THE EARLIEST CHINESE EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS
OF THE FORMOSAN ABORIGINES

LAURENCE G. THOMPSON
University of Southern California

The most striking fact about the historical knowledge of Formosa is the lack of it in Chinese records. It is truly astonishing that this very large island, so close to the mainland that on exceptionally clear days it may be made out from certain places on the Fukien coast with the unaided eye, should have remained virtually beyond the ken of Chinese writers down until late Ming times (seventeenth century). A few remarks which may or may not refer to Formosa appear in various works from the Shang Shu on, but scholars have not yet been able to agree as to which, if any of them, denote Formosa rather than the Liu-ch’iu Islands or even perhaps Luzon. This is not to imply, of course, that Formosa was in actuality terra incognita to the Chinese. The conclusions of common sense, as well as certain archeological and other evidences, are sufficient to convince us that the people living es-

1) Schlegel has mentioned this, citing Swinhoe, Notes on the Island of Formosa, and du Halde, Description de la Chine. (G. Schlegel, "Problèmes géographiques. Les peuples étrangers chez les historiens chinois: XIX, Lieou-kieou kouo..." T'oung Pao, VI, 1896. See pp. 165-166.) It is also mentioned by Pickering. (W. A. Pickering, Pioneering in Formosa, 1898, p. 40.) It has been confirmed by statements made to the author by missionaries formerly resident in Fukien.

2) These notices have now been collected conveniently in one volume, with punctuated texts: Liu-ch’iu yü Chi-lang-shan 流求與蠻龍山, edited and published by the scholars who are producing the monumental Taiwán Wen-hsien Ts’ung-k’ao series (volume 196, Taipei, 1964). Schlegel long ago utilized the notices from the Sui to the late Ming, in the article cited above, note 1, giving French translations of a good part of the material as found in Ku Chin T’u-shu Chi Ch’eng, “Pien-i” 隊官 Division, section on Liu-ch’iu, ch’uan 100. None of these can be considered as personal, eyewitness accounts, which is why they have not been included here.


163
especially along the coast of the mainland opposite the island must have visited it continually throughout the centuries. We know for sure that P’eng-hu 澎湖 was even included within the administrative control of Chin-chiang hsien 晉江縣, Ch’üan-chou prefecture 泉州府, during the first half of the thirteenth century, and that it continued to be so administered, with a resident population of Ch’üan-chou immigrants, during the following century. It is inconceivable that the huge bulk of the island of Formosa itself, looming over the horizon just beyond, should have remained a mystery. It is just this that causes our wonder at the undeniable fact that Chinese writers have told us so little about the subject.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, there are extant only four personal, eyewitness accounts until so late as the eighteenth century. The earliest of these is no earlier than the Yüan dynasty, when Wang Ta-yüan writes in the mid-fourteenth century. Following him there is a blank for two and a half centuries, until the report by Ch’ên Ti in 1603. Shortly after this the Dutch assumed control of the island (1624–1662), and while we have no Chinese accounts during this time, we do have extensive Dutch records. The most detailed and valuable description of the ab-

4) It is so stated in Chao Ju-kua’s 趙汝適 Accounts of the Barbarians (諸蕃志), chapter on P’i-she-yeh 貝舍耶. For English translation, see Hirth and Rockhill, Chao Ju-kua: His Work..., St. Petersburg, 1911.

5) See translation of Wang Ta-yüan’s account of P’eng-hu, below.

6) The lack of Chinese records may be confirmed by the fact that not a single Chinese work is listed for the period by Lai Yung-hsiang 梁永祥, a leading authority on Taiwanese history, in his “Conspexitia bibliographiarum formosanarum” (to use his own title), a listing of the most important sources for Taiwanese history (in Taiwan Wen Shiian, Vol. IX, No. 2, August 1958, pp. 1-12 at end of volume). The great repository of Dutch records is the records of the Dutch East India Company, kept at The Hague, and still awaiting the attention of researchers. The most valuable publication of selections from these Dutch records is the English translation of William Campbell, Formosa under the Dutch, London, 1903—a work unfortunately exceedingly rare today, and one which it is hoped will be included among the valuable reprints currently being issued in Taiwan. The Dutch records also exist in handwritten and photographed and photostated copies in National Taiwan University, where they have for a long time been utilized by Japanese and Chinese scholars. (See Lai Yung-hsiang, “Chief historical materials on Koxinga,” Taiwan Feng-wu, Vol. IV, Nos. 8 and 9 [in one], August-September 1954 [in English], pp. 1-16 at end of volume.)
origines among these Dutch records is the “Account of the Inhabitants” written by the first Christian missionary, the Rev. George Candidius, who served in Formosa from 1627 to 1631. Its length precludes our reproducing this piece, although it would be desirable to place it together with the Chinese accounts.

In 1662 the Dutch were compelled to abandon the island by Cheng Ch’eng-kung 鄭成功 (“Koxinga”), leader of the Ming loyalist resistance to the Manchus. The “Cheng dynasty” — in actuality for almost the whole period the reign of Koxinga’s son Ching 經 — lasted only until 1683, but did accomplish the real establishment of Chinese occupancy in the south-central western plain. There seems to be no eyewitness report on the aborigines during the Cheng period. However, Lin Ch’ien-kwang’s account dates from 1685, only two years after the Cheng regime had surrendered the island to the Manchus. Then, at the very end of the century, we have the fascinating travel journal of Yu Yung-ho, a private businessman of adventuresome disposition, who visited the island in search of sulphur in the year 1697.

