

Spanish early modern colonies in the Austronesian context: San Salvador de Quelang, Heping Dao, Keelung, Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Since 2011 we have investigated the site of the Spanish colony of San Salvador de Quelang, founded in 1626 on Heping Dao, a then small island off the coast of Keelung, in northern Taiwan. The colony was established as an extension of the Spanish post of Manila and the Philippines, with clear strategic and political goals that involve many different agents and processes at the level of the entire Asia-Pacific region. The Spanish held in San Salvador for 16 years, when they were expelled by the Dutch who then took over the colonial space until 1668. After this European spell, the colony and Taiwan fell under the control of the Qing government.

We have aimed to reconstruct the lifeways of the local peoples inhabiting the place, the Basai, before, during and after the European colonial occupation. The Basai were an Austronesian population of the Iron Age –in Taiwanese terminology- when the Spanish arrived in Keelung. Their history can potentially be observed throughout prehistory in a long span of several millennia. Contemporary European and Chinese documents that describe social practices of the Basai are also available. By understanding the indigenous prior to the Spanish presence we can evaluate the impact that the colonists had on the locals, as well as the role that the Austronesian may have played in the colonial process, including their long-distance contact with peoples from the continent.

Key words: Keelung, Taiwan, Austronesian, Europeans, Colonial process

INTRODUCTION

Taiwan (Isla Hermosa) was an important strategic place since the end of the sixteenth century as a scenario of the political struggles that unraveled back in Europe and extended towards the contemporary world's edges. In 1624, the Dutch retreated from the Pescadores Islands onto Taiwan and founded a first settlement in the bay of Tainan, Taiwan. From there, other Dutch settlements and forts unfolded; the Spanish replied by founding a colony on current Heping Dao, a small island off Keelung, in 1626, called San Salvador de Quelang. This, and the later settlement in Tamsui, were strategic outposts to advance Spanish's interests such as commerce and evangelization, and keep the Dutch at bay.

Since 2011 a research group led by M. Cruz Berrocal and Ch. Tsang has carried out archaeological investigations on Heping Dao with an initial focus on the Spanish colony. However, the archaeological record has shown a long sequence of continuous occupation since early prehistory to the postwar times (Cruz Berrocal et al 2018). We have applied a long-term perspective which allows us understand the history of Heping Dao, and Taiwan, not only as different episodes of colonial presence, but also as a history of continuity that can often be blurred by highly visible events and processes. In this case, we contend that highly monumental historical contexts such as those produced by European colonialism and beyond, have obscured the role of agents such as the Taiwanese aborigines.

THE PREHISTORIC AND PRE-EUROPEAN PERIOD

The archaeological record in Heping Dao has proved very rich for the Neolithic and Iron and Proto-historical Age, using the Taiwanese conventional periodization. Both periods convey the prehistory of the island, and they are well represented in Heping Dao primarily as remains of potential households, as well as, for the Iron Age, metallurgical activities (Cruz Berrocal et al 2018). For households we have recovered abundant evidence of post holes that can be interpreted as the material evidence of stilt houses, built on top of wooden pillars, that would have undergone long-term processes of destruction and reconstruction. Thus, the post holes do not show a particular house in a particular time period, but *trajectories* of houses over centuries. Bone and lithic artifacts have also been abundantly documented, including high quality artifacts made of jade, or more properly, nephrite, seemingly from Fengtian mine on Eastern Taiwan. Artifacts and debris and tools in the making process are found, which seems to point to a potential down-the-line exchange of raw material covering the northeast coast of Taiwan. The most abundant remains are, however, pottery sherds, that form at least 90 complete or almost complete vessels in situ, ie., where they ended up after collapse of house floors. The ceramic assemblage shows the vessel types that were typical of the Taiwanese prehistory: bowls, globular jars, and stands, which appear in association in some cases.

