

Governmentality and Its Consequences in Colonial Taiwan: A Case Study of the Ta-pa-ni Incident

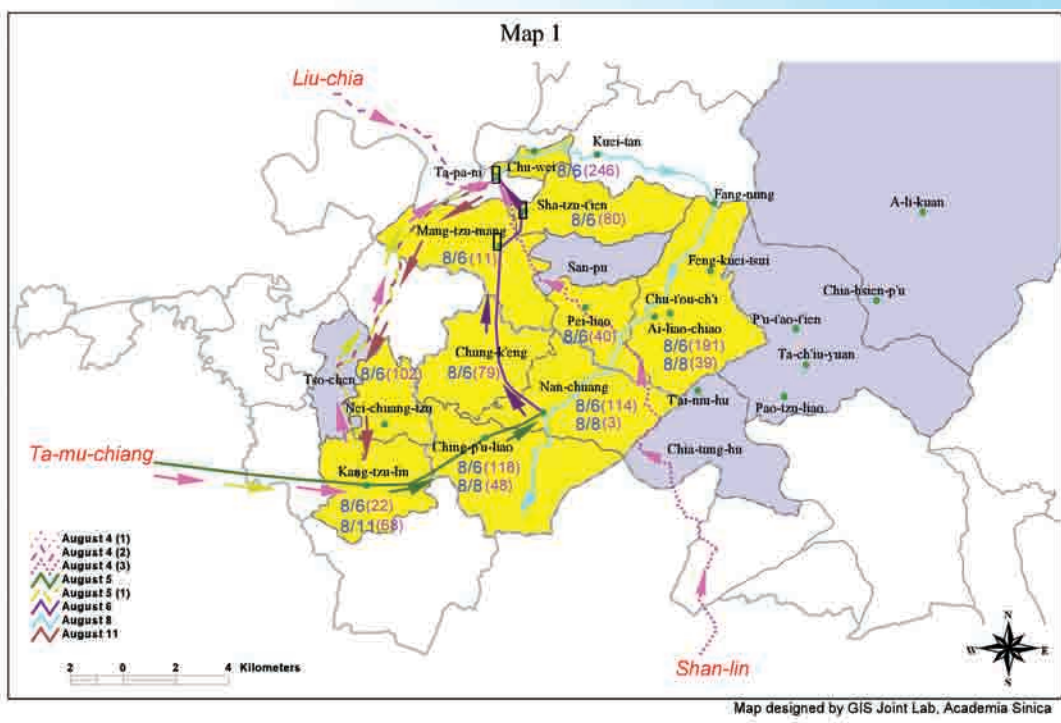
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Abstract

This paper attempts to better understand the background and long-term impact of one of the most dramatic acts of armed resistance to occur during the colonial era: a one-month long armed uprising in 1915 referred to as the Ta-pa-ni (pronounced Da-ba-nee) Incident. I begin by briefly introducing the villages that participated in the Ta-pa-ni uprising, including their diverse social and ethnic structures, local economy, and the impact of Japanese colonial policies. This is followed by an account of how villagers mobilized to rise up against their colonial overlords, as well as the role millenarian beliefs, vegetarianism, oaths, and banner worship played in the mobilization process. I then analyze the Ta-pa-ni Incident's impact on local society, especially in terms of mortality rates, causes of death, and the ways that local women coped with this catastrophe. Finally, I describe how the Incident survives in the memories of local villagers today.

In postcolonial Taiwan, the colonial past does not rest in peace. In particular, attempts to address events that took place during the period of time when Taiwan was a colony of Japan (1895-1945) frequently spark controversies between scholars and politicians embracing vastly different ideologies and historical perspectives. For example, in attempting to explain why some Taiwanese resisted Japanese rule, previous scholars have generally adhered to one of two hermeneutical extremes. One interpretation, initially adopted by the colonial authorities and persisting in some scholarship today, treats acts of armed resistance as a form of banditry. Another, first presented by scholars in Republican-era China and further propagated by some scholars today, depicts these very same uprisings as patriotic partisan warfare driven by nationalist sentiments.

This paper attempts to shift the focus of research about Taiwanese resistance during the colonial era from highly articulate forms of legalistic protest by urban elites to the deeds and motivations of men and women who were neither bandits nor patriots – rural wage earners, petty entrepreneurs and agriculturists. By choosing to focus on the manifold experiences of



local communities, I attempt to better understand the broad range of political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors which helped spark one of the most dramatic acts of armed resistance to occur during the colonial era: a one-month long armed uprising in 1915 referred to as the Ta-pa-ni (pronounced Da-ba-nee) Incident. Beginning in early July 1915, Yü Ch'ing-fang (1879-1915; a former police officer, clerk, and rice merchant) and Chiang Ting (1866-1916; a former district head from the Nanhua area who became an outlaw after being implicated in a murder case), led an armed force of Han Chinese and Aboriginal fighters that quickly overwhelmed numerous police stations in the mountains of southern Taiwan (today's Tainan and Kaohsiung counties). The uprising lasted for over two months and was only put down after sustained counterattacks by a combination of Japanese military and police forces (see Map 1 and Figure 1). The Ta-pa-ni Incident was one of the largest acts of armed resistance to occur during Taiwan's colonial era, with the number of Taiwanese and Japanese killed during the fighting estimated to have exceeded 1,000 people. A further 1,957 Taiwanese were arrested after the

