

Changing perspective on history

Written by Ho Lai-mei 何麗梅

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The TV drama series *Sequalu: Formosa 1867*, an adaptation of former doctor Chen Yao-chang's 2016 novel *Kui Lei Hua* (歸來花), has been building an audience since its premiere on Public Television Service. The book and the drama go against the traditional Taiwanese perspective on history, which has been shaped by the view of Han (漢) Taiwanese.

Taiwan is an immigrant society, whose earliest masters were the “gaoshan” (高山), or highland Aborigines, and the “pingpu” (平埔), or plains Aborigines. Taiwan's historical perspective should be based on cultural diversity and ethnic integration.

At the end of Chen's book, Tiap Moe (田阿婆) and Song Zai (宋在) marry and raise the next generation. Tiap Moe is of mixed highland Aborigine and Hakka descent, while Song Zai is half plains Aborigine and half southern Min (閩) Chinese. That means their children are a mixture of Taiwan's four major communities, a situation that could well apply to a majority of Taiwanese today.

At that time, many Han men married highland or plains Aborigines. As the number of southern Min and Hakka immigrants and mixed marriages increased, Aboriginal communities quickly lost their land, and many, especially the plains Aborigines, were sinicized.

Just as with the highland and plains Aborigines on the Hengchun Peninsula (恆春半島) in southern Taiwan, the Pazeh community — plains Aborigines in the Taichung Basin — were affected by the Han people's cultivation of their traditional lands in the mid-1800s.

Many of them never returned home after being drafted to suppress rebellions in China, and, as a result, they lost not only their land, but their numbers also dropped sharply, which accelerated the sinicization of the community.

The Pazeh community today resides by Liyu Lake (鯉魚湖) in Miaoli County's Sanyih Township (三義). In the book *Heroes in Taiwan's Pioneering History: The Pazeh Tribe* (台灣開拓史中的英雄：平埔族), Aboriginal author Pan Ta-ho (潘大和), the grandson of the community's last leader, said that although Qing Dynasty interpreter Zhang Dajing (張大經) — a Hakka from Guangdong Province who joined the community's Anli group (安里) — contributed to the

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development of the Huludun Waterfront (葫蘆墩) and the Taichung Basin, credit should also be given to the Anli people.

This view differs from the Han view of history, which claims that Aborigines knew nothing about irrigation, and that it was the Han who built irrigation works in exchange for land.

Taiwan has been ruled by the Dutch, the Spanish, the Ming (明) and the Qing dynasties, and the Japanese. When the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) was defeated in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, the party and 2 million mainland people relocated to Taiwan.

Transformed by the growing number of mixed marriages in the past 30 years, Taiwan's ethnic groups and culture have become increasingly diverse. However, the right to interpret history is controlled by those in power, not to mention that Taiwan's Aborigines did not have a writing system in the past.

As a consequence, Taiwanese history has been dominated by the historical perspective of Han people, or even central China, ignoring Taiwan's ethnic and cultural diversity. These are issues that we should consider as we read Kui Lei Hua and enjoy the TV show it spawned.

Ho Lai-mei is a writer of culture and history.

Translated by Eddy Chang

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