

Taiwan's Colonial Experiences and the Development of Ethnic Identities: Some Hypotheses

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How have Taiwan's ethnic communities come into existence? This paper examines this complicated question through historical analysis. The paper begins with some hypotheses:

First Hypothesis: From the arrival of the Dutch in 1624 until the death of President Chiang Ching-kuo in 1988, Taiwan was ruled by six colonial regimes: (i) the Dutch (1624-1662), (ii) the Spanish (1626-1642), who ruled in north Taiwan simultaneously with the Dutch, (iii) the Zheng family (1662-1683), (iv) the Manchu Qing empire (1683-1895), (v) the Japanese (1895-1945), and (vi) the authoritarian Chinese Nationalist regime (1945-1988). These colonial regimes were controlled by outsiders and ruled in the interests of the outsiders.

Second Hypothesis: Colonial regimes are essentially racist. In the words of Albert Memmi:

Racism appears then, not as an incidental detail, but as a substantial part of colonialism. It is the highest expression of the colonial system and one of the most significant features of the colonialist. Not only does it establish a fundamental discrimination between colonizer and colonized, a *sine qua non* of colonial life, but it also lays the foundation for the immutability of this life.¹

While Memmi talks about European colonization, it is quite relevant that the writer first saw reference to Memmi's work in a discussion of Japanese colonization of Korea.² Taiwanese appear to be discriminated against in all of the six colonial regimes mentioned above. This too creates a sense of ethnic difference.

Third Hypothesis: Colonial regimes often use strategies of "divide and rule" to control the colonized. Thus, for example, the Japanese used Hakka people to run the railways and to have important roles in the police. The Chinese Nationalists continued these policies.

The research will have to examine whether or not this third hypothesis applies to all situations creating ethnic identity in Taiwan. Were there other factors that led to a stronger sense of ethnicity among different groups such as competition for good land or water? Did religious differences among early settlers in Taiwan play a role in ethnic division? Did language differences play a role? What, for example, were the causes of *xiedou* 械鬥?

¹ Albert Memmi, *The colonizer and the colonized* (New York: The Orion Press, 1965), p. 74.

² Carter J. Eckert, Kai-baik Lee, Young Ick Lew, Michael Robinson, Edward W. Wagner, *Korea Old and New: A History* (Seoul: Ilchokak Publishers for the Korea Institute, Harvard University, 1990), p. 319.