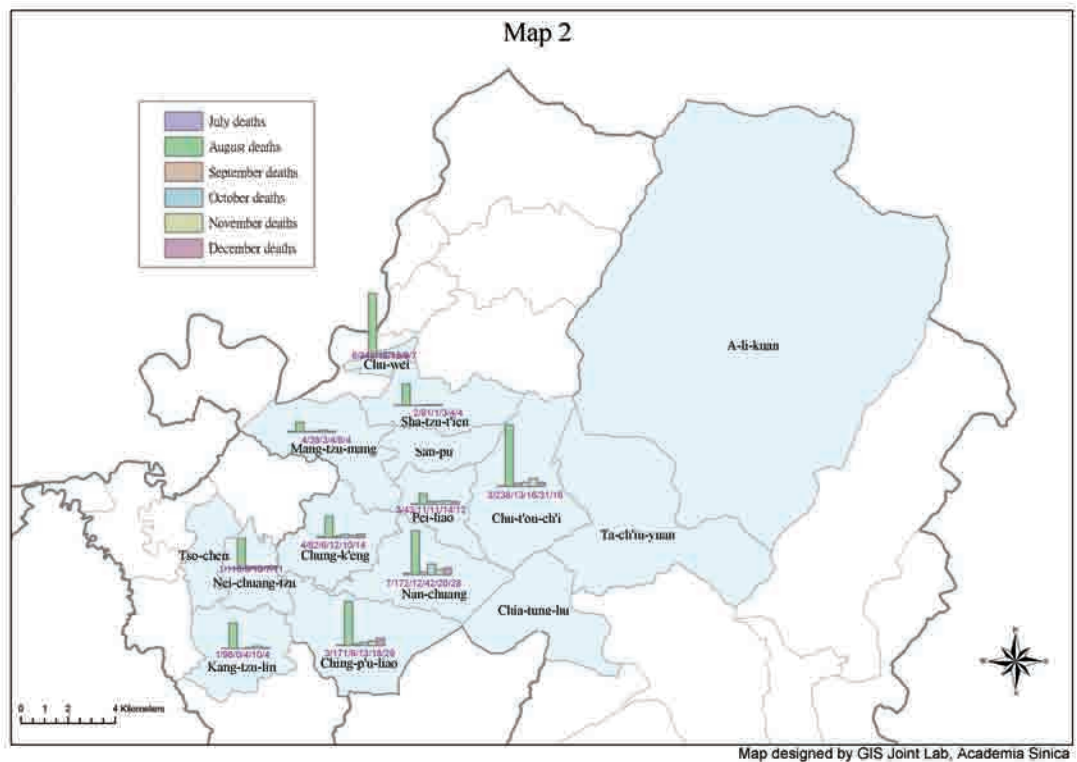
uprising was suppressed, of whom 1,482 were put on trial and 915 sentenced to death. A total of 135 Taiwanese were executed before the Taishō emperor issued a decree of clemency, while scores more died in prison. Those who participated in the Ta-pa-ni Incident came from northern, central, and southern Taiwan, but the greatest number of participants, including those who actually took up arms against the Japanese, lived in the hills and mountains of southern Taiwan where the fighting took place (especially the area encompassing today's town-



Figure 1.



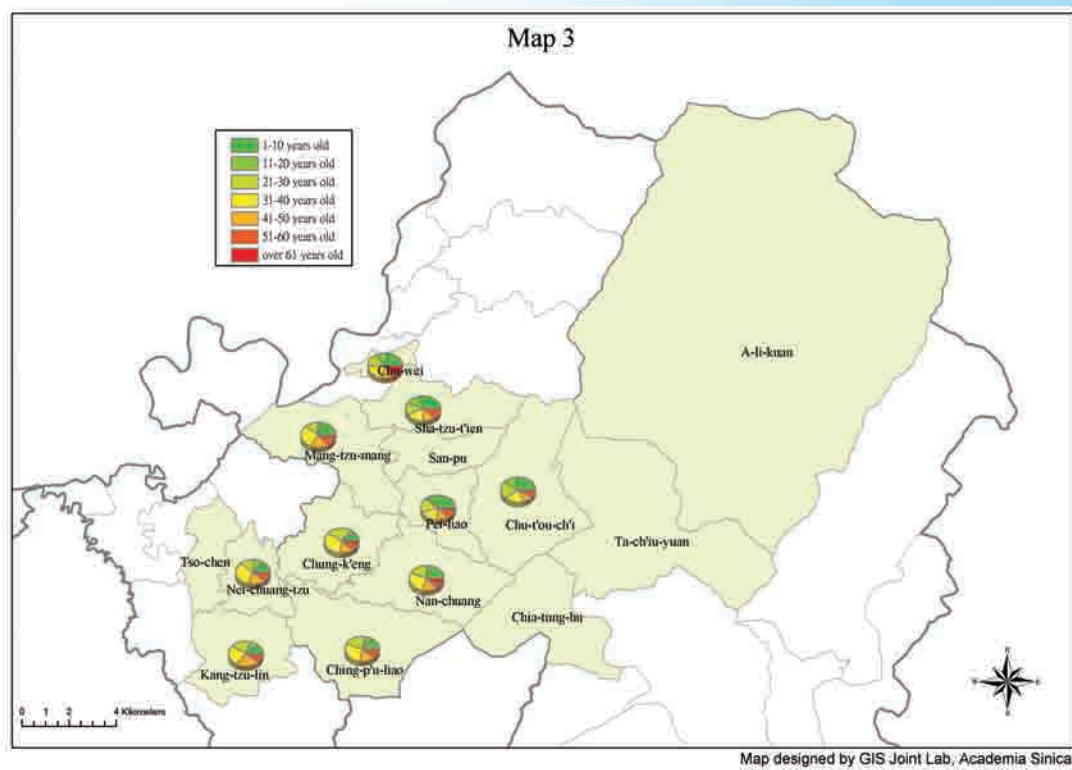
Figure 2.