The interpretation of the site as a domestic area is fairly uncontroversial, although the taphonomic issues here make the excavation and recovering of organic remains problematic: the area was probably a damp environment probably seasonally flooded and closer to the ocean than current location points out. Thus, periodical washing out of the surfaces where the houses stood up, as well as the nature of soil deposition -yellow clay likely washed by rain from the hills surrounding the site over centuries, in a slow process of sedimentation- which appears as a homogeneous package comprising the entire prehistoric time from the Neolithic into the Iron Age, hides potential markers for continuity or rupture between both periods. Our insights of the site, supported by the analysis of pottery, among others, point out to a fairly enduring occupation over a time span of more than 2 millennia¹, abruptly interrupted by the European occupation.

This does not mean, however, that the social formation of the Taiwanese aborigines remained static. We have already mentioned the documentation of metallurgical activities. On the one hand, this shows a degree of internal change within the Heping Dao population that can be traced also over most of the island. On the other hand, and although there is some margin to hypothesize a partially local development of a fairly simple technology such as that documented here (Cruz Berrocal et al 2018, in preparation), it is probably parsimonious to acknowledge a long contact of the Taiwanese locals with other Chinese and/or Southeast Asian groups arriving in Taiwan since fairly early, c. the 9th century AD (Cruz Berrocal 2016; Liu and Wang 2017; Cruz Berrocal et al 2018). Still lacking an exact chronological date, the Chinese early contact is however indeed attested at Heping Dao through elements such as Celadon, or greenware, possibly dating to the 10th–12th centuries (Liu and Wang 2017: 284; see contextual discussion in Cruz Berrocal et al 2018), ceramic net sinkers whose typology points to an origin in the South of China, and Chinese stoneware –or high-temperature pottery-. The single most important piece of stoneware unearthed in Heping Dao attesting a long

¹ Dates are mostly based on conventional chronology assigned to the Taiwanese sequence in general, for the Late Neolithic on. C14 dates have not yet been produced systematically in Heping Dao.

interaction between Taiwanese aborigines and Chinese is a child burial uncovered in the European cemetery (see below). The child was placed, with some ornaments typical of the Taiwanese indigenous people, inside a Chinese stoneware jar together dating to the seventeenth century, following the Austronesian burial form (Tsang and Li 2015; Valentin et al. 2015; Cruz Berrocal et al 2018). The fact that the burial introduced a Chinese production could point to a well engrained used of Chinese material culture in the aboriginal Taiwanese life before the European presence, so much so that both domestic as well as ritual life had been pervaded by it.

Despite this early contact, aboriginal social groups apparently preserved a way of life and loose hierarchy that characterized their material signature throughout the prehistoric period. Whether these northeastern Taiwanese societies were House societies or not has been discussed by Chiang (2015) and Cruz Berrocal et al (2018) and could be supported by some historical documents, i.e. *“The organization of these Indians is quite peculiar; for they have no common government: each head of the family is the absolute master of his own house, having no one over him: neither a judge nor any superior. While this is the case, they still live peacefully. Another matter is when they wage war on outsiders; then they hold meetings and councils”* (SIT: 569, Brief account of the situation on the Holy Rosary Province of the Order of Preachers...). The truth is that the status of these social formations remains little understood, although their stratification appear to have not been strictly evident to Early Modern Europeans (Cruz Berrocal et al 2018, for the Spanish, the aboriginal Taiwanese *“have no king; the strongest one of each village is considered its leader”* (SIT:65, Salvador Díaz’s description of the Dutch fort in Taiwan and his account of the activities of the Dutch, the Japanese, and the Chincheos); they *“have no headman or chief who governs them, but each village governs itself, and some are at war with others”* (SIT:88, BA fragment from a Jesuit annual report entitled ‘An account of the Philippine Islands and the neighbouring areas’).

