

Taiwan is not a Han Chinese society

Written by Sim Kiantek 簡謙

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A group of young Maori from New Zealand has visited Taiwan to seek their roots, while a Japanese anthropologist has speculated that a branch of Japanese ancestry might have traveled to Kyushu Island from Taiwan.

As people from other places seek their roots in Taiwan, it is ironic that the high-school curriculum guidelines claim that the nation is a “Han Chinese immigrant society” and that Taiwanese’s ancestors came from China.

Recorded history in Taiwan started during the Dutch colonial rule. Documents show that, there were more than 200 plains Aboriginal communities at that time, the largest being the community in what is today Tainan’s Madou District (麻豆) with a population of more than 3,000.

It was surrounded by smaller communities, whose populations were not recorded.

Among highland Aborigines, the Dutch had most contact with the Paiwan people.

The plains Aborigines and the Paiwan people were the main forebears of Taiwanese. This can be seen from more than 30 lines of evidence, including Aboriginal household and tax records, and farming data.

Why then the distortion that Taiwan is a “Han Chinese immigrant society”? The causes are Sinicization, bestowing surnames and using genealogies to connect Taiwan to China.

In a report on Taiwan affairs to Emperor Yongzheng of the Qing Dynasty, then-prefectural magistrate Shen Qiyuan (申愷) recorded the policy of “turning naturalized Aborigines into Han Chinese and unnaturalized Aborigines into naturalized ones.”

The book A Brief History of Taiwan writes that in Aboriginal communities near today’s Tainan

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and Kaohsiung, people mostly spoke Mandarin or the dialects of Quanzhou and Zhangzhou from China's Fujian Province — just as Han Chinese did.

During the reign of Emperor Qianlong (乾隆), the Taiwan Prefecture Gazetteer recorded that people in naturalized Aboriginal communities mostly dressed like Han Chinese and could speak a little Chinese.

The book Annals of Taiwan Province, published by the Taiwan Province Archives — what is today Taiwan Historica — said that Qianlong in 1785 implemented a compulsory measure to bestow surnames, the most concrete proof of Sinicization.

How did Qianlong bestow surnames? The residents of an Aboriginal community were simply forced to adopt the surname of the Chinese official who was sent to them. No wonder it was common to find villages where people had the same surname, despite not being related.

In 1885, Chinese official Liu Mingchuan (劉銘傳) wrote in a report to the emperor that it was inappropriate for the Qing Empire to turn Taiwan into a Chinese province.

Aborigines and Taiwanese in the eight coastal counties of the time accounted for 60 and 40 percent of the population respectively, Liu wrote.

Taiwan was still an Aboriginal society in 1885. It in 1895 entered half a century of Japanese colonial rule, but the attempt at Japanization eventually failed. In 1951, Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) began to bestow surnames and genealogies, and, absurdly, some siblings were given different surnames.

Chiang even “amended” 791 Taiwanese genealogies, or about 65 percent of them.

Even after all these distortions, census data in 1956 showed that the 940,000 Chinese in Taiwan at the time only accounted for 10 percent of the population, showing that Taiwan is not

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a “Han Chinese immigrant society.”

How will Taiwanese face history if the curriculum guidelines remain unchanged?

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