After the incorporation of Taiwan into the Ch’ing empire, the Chinese records naturally become much fuller, and we begin to have longer and more detailed eyewitness accounts of the aborigines. As this is a new chapter in our subject, we shall leave it for future treatment.

* * *

汪大淵: 島夷誌略
Wang Ta-yüan: Brief Accounts of the Island Barbarians (1349)

The following excerpts from the work by Wang Ta-yüan are translated from the text published in Taiwan Literary Collectanea (臺灣文獻叢刊), volume 119 (Taipei, 1961), where they are found as an appendix to the Accounts of the Barbarians (諸蕃志), of Chao Ju-kua 趙汝適. The source of this text, according to the

7) Candidius’s “Account” is found in Campbell’s collection cited in the preceding note.

M.S. XXIII 11
in the wild mountains and solitary valleys where there are no inhabitants. When they encounter a fisherman or a woodcutter they at once take him alive and then return. They sell [their captives] to another country, at two ounces of gold per head. The people of that country all imitating each other, this has become a habitually practiced business. Therefore when the people of the Eastern Sea hear the name Pʻi-she-yeh, they are all terrified and flee.

* * *

陳第：東番記

Chʻen Ti: An Account of the Eastern Barbarians (1603)

The full identification of this source, and the publication of the complete text, has occurred only within the past decade, as the result of some keen detective work on the part of Maurus Fang Hao. For our purposes it is not necessary to recapitulate the story of Professor Fang’s researches, which has been told in detail in his long article published in the Bulletin of the College of Arts of National Taiwan University, in 1956, and in outline in his preface to the Taiwan Literary Collectanea edition (volume fifty-six, Taipei, 1959) of Min-hai Tseng-yen 閩海贈言, in 1959. The text used in the present translation is found in this latter work. It is based in turn upon the block-printed version which was located in the East Asian History Research Room of Tokyo University. Professor Fang utilized a photographic reproduction of that text, and later also personally inspected it, so that the punctuated version we are using represents as authoritative a text as is possible to find.

Chʻen Ti, [tzu Hsiu-li 秀立, hao I-chai 一齋, also Tzu-yeh-tzu

---

22) Chinese title of journal is Wen Shih Che Hsüeh Pao 文史哲學報. Fang’s article is in Vol. VII, pp. 41-76, followed by photocopy of text; Chinese title is: 陳第東番記考證.

23) Min-hai Tseng-yen was a compilation of literary compositions lauding the achievements of General Shen Yu-jung 沈有容, tzu Shih-hung 士弘, hao Ning-hai 寧海; it was published, with additions at later times, by the general and his descendants.

24) There is a modern colloquial translation of Chʻen Ti’s Tung Fan Chi, by Sun Tao-shih 孫道始, in Taiwan Feng-wu, Vol. V, Nos. 8 and 9 [in one], August-September 1955, pp. 27-30.
子野子] was a native of Lien-chiang hsien 连江县, a place still represented by a town of that name, northeast of Foochow. He was born in 1541 and died in 1617. His father was a first-degree graduate and a petty official of the hsien. Ch’en Ti himself was a government student at the pre-degree level, and an ardent student also of fencing and the military arts. He was invited to enter military service by Governor Yü Ta-yu 余大猷 (likewise a famous person in the fragmentary early history of Chinese connections with Taiwan), and he afterwards rose to command the garrison forces along the eastern section of the Great Wall. After being in this position for some ten years he resigned, and spent his later years mostly in traveling and literary pursuits. He is well-known as the author of *Phonological Studies on the Mao Version of the Canon of Poetry* (毛詩古音考), a worthy precursor to the textual studies of later Ch’ing classicists.25

In 160226 it was determined to launch an expedition to wipe out the Japanese wakō 和寇 who were using Taiwan as their base for piratical raids on the Fukien coast, and the initiator of this expedition, General Shen Yu-jung 沈有容 of the garrison at Wu-yü 沃嶼,27 invited Ch’en Ti and other military experts to serve as his commanders. Thus it was that Ch’en Ti crossed to Formosa, participated in the successful battle to drive out the wakō, and wrote his account of what he had seen on the island. This account, the *Tung Fan Chi*, as has now been amply demonstrated by Fang Hao, was the source for the other late Ming and early Ch’ing accounts of Taiwan’s aborigines—except for the two other eyewitness accounts which we have translated later in this paper.28


26) Not 1602, as Chu Chiu-ying has it (see his article cited in note preceding).

27) Wu-yü 沃嶼 was a tiny island outpost across the water to the southwest of Chin-men or Quemoy 金門, which guarded the entrance to Hsia-men (Amoy).

28) In the article mentioned in note 22, above, Fang Hao gives full details. He shows the derivation, directly and indirectly, of the following accounts from *Tung Fan Chi*: *Tung Hui Yang K’ao* 東西洋考 (1617-18); *Min Shu* 閔書 (1628-48); *Yüeh-mei Hsin-shih Chi-lüeh* 畲貊巡視紀略 (1699); *Men-yüeh Chi-lüeh* 閩越紀略 (date uncertain); *P’eng-hu Taiwan Chi-lüeh* 彭湖臺灣紀略 (late 17th century); *Ming Shih* 明史 (1736); *Taiwan-fu Chih* 臺灣府志 (1741 edition and others).