

# THE FORMOSAN ENCOUNTER

Notes on Formosa's Aboriginal Society:  
A Selection of Documents from  
Dutch Archival Sources

Volume I: 1623-1635

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Published by

Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines  
Taipei 1999

This could be arranged satisfactorily by using the kidnapped Chinese<sup>1</sup> but as many Chinese live in Tayouan, they could incite the natives to make war against us, which would be greatly to our disadvantage.

*(In October, 1623, Commander Reyerssen himself made a trip to Tayouan in order to survey the local situation. In the following November two merchants, Jacob Constant and Barend Passaert, made a two-day trip to Soulang. Reyerssen returned to the Pescadores on November 18, 1623.)*

**5. Description of the village of Soulang on the island of Liqueo Pequenó<sup>5</sup>, its situation, the daily life of the people, wars, and so forth, as far as we have discovered this and learned from our own experience. VOC 1081, fol. 105-109.<sup>6</sup>**

fol. 105: "Scheepende van de reede van Taijowan naer de Stadt Soolangh set men sijn coers Noorddoost ten Oosten aen, totdat men compt bij 6 à 7 eylan-deckens, die geheel vlak, ende sonder heuvelen sijn met groene nuijchten sonder geboorte gewoosen. Deselve altesamen aen backboot van sich latende, de lenghte van ontrent 2 à 3 musquets schoots, alwaer men gromt heeft op 5, 4 en 3 voeten waeters minder ofte alteskens totdat men ontrent het vertroncke en moerassich lant van de cust van Lique Pequenó comt, twelck heel laach en onganckbaer is door de scherpe wortelen, die daer uit de bracke gront voort spruijten, daer men niet meer als een ofte ten uyersten 1½ voet waters heeft (soo dat men hier de Chinesee champantgens voort ende over sleepen moet), totdat men alle de voorsz. eylanckens verbi, ende op ontrent een gootelingh schoots, het voorsz. vertroncke lant genaect is, het welck ontrent 4 à 5 mijl van de voorsz. reede van Taijowan mach, sijn. Hier sal sich terstond een embocadeliro ofte mont van een revier openbaeren, hebben de wijde van ontrent 50 passen in het incomen, daer men allenskens dieper water crijcht, tot de 20 voeten ende meer toe, dat is vol samplaten, door het scheuren van aff en oploopende stroomen, gemenigh met de cromaticheyt des voorsz. reviers geauseert, twelck den voorstichtigen genoesaen ende lichtelijck te mijden sal sijn, ist bij soo verde hij yeis op reviere bedreven is.

Dese revier ontrent ¼ van een hollanse mijl opgevaren sijnde vint men een harde, vlak, ende dorre camp ofte stuk lants, palende aan het voorsz. scherpe ende wortelachtich morass, sonder eenich teijcken ofte merck, dat aldaer de plaecse is, daer de champans der Chineseen aenleggen alsoo de vloet het water van de reviere (die hier noch sout is) over 't voorsz. lant doet

loopen, waer door de mercken afgespoel, ende te niet worden; welck vloet de voorsz. camp ofte gront, deselfs soo brack maect, dat de son daer over schijnende alst water gevallen is, een natuerlijk sout baet; twelck de passanten, doort flicker van de some d'ooogen doet schenmenen soodat het wonderlijk bequaem soude sijn om souppannen te maeken de natter deslans met onse ofte der Chinesee industriel een weijnich geholpen sijnde. Ende alsoo ick dagelijck mercke, de Chineseen met d'inwoonders in sout waeren met de Chineseen handelende 't welck sij met wancans uit China brachten, communiceren het selve met cappien China, hem vragende waerom de Chineseen sout vijf China herwaerts over brachte naerdemael de naeture van 't lant, door 't toedoen van de son en zee-water, het selve haer in overvloedicheij was schenkende. Creech hierop voor antwoord dat dit fol. 105v: de Chineseen seer wel bewust was ende schrandter genoech waren omseive vijf deese naturelijke mildicheij te trekken, dan soo wanneer sij het selve de inwoonders eens voor gedaen souden hebben, den profijt geven- de handel der selven te niet soude gebracht sijn, als sijnde een cunst en w- tens, die alleenlijk doort gesicht geleert can worden. Derhalven haer tot in dese heerne devoyte ende simpelheij waeren houdende.

