

**THE ABORIGINES OF NORTHERN
FORMOSA: A PAPER READ
BEFORE THE NORTH CHINA
BRANCH
OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY**

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The Aborigines of Northern Formosa: A Paper Read Before the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society by Edward C. Taintor

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ABORIGINES

OF

NORTHERN FORMOSA:

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE

NORTH CHINA BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC
SOCIETY,

Shanghai, 18th June, 1874,

BY

EDWARD C. TAINTOR, A.M., F.R.G.S.,

Commissioner in the Chinese Customs Service.

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THE ABORIGINES OF NORTHERN FORMOSA.

THE eastern portion of Formosa, it is scarcely necessary to remark, is in the possession of aboriginal savages. The part occupied by them, which comprises at least two thirds of the area of the island, is mostly mountainous and densely wooded. The Chinese settlements lie along the comparatively level tracts which extend from the base of the central range of mountains westward, to the western coast, and continue across the northern end of the island and a short distance down the eastern coast. I cannot better introduce the whole subject than by quoting a few paragraphs from a Trade Report written by me five years since.

“The rugged character of the eastern portion of Formosa has been alluded to above. The proportion of level or valley land to be found is exceedingly small, precipitous and densely wooded mountains occupying by far the greater portion of its extent. The Chinese settlers, in gradually pushing their way into the interior, denude these mountains of their forest coverings, and the dividing line between the territory reclaimed by them and that still in possession of the aborigines is distinctly marked by the boundary of the wooded tracts. The water courses are merely mountain torrents, dashing down through the rough rocky gorges, and affording no facilities for navigation. The ability of this part of the island to

support a population is thus naturally very limited. The savages who at present occupy it are thinly scattered throughout the few level tracts to be met with, and maintain a precarious existence by hunting, and the cultivation in small quantities of beans, millet, and bananas. These supplies often fail them, and with their natural aversion to labor they will go for several days without food, until pressing hunger prompts them to organize hunting parties for deer, wild pigs, or bear, which latter animal is occasionally to be met with. These people stand at the very lowest point in the scale of civilization, and in physique those of the northern portion of the island at least are generally puny and insignificant. Long limbs and short trunks indicate a degenerate type of body, and their habits and mode of life are such as are found only among the most degraded savages. Like most of their class, they have a fatal fondness for ardent spirits, and the use of these has frequently endangered the friendly relations which the Chinese have in some few instances endeavored to establish with them, and has led to conflict, loss of property, and sometimes of life. Few in numbers, and weak in combination, they are incapable of offering very serious resistance to the encroachments of the Chinese upon their territories, and are doubtless destined to disappear before the slow but steady advance of their more enterprising neighbors."—(*Customs Trade Reports for 1868*, p. 170.)

"Upon the eastern coast, commencing about twenty-five miles south of Kelung, and extending some fourteen miles farther, to Suao Bay, lies a fertile and beautiful plain or valley. Its popular name is Kapsulan (蛤仔巖), and the official Komalan (噶瑪蘭). It is bounded inland by a semicircle of mountains, its greatest breadth being six or seven miles. The valley is one vast rice field, and much of its

produce is carried to Kelung. Several thriving towns lie within its borders. The chief of these, Lotong (羅東), is a clean, well-built town, with a considerable population, and an active trade. The valley has been almost entirely settled within the present century. It became, soon after its discovery, and while still occupied by savages, the resort of bands of outlaws; but during the closing years of the last century parties of Chinese settlers were attracted thither by the richness of its soil, and as the immigrants increased and pressed upon each other, feuds arose, which led to a memorial to the Emperor from the provincial authorities in 1810, and to its erection into a *t'ing* (廳) district by Imperial edict in 1812.

"The original inhabitants of the plain, a fine looking race of people calling themselves Kabaran, have been gradually driven by the Chinese farther and farther towards the mountains, or altogether out of the valley. They have become to a great extent civilized, and adopt many Chinese customs. They are called in the local Chinese *Pepo hwan* (平埔番) or savages of the plain, in distinction from those dwelling in the mountains. Driven from their original seats, they have themselves pushed their way in some places into territory in possession of the still untamed savages. An attempt in this direction on a considerable scale has been made during the past year by a colony of Pepos, under the leadership of a foreigner, at a place called Ta-lam-o (大南澳), situated on the east coast about fifteen miles below Suao. Friendly arrangements have been made with the savages, and the valley is abundant in resources; but the enterprise has met with strong local opposition, and its success is, from a combination of causes, problematical."—(*Id.*, pp. 167-8).

My own visit to the savages on the east coast, which was made in January and February 1869, arose partially out of circumstances connected with the colonization scheme alluded to. Very shortly after my visit, the scheme ended in a disastrous collapse, and a few months later the foreigner who had been its active leader was drowned near the southern end of the island.

I propose first to narrate briefly the incidents of our journey, and then give the results of my observations on the aborigines and their country.

Our party left Tamsui at midnight on the 14th of January, 1869, for Kelung; and the mildness of the winter climate of Formosa may be inferred when I state that we passed the night in an open gig on the river, without discomfort from the cold. We left Kelung on the 16th, in a junk of about twenty tons, and after calling at Pitow, a coal harbor a few miles down the east coast, arrived at Suao Bay on the morning of the 18th. Here a heavy north-east gale detained us for five days, making it impossible for us to put to sea in the small open row-boats in which it was necessary to proceed the remaining 15 or 16 miles to Talamo. This delay enabled me to make some notes upon the customs and character of the Pepos, and to collect a vocabulary of a few hundred words. A small Pepo village lies on the southern side of the bay. I may remark that during our stay here a *census* of our party showed that it was composed of no less than eight distinct nationalities—two Scotchmen, one German, one American, and one

Spanish Mexican, one Goa Portuguese, a Malay, and sundry Chinese and Pepos. Finally, the gale subsiding, we embarked in small boats manned by Pepos, on January 23rd, and reached Lam-o (南澳), the landing place for Talamo, after a pull of three hours. Here we found a small stockade or fort, built by the Pepos under foreign direction, as a defence against sudden surprise by the savages. Talamo, the site of the newly formed colony, lay about two miles from Lamo, the path thither winding inland around the base of a steep mountain which abuts abruptly upon the sea. A still larger stockade, with bastions of stone, and capable of holding at least a hundred men, had been built at Talamo, a short distance from the sea. At both places we found large parties of the savages who had come down from the interior to see the foreigners, the report of our intended visit having been spread among them by the Pepos.

Our stay here, of eleven days, was passed in making short excursions into the interior, and in getting vocabularies of the savage language and making notes upon their habits and characteristics. The longest of our excursions, some seven or eight miles, was up the valley of the small river which flows into the sea at Talamo. The valley, perhaps a mile and a half wide at the sea, rapidly narrowed, until soon it was a mere mountain gorge, and the river a mountain torrent. Enormous boulders blocked the way, and over these the narrow and not easily distinguishable savage trail led; and our scrambles over them were often attended with considerable risk