The Chinese who may occasionally landed in Taiwan since the 9th century on managed to establish a, we must hypothesize, fruitful contact with the aboriginal Taiwanese in spite of the different understandings of social prominence. Maybe there were not big differences after all since the Chinese groups were most likely fishing communities scarcely stratified (Wills 1999: 86; Cruz Berrocal et al 2018). In any case, the interaction between both groups could be attested not only by the archaeological record but also by the Boxer Codex (Hsieh 2017), produced before the Spanish took over Heping Dao, and it is of the outmost significance: the fact that the Chinese and the natives had established exchange networks that could be reproduced or co-opted, was probably key for the survival of the Spanish settlement in Heping Dao (Cruz Berrocal 2016; Cruz Berrocal et al 2018). Where the appropriate “niche” for interaction was not pre-existing, the Europeans had little chances of success in their colonization endeavours.

THE EUROPEAN COLONIAL TIMES

The first written texts about the inhabitants of Heping Dao were produced by Spanish, who give estimates of population, toponyms, and describe the subsistence and other features of life of the people they call Basai², Austronesian-speaking populations of the northern coast of Taiwan. From the texts it can also be inferred that the Basai had established a deep link with the sea. They are said to *“live on fishing, hunting, salt making and fashioning arrows, houses, clothes, and knives. They do not plant as the other natives do because they do not know how. Still, they serve as farmhands for*

² More recently known as Ketagalan (Li 2001).

the rest, the way the sangleys (Chinese) work for us, as they are always bustling about. They are friendly and mingle with the other villages with whom they barter manual work for rice and corn. These natives are craftier and more sardonic than the others who are simple and more open” (SIT:166, Record of affairs concerning Isla Hermosa, according to the Dominican priest Fr. Jacinto Esquivel). They became intermediaries between the Chinese and other Taiwanese groups, a role that they probably played with the Spanish too.

The way of life described by the Spanish in the 17th century is consistent with the archaeological findings for previous time periods -archaeobotanical and archeozoological research is still ongoing-. Given that agriculture was probably not feasible on this small island during prehistory³, the Basai based their subsistence on cereal staples, probably rice, obtained from other groups in exchange for goods that are not easy to determine. As mentioned above, the archaeological remains point out the importance of deer and therefore hunting, probably beyond subsistence; the work on jade and other imported stones for arrowheads and other artifacts; and the potential weight of metallurgy for the household production (Cruz Berrocal et al 2018, in preparation). Moreover, the Spanish documents could point to a continuation of these basic features of Basai political economy during the European colonial period. The presence of the Taiwanese aboriginals in the colony would have been desirable, in spite of potential resistance or danger. Indeed, the material signal points out to a clear dependency of Europeans on the aborigines, as well as the Chinese, for the survival of the colonies in Taiwan and potentially in Asia-Pacific (Cruz Berrocal 2016; Cruz Berrocal 2017). Both groups would have acted to some extent –and in spite different racial preconceptions of the Spanish-, in some equivalent way: the people in Heping Dao, were for Spanish’s eyes, more similar to the Chinese than they were to other Taiwanese groups. Since the Basai’s economic activities in Heping Dao were quite distinct from those of other Taiwanese groups, they adopted some of the roles that the Chinese played in other areas (Chen 2006). This is probably a key feature to understand their role in the colonization process, and their likely presence in the colony throughout European times and beyond.

The materiality of daily life in the colony seems to have been shaped by both groups, Basai and Chinese, as observed in the material culture recovered from Heping Dao. In 2019, some pieces relating to European dress have been recovered (still under study); by far, however, the most abundant artifacts relating to the European colony are Chinese porcelain and stoneware, mixed with indigenous material culture. The lack of European material culture is most flagrant; the Spanish appear to have used Chinese and indigenous objects (especially pottery known as Shisanhang or Kiwulan style). It could even be said that the Spanish may have undergone a process of “indigenization” rather than the other way around. Indeed, the marriages between Spanish and native women seem to have been prevalent (Cruz Berrocal et al 2020). A most interesting piece of evidence in this context would be the native burial recovered from the Dominican cemetery. This, along with the church (Convent of All Saints), are the most monumental remains recovered so far in Heping Dao, and a unique finding in Asia-Pacific (Cruz Berrocal et al 2020).