Comende weder tot ons propoost, soo gaet men van de oevere van reviere over het voorschreven soultant ('t welck vlak, door en cal is) door een bebent pat, 't welck leijt tot eenighen velden, die al gepagert sijn met rijns ende andere groenten besaijt, ontrent dewelck eenighe cleene hujskens ofte schueren staden, van bamboese ende stroo opgemaect tot gertief dergeenen dit lant bearbeijden. Tusschen desen leijt het pat door en breinight op een wech, die-hier-ende daer met eenighe overdede vaelijn beset is, daer men overdach voor de hette der some in can rusten. Alles sonder te connen bespeuren, waer ofte waeromtrent de stad leijt, voor ende alleer men deselve onversints op het lieff is, want deselve onbemaect ende niet dicht bebout is maer soo haest men een groote bosschagte ende lommeringh van rieden ofte bamboesen verneempi, doen hen de huysse ofte eer de stad selfs op, met soo treffelijke gebouen dat men ider hujs een tempel soude meenen te sijn, sijnde de selve ronsonn met heele bamboese bepagert.

't Fatsoen derselver is min ofte meer als een omgekeert schip, te weten in deser voeghen: sijn ontren een groot mans lengide verheven boven der aerde gefondeert op cleij, daer sij in ende op gebouwt sijn, welke cleij soo cuerius ende net bestrecken is, dat niet soude seggen iselve van wilde, maer Europese meesters gedaen te sijn. Vergelijcke deselve cleijge fondementen bij het verdeckt ende overloop van een neerlants schip, daert geen quade forme ofte gelijkensise van heeft.

or lights, but they manage with a small fire, burning in one of the corners of the house between three or four stones. And if they need a light to find something they take a burning brand of wood from the fire and blow on it so that it glows and gives off light, or burn a bundle of straw that very quickly disintegrates into smoke and ashes.

On one side of their dwelling everyone has five, ten, or fifteen coconut or calappus palm-trees inside the fence which they do not tap but from which they pick the young coconuts and drink from them or keep them to ripen. Some people also have a few lime-trees. On the other side of the house stand small cabins on crossed piles of a solid construction for the storage of their rice and food during the year. These have solid doors to prevent theft. And this is all concerning the houses.

Moving on to speak of their household, it does not bother them nor is it a burden, for they have few or no possessions in the house. The men have no interest in it whatsoever because their task is hunting and warfare. The women sweep the house and they are very skilful and good at it, cleaning it a hundred times a day. They cook and steam their rice (which is red) until it resembles porridge. They gather fruits in the forest and oysters, shellfish and small fish at the seaside or in the river (but strangely enough they do not have fresh fish nor fishery), and take care of the needs of the tame swine and with all this they are busy from morning till night.

Other women of less means (fol. 106v.) or status walk along the seashore into the water up to their necks, fishing for jellyfish, snails, and other rubbish to eat, this is done without the company of men. Other women who stay at home or in the near vicinity, plait together blades of grass to cover their own private parts or those of their children, but this hangs so lightly around their loins that the slightest breeze blows it up and embarrasses them. Some old women split and beat the roots of trees and make yarn out of this. They roll the ends together and join them, like our sailors twine and splice their yarn.

The treasure of their house, apart from the aforesaid basketry with the assorted cloths, consists of deerskins which they lay down for each other at their gatherings, to sit or to sleep on. They also show off their assegais, swords, or choppers, of which even the handles are made of deerskin, nicely or artfully drilled and engraved, in which they are extraordinarily skilful. There is no doorpost, pillar or anything that can possibly have something attached to it in or around the house that has not been covered

with deerhorns, heads, jaw-bones or other trumpery. Why they do this, out of peculiarity, superstition or some other reason, I do not know.

There is no ceremony whatsoever in their marriage customs. For the bride's parents, friends, or acquaintances, being informed of a marriage, give the daughter in question to the young man without the exchange of any dowry or bride price. Before this daughter is acquainted with her husband carnally, or her husband with her, two of her upper teeth are knocked out of her mouth with stones, which shows whether she is married or not.

During the day men do not visit their wives, nor the wives their husbands, but the husband summons his wife to come to (the house of) one of his close friends or acquaintances and this friend sends for his wife to come and meet him at the house of the other. In the evening each husband visits the house of the friend where his wife is lodging in the evening, performs his conjugal duty, after which each returns to their own bed and house.

They do not appear to be very jealous of their wives, nor do they think prudishly of the act of procreation, for it overcame us when we were there that a man who used his wife (said with reverence) in a natural way (and what is more: in our presence), took her by the hand and led her to us to commit the same act and replace him at his work, which to their amazement we refused, deeming this to be unchristian.

And although both men and women appear naked and (fol. 107) unashamed in front of each other, I nevertheless have the impression that they do not revel so much in lasciviousness or unchaste desire as any other nation that I have encountered so far, as far as I could gather and understand from daughters and sons, married women and men as well as unmarried young people in conversation and social intercourse during these few days. None of the wives show their husbands humility, respect, or reverence, no more do the children their parents, the young their elders, or the common people their superiors. They go wherever they want and do whatever springs into their minds, like people who are raised in a rude uncivilized manner, unbridled by fear, shame, honour, or laws.

