she* established at this time were initially set up as units of taxation and a commissioner (*t'ung-shih*) played an important role in overseeing land transactions between the aborigines and Han Chinese settlers.

The tax reforms initiated by Liu Ming-ch'uan in the nineteenth century brought about the end of the *fan-ting-yin* system and the abolition of the two *she*. The history of the origins, development, and end of the Nankang and Peikang *she* is therefore an excellent opportunity to discuss the nature of *she* in general.

Keywords: Nankang *she*, Peikang *she*, *fan-ting-yin* system