³ The geomorphology of the site seems to change with the European occupation, and by the first half of the 20th century the island was under cultivation (photographic documentation by the Japanese scientific expedition of 1936, Cruz Berrocal et al 2018).

SUBSEQUENT OCCUPATIONS OF TAIWAN IN HEPING DAO

The Spanish were expelled from San Salvador by the Dutch, who in turn were defeated by the Zheng family, who took over San Salvador de Quelang and Taiwan. They opposed the Qing dynasty and the island became the core of the Zheng House (Wills 1999; Hung 2000) and headquarters for the sustenance of Ming loyalism between the 1660s and 1680s. The remains in Heping Dao cannot be safely ascribed to the Zheng period, but to a non-specific Zheng and Qing time, the latter inaugurated by the annexation of Taiwan by mainland China in 1683. The Qing period is abundantly represented in Heping Dao; the area was apparently used for the extraction of sulfur for the production of gunpowder (Keliher 2003: 79), but contemporary documents point to the reluctance of the Chinese to stay and patrol the north. Indirectly, the presence of the Taiwanese aboriginals in the area seems attested in this demurring. It is also attested in the archaeological record through the pottery productions, in spite of an increasing visibility of the Chinese through abundant material remains and constructions (Cruz Berrocal et al 2018). Heping Dao had become at this point a stepping stone in the regional trade and a Chinese settlement where the native component had not been completely erased. The record shows an endurance of hand-made pottery of indigenous traditions and even a timid presence of mixed techniques of hand-made/slow wheel that could be attributed to native potters, given the abysmal difference in the crafting ability of the Chinese. One more piece of evidence could point to the survival of Basai groups in the area keeping their own traditions after the European banishment and possibly under the Qing rule: a burial excavated by the Japanese in 1936 as observed in pictures of the expedition shows an adult in close spatial relation with one of the main stone buildings of the colony, presumably the fortress, which would show a reutilization of colonial spaces once they had been abandoned (Cruz Berrocal 2016; Cruz Berrocal et al 2018).

The aboriginal presence in the archaeological record nonetheless starts disappearing in recent centuries, in parallel with the enlarging role of Heping Dao as a scenario of worldwide historical and social processes. The Japanese occupied Taiwan in 1895 after the First Sino-Japanese war. The colonists did not seem to show major interest for Heping Dao until a scientific expedition visited the area in the 1930s to study and excavate the European colonial remains. Little after that, Heping Dao once more became strategic in geopolitical terms: the current shipyard on the island was built on the premises of the European fortress in preparation for WWII. The shipyard and a naval submarine station made of Heping Dao a potential target during the war although we have not recovered material evidence of bombing as opposed to the heavy bombing that Keelung, on the mainland, suffered. But abundant material evidence of occupation during WWII is well visible in the record, i.e. porcelain, bottles (in many cases complete), tooth brushes, shoes, metallic artifacts, food debris (sea urchins prominently), and a large trench (running to a length of at least 33 m perpendicular to the entire archaeological site; it reaches an estimated surface of 150 m²) that could have been excavated as a defensive structure during the war, in probable association with other features –barracks, a shower or sink directly built on the ground, and a possible latrine. After the war, Taiwan was relinquished to the Republic of China (ROC).

