

The History of Taiwan

Notes taken from Dr. Andrew D. Morris's *Taiwan's History: An Introduction.*

- The date of the earliest Chinese travel and migration to Taiwan is the subject of great political debate.
- To assume some intimate China-Taiwan relationship through the millennia would be wrong. Jack Wills¹ has more accurately shown that even in 1600, Taiwan still "was on the outer edge of Chinese consciousness and activity" (Wills 1999, 85).
 - Four centuries ago there was no permanent Chinese settlement on (or name for) Taiwan, although by that time there were Chinese and Japanese traders, fishermen, and pirates willing to brave the malarial fever that claimed the lives of so many visitors there.
- As would become a pattern in the island's history, Chinese interest and settlement in Taiwan picked up only with the presence of other foreign powers in the Taiwan Straits - in this case, the Dutch.
 - Hoping to obtain a foothold in the lucrative China trade, the Dutch failed to gain trading posts in southeastern China. Ming dynasty officials pushed these pesky and dangerous traders farther east to an island not considered imperial territory but known to early seventeenth-century Chinese officials as *Taiyuan*, *Dayuan*, *Taiwan*, or *Dawan* (Nakamura 1954, II4).
 - The Dutch knew this island as *Ilha Formosa*, as it had been named by passing Portuguese sailors in the 1540S, and they set up their China trading operations there.
- When they arrived in southern Taiwan in 1622, Dutch East India Company agents estimated populations of a thousand Chinese sojourners and traders and some seventy thousand plains aborigines on the western Taiwan coast (Wills 1999, 87-88; Hauptman and Knapp 1977, 175).



¹ A longtime leader of China studies at the University of Southern California.

- By 1650, some twenty-five thousand Chinese had come to the Dutch colony to grow and sell rice, vegetables, sugarcane, and indigo, as well as to fish and hunt, during the three years that Chinese law allowed them to reside abroad.
- At its largest, the Dutch population in Taiwan was a mere twenty-eight hundred, of whom some twenty-two hundred were soldiers. These vulnerable numbers required colonial forces to spend most of their income on fortifications, and their worst fears were realized in 1652. In an event later immortalized as the first Chinese "anti-Western uprising" in history, some fifteen thousand Chinese settlers armed with sharpened bamboo set out to "kill the Dutch dogs" at Fort Zeelandia. The Dutch recruited some two thousand Austronesian Indigenous Peoples to aid in suppressing the revolt (Hsu 1980a, 15; van Veen 1996, 65-67, 71).



Colour painting of the view of Fort Zeelandia

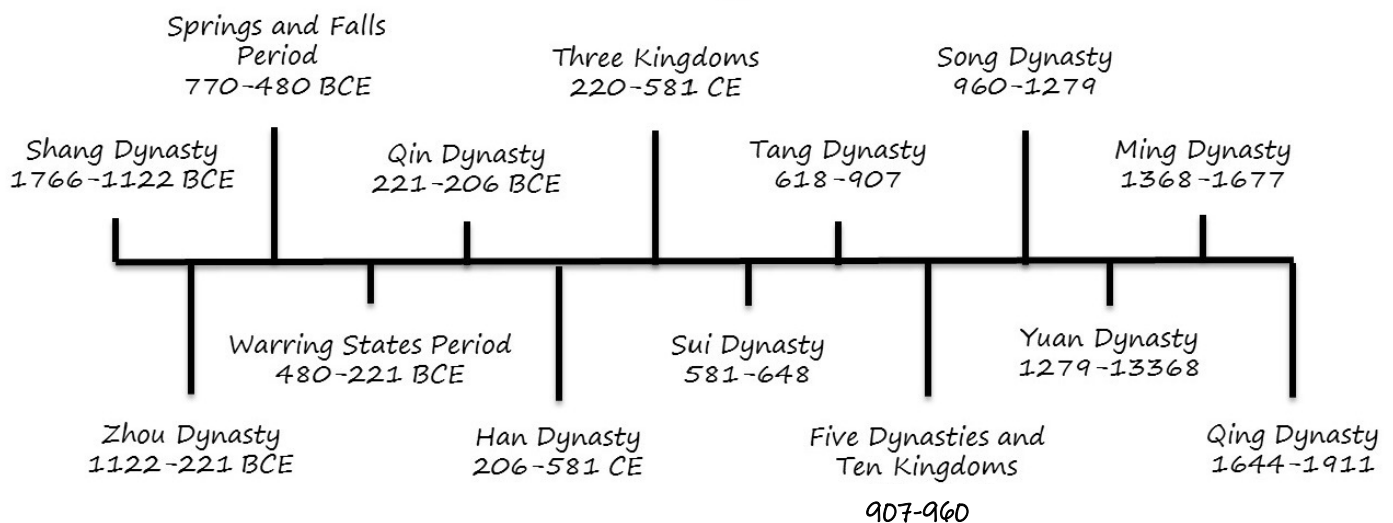
- The Dutch presence on Taiwan forced the outgoing Ming dynasty and the new Manchu Qing to pay more attention to the island. Only under the Qing in the mid-seventeenth century was the name "Taiwan" officially adopted to refer to the whole island (Nakamura 1954, 114).



- It was in the context of this new Chinese consciousness of Taiwan that Japanese-born² **Zheng Chenggong (Koxmga)** sought to make the island the base of his movement to overthrow the newly founded Qing dynasty in the name of restoring the vanquished Ming.
- In 1661, after fighting Manchu Qing forces for more than a decade, Zheng's fleet of two hundred ships and twenty-five thousand men set sail from the southeastern Chinese coast for Taiwan. By this time, the number of Chinese settled in Taiwan had reached some fifty thousand. This large fifth column was twenty times larger than the entire Dutch occupation force, and it made Zheng's conquest easy. Zheng thus established [a dynasty] – the **Kingdom of Tungning** – the first Chinese administration of Taiwan ironically, a regime formed in rebellion against China's ruling Qing.

Diverse modern political forces In China and even Japan have sanctified Zheng for delivering Taiwan into Chinese hands for the first time-notwithstanding the myth that Taiwan had "always" been part of China.

Chinese Dynasties



² Son of a Chinese pirate and a Japanese mother.

- Taiwan's position as a commercial center in maritime East Asia continued, as the Zheng regime pursued foreign policy according to trading needs. Formal relations were established between the Kingdom of Tungning and Japan, the Ryukyuan Kingdom, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and even England.
- During the Zheng period, the Chinese population, concentrated in the southwestern coastal plain, began to rival the numbers of Indigenous Peoples on Taiwan, doubling to roughly a hundred thousand after twenty-one years.
- Koxinga's son Zheng Jing had hoped to negotiate independence from the Qing, however the Qing Navy took the island by force and the Kingdom of Tungning was dissolved.
 - The Qing first attempted to sell the island back to the Dutch.
- Finally-for reasons not of Chinese historical destiny but of the very practical wish to keep the island out of the hands of pesky foreigners-Taiwan was integrated into the empire in 1684 as a prefecture of Fujian Province.
- Qing officials annoyed by this malarial frontier joked, with black humor, that Taiwan produced "a minor revolt every three years, a major one every five years." This was no exaggeration. During the 212 years of Qing rule in Taiwan, 171 "disturbances among the people" were recorded-including anti-Qing revolts and 38 battles fought between migrants from rival home prefectures on the mainland (Chen 1987, II-12; Hsu 1980b, 94; Lamley 1981).



The territories ever controlled by the maritime force of Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) depicting in red, its historical sphere of influence shown in peach. (Source: Wikipedia)