ships of Yü-ching, Nan-hua, Tso-chen, and Chia-hsien).

This paper begins by briefly introducing the villages that participated in the Ta-pa-ni uprising, including their diverse social and ethnic structures,

local economy, and the impact of Japanese colonial policies. This is followed by an account of how villagers mobilized to rise up against their colonial overlords, as well as the role millenarian beliefs, vegetarianism, oaths, and banner worship played in



the mobilization process. The core of the paper is devoted to assessing the Ta-pa-ni Incident's impact on local society, especially in terms of mortality rates and causes of death.

One key question that has long troubled historians of the Ta-pa-ni Incident is how many villagers died at the hands of Japanese police and military forces sent in to suppress the uprising. Nearly three decades ago, Wang Shih-lang claimed that thousands of villagers had perished, while Ch'eng Ta-hsüeh drew on oral histories and demographic reports to hypothesize that there had been a massacre at Ta-pa-ni, but that it did not involve the thousands or even tens of thousands of deaths cited in some accounts. More recently, T'u Shun-ts'ung has argued that a total of 3,200 villagers were massacred. However, data contained in annual censuses and the household registers indicate that in the ten villages included in this study that had registers from 1915, a total of 1,789 individuals perished between July and December 1915. Not all these people died as a result of acts of violence, however, as some deaths were also a result of exposure, dis-

ease, and natural causes.

I have attempted to reconstruct mortality patterns for the villages most directly affected by the Ta-pa-ni Incident by relying on data that can be gleaned from the household registers and other demographic sources. According to these texts, from July to December 1915, the majority of deaths in these villages occurred among adults (mostly adult males) between the ages of 21 and 50, with some deaths also occurring among children under age 10. However, during the four months after the Battle of Ta-pa-ni (August 6) and Yü Ch'ing-fang's arrest (August 22; see Figure 2) many of the dead were young children (see Maps 2 and 3). This was an indirect result of the presence of Japanese soldiers and police, who stayed in the area in order to seek out and destroy those rebels who were hiding out in the mountains. When their efforts failed to bear fruit, they began to take out their frustrations on local villagers, and in some cases entire villages were forcibly relocated and their inhabitants imprisoned in stockades for weeks on end.

Because so many adult males had been killed

or imprisoned, local sex ratios ended up being highly unbalanced. In most villages located in the region where the Ta-pa-ni Incident occurred, approximately 54 percent of the local populace was male and 46 percent female. For the villages involved in the uprising, the totals are almost exactly the opposite, 44 percent male and 56 percent female. Moreover, in most villages located in this area, the percentages of bereaved spouses were approximately 38 percent widowers and 62 percent widows; however, in the villages most affected by the Ta-pa-ni Incident the figures were 19 percent widowers and 81 percent widows. Birth rates also took a long time to recover, mainly because large numbers of adult males had died or been sent to prison, while some women had

left their native villages to find a spouse.

In the course of researching the Ta-pa-ni Incident, my assistants and I have spent many hours interviewing some of those individuals who survived these tragic events, or heard of them from their family and friends. Listening to their histories has been deeply moving, but I have also been struck by the strength these men and women showed in coping with intense adversity, as well as their willingness to show forgiveness at the same time. This combination of sentiments has found vivid expression at the home of one of my key informants, Chiang Ping-huang. Chiang lives in Chu-wei village in Yü-ching Township, a rural community that suffered frightful devastation during the fighting. A

corner of his garden, located near the sole edifice that survived the flames of war, has been devoted to commemorating the past in the form of a set of bricks shaped like a heart, in the center of which sits a stone carved with the words “A Wish for Eternal Peace” in Japanese (see Figure 3). It is on this note of hope that our study of the Ta-pa-ni Incident ends.



Figure 3.

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