CONCLUSIONS

The history of Heping Dao is one of rich and complex historical processes with global implications, in particular the overlapping episodes of contact, colonialism and imperialism which show how

different these social and historical movements appear in material terms. Over these changing scenarios, an example of endurance can be singled out: although sometimes feeble in the archaeological record, some degree of continuity in life can be rescued as a narrative that pervades our interpretation and has implications (see Cruz Berrocal et al 2018 for a discussion), starting with the view of the prehistoric period as primarily a story of continuity in practices and materials along the transition between the Neolithic and the Iron Age. Either as Basai or Ketagalan, or as a group of different native identities⁴, an “indigenous” core, ie. Taiwanese in the most literal meaning of the word, or more to the point here, a “local” agent, would likely have remained, in changing forms, until contemporary times. This endurance is fundamental to understand at least the first truly colonial episode: the Europeans would have had much worse prospects to settle down and make the colony survive given the political and economic situation of the colonists, and the Spanish Empire at large, were it not for the support of the indigenous-Chinese niche of exchange.

In subsequent times, and in spite of prevalent ideas that the Qing annexation and massive arrival of Chinese from the mainland led to complete replacement of the indigenous traditions by Chinese imports, it is probably more parsimonious to interpret the archaeological and the ethnographic record -in particular the many pictures taken by Japanese researchers during the colonial occupation of Taiwan in the twentieth century in which the aboriginals are depicted with their own ceramic vessels- as a living tradition instead of as a late re-creation by the aboriginal Taiwanese (Lu Taikang, pers. comm.; Cruz Berrocal et al 2018).

In Heping Dao, it seems that the presence of the Taiwanese aboriginals gradually fades away, possibly in accordance with their identity, especially after the 19th century AD. But we need to keep in mind that using solely the archaeological record makes it difficult to evaluate the situation of the Taiwanese aboriginals, since their material traces become minor as the material signature of other agents and large-scale historical events take over. It is always necessary to keep an eye for the local and the persistent, rather than the monumental and disruptive.

⁴ Also including potential mix with Chinese, and even with Europeans and other cohorts of people that accompanied, per force or voluntarily, the Spanish, among them, most prominently, the Filipino soldiers and workers.

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Dr. Cruz Berrocal is a Research Fellow at the International Institute of Research of the University of Cantabria, and an Associate Fellow at the Zukunfts Kolleg of the Universität Konstanz. Her research focuses on prehistoric and historical archaeology of long-sequences with a special emphasis on colonial processes. She currently develops research projects on Heping Dao, Taiwan, together with Dr. Tsang Chenghwa (since 2011) and Dr. Ellen Hsieh (since 2019), and Wallis and Futuna, French Territory Overseas, Central Pacific.

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Archaeologist, since 1988 she has directed numerous archaeaeological interventions, among which are those carried out in urban areas with extensive and complex sequences of occupation. In 2012 she joined the team of the international research project “Taiwan in the 17th Century: Archaeology of Early Colonialism and the Beginnings of Globalization”, directed by Dr. María Cruz Berrocal. Serrano is currently a PhD student and her research focuses on the analysis of the prehistoric sequence – Neolithic/Iron Age – of the Heping Dao B site (Keelung, Taiwan) and the comprehensive study of prehistoric ceramic materials inserted in this sequence.

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Dr. Cheng-hwa Tsang is an archaeologist. Before his retirement from Academia Sinica in 2017, he was a Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute of History and Philology. Afterwards he was awarded a Distinguished Research Chair Professorship at National Tsing Hua University and appointed as the Director of the Institute of Anthropology. His main research specialties are the archaeology of Taiwan, South China and Southeast Asia. He has been engaged in the research of Taiwan archaeology for over 40 years and carried out many archaeological research projects, including the Heping Dao Archaeological Project, which has been co-directed with Dr. María Cruz Berrocal since 2011.

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Dr. Ellen Hsieh is an assistant professor at the Institute of Anthropology at National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. She is also a research associate at the National Museum of the Philippines. Her research focuses on historical archaeology in East and Southeast Asia in the context of global history, the production, transportation and consumption of trade ceramics, and postcolonial and network theories in archaeology. Her previous project concentrated on colonialism in early Spanish Manila; currently she is co-directing the Fort San Salvador and Todos Los Santos Church Archaeological Project, Heping Dao, Taiwan, together with Dr. Tsang Chenghwa and Dr. Cruz Berrocal.