

The Subsequent Events after the Sentence of the Wufeng Lins' Imperial Appeal Cases, 1882~1895

A Study of the Rivalry among Central Taiwan's Leading
Families in the Ching's Period

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ABSTRACT

This article is intended to uncover the truth behind the Imperial Appeals made by the Wufeng Lins and their rivals by dealing with the lingering lawsuits between the two sides after sentence on the cases was passed in 1882.

By carefully analyzing various new source materials, it is possible to draw at least two conclusions. Firstly, these imperial appeals were by nature political rather than legal matters. The summary execution of Lin Wen-ming and the jailing of Lin Tien-kuo were actually used by the authorities to suppress the expanding influence of the Wufeng Lins. Therefore, it was impossible for the Lins to win their lawsuit. However, the Lins' rivals, who had so far been used as pawns to defy the Wufeng Lins, were sacrificed once the officials and the Lins had reached a compromise. Consequently, no matter how hard they tried to sue the Lins, they had no hope of success. This proves that the power structure of traditional China, i.e., the rigid stratification of the imperial court, officialdom, and gentry powers permitted no challenges.

Secondly, the underlying causes of the Imperial Appeal cases can be reduced to the rivalry between the Wufeng Lins and other nearby leading families. Generally speaking, there had been a balance of power as well as a long-term feud among the rivaling families in central Taiwan before the 1850's. Afterwards, the Lins, due to Lin Wen-ch'a's successful career, rose rapidly to prominence and soon surpassed other families, whose interests were seriously damaged during the Tai Ts'au-ts'un Rebellion in 1862~64. Old feuds and new hatreds drove the Lins' rivals to cooperate with the officials in curbing the Lins' expansion of power. The plaintiffs against the Wufeng Lins all belonged to the Lins' rival families. Lin Ying-shih was a member of the Hou-ts'uo Lins and Hung Jen-hou belonged to the Pei-t'ou Hungs, all of whom were the Wufeng Lin's rivals. The most interesting case is that of Huang Lien-p'u. He was also a relative of Lin Ho-Shang, a rival of the Wufeng Lins.