They raise their children in a tough and ruthless way and love the girls more than the boys. This clearly is shown by the jewellery with which they prefer to deck the girls, rather than the boys: like bangles, beads, and other baubles, apart from this they are naked. Furthermore, they are more often carried on the arm and the shoulders, whereas the boys run around without any heed being paid to them.

Generally speaking the men are taller than is our average man by a head and a neck. They are, as has been mentioned, stark naked without covering up their private parts. Like women in our country they have long hair, which hangs down loose and is not plaited. Some old people have branded their bodies from top to toe with a hot iron and have painted them, which I did not see or notice among the youth or young adults, for they have perfectly unblemished and smooth bodies.

They are a very sturdy and well-built people. Generally speaking they are amazingly fast and skilful runners, I even believe they can outrun a horse. They present a fine and perfect appearance, as nature has been good to them, apart from their brownish body and skin, which equals the darkness of the people from Ternate, although the children and young people appear to be of a fairer and more yellow colour.

Their language sounds pleasant, modest, measured, and extraordinarily graceful, so that judging them in this respect you would not think them to be savage but to be outstandingly wise men, filled to the brim with modesty and virtue. They use a strange language mixed with many Malay and other strange or foreign words like *badji*, *takur*, *busak*, *makan*, *ikan*<sup>10</sup> etcetera and also *macselo* and *mapiho*<sup>11</sup>, which are used on the island of Talaut near the Sangir archipelago.<sup>12</sup> I am ignorant what sort of dialect this is, but I understood it comes from the Jorisis,<sup>13</sup> who sailed to this island or ended up there by accident and stayed and begot offspring. But whether it is a fact or not I refer to the truth.

fol. 107v.: Their religion is diverse. Some seem to follow the religion of the Moors, others paganism, for some have eaten much pork with us, while others by contrast seemed frightened to do so and were averse to eating it. There is only one priest in every village, whom they venerate as a deity. In addition, they have a lot of old women whom they use in the same function. Although we did not notice them practising any religious ceremonies, it is a fact that every home has its own special altar, shoddy, dirty and rundown, shrouded and soiled with cobwebs and other filth. On these altars they put aforementioned altars there are a few strings to which the hair of the aforesaid vanquished is tied. This has been divided up into small braids to give the impression that they conquered and defeated a host of enemies. To this, here and there, they add their choppers, assegais, and other arms, which also serve to decorate this altar. As far as I could discover, they nei-

her observe much superstition in this respect, nor do they pose any questions if we touch, move or even offend or repudiate their superstitious and idolatrous artefacts.

I believe nevertheless that they use them in some sort of ceremony when they go to war or come home from it, which happens once or twice a year. This is when crops are harvested and in the barns, in order to prevent the crops from being trampled under foot, spoiled, or lying unharvested. I did not ask for the motive, purpose, or intention of this factionalism and, as I do not know it, I therefore remain silent on the matter.

When they go to war, every little hamlet or village drums as many adult males as possible or is allowed, whom they put into the field against the other villages, even though they are allies and friends during the rest of the year. Women and children stay at home, being useless in combat.

At the public marketplaces of the villages, five in number and fairly large, daily drills are held. There they run against each other to gain the upper hand, sparring with reeds or canes and trying to gain advantage over the opponent. Some men and women sit about, watching this exercise and one person beats a drum made out of tautened deerskin, representing the musicians, like we have drums and trumpets at our exercise.

The aforesaid young men, although stark naked, decorate their heads, waists and arms with greenery, more or less like one sees Bacchus depicted, his body wreathed in ivy.

Others have made garlands out of the flat part of the deer's tail, painted in all sorts of colours, which they likewise wind around their heads, arms, and waists and they seem to be very proud of it.

The man who has (fol. 108) defeated the most enemies in war or brings home several heads is greatly revered by them and will be admitted to the number of the seven most important men, which gives him no further gain than the first claim in the hunt and a choice of the quarry. On the other hand they get a seat or as we would say a cushion among the government officials, whose duty it is to appear at one of the marketplaces daily before sunrise (when lute is plucked or a drum is beaten) to inform all the people, young and old, gathered there what is afoot, on which the lowest votes equally with the highest, without discrimination of person, quality, or status.

The town (by the name of Soolangh) is very large, which (in my opinion) makes it comparable in size to some of the largest cities in the Netherlands. But it is not surrounded by walls or palisades, nor is it densely built, becau-