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On the Tombstones and Ancestral Tablets of the Wu Family of Songkhla in South Thailand

By Sōkichi Kimura

It is well-known that a large number of Chinese left their native land and emigrated to the Southeast Asian countries, largely due to the upheavals associated with the transition from the Ming dynasty to the Ch'ing. However, it has recently been noted that such Chinese refugees or their descendants were not only engaged in trade, commerce and so forth, but also that some of them attained political power in Southeast Asian countries from the latter half of the 17th century to the latter half of the 18th century. Among these, Dr. Chen Ching-ho noticed in his article that Mac-Cuu 鄭玖 of Ha-tien 河仙, Chên Chao 鄭昭 in Siam, Lo Fang-po 羅芳伯 of Pontianak in western Borneo and Wu Jang 吳讓 of Songkhla in the Malay Peninsular region of present-day Thailand were contemporaries who were supported by groups of their fellow Cantonese, Teochiu, Hakka and Fukien countrymen, respectively. Of these four men, the first three have already been the object of considerable scholarly research. But so far, little research has been done on Wu Jang.

Wu I-lin 吳翊麟 was the first man to make an on-the-spot investigation of the tombstones and Shên-chu 神主, or ancestral tablets, of the Wu family, and he proposed a new theory regarding the family line on the basis of this investigation and various Thai records; the details may be found in *Sung-k'a Chih* 宋卡誌, or the Topography of Songkhla, by Wu I-lin (published in Taipei in 1968).

The author of the present article also investigated the tombstones and ancestral tablets of the Wu family at Songkhla in August of 1969, compared his own observations with those of Wu I-lin, and noticed certain problems.

According to *Phongsawadan Muang Songkhla*, or the Chronicle of Songkhla, by Phraya Wichiankhiri (Chom—the eighth of the

Wu family governors of Songkhla), Wu Jang emigrated to Songkhla from Fukien Province in 1750. He worked in and around Songkhla as a vegetable gardener, fisherman, and merchant, and won favor with the populace of Songkhla. In 1767, Ayutthaya, the capital, was captured and sacked by Burmese invaders. Subsequently, Chêng Chao, or Phraya Taksin, repelled the Burmese invaders, proclaimed himself King of Siam, and established a new capital at Thonburi. At that time, only the central part of Siam came under his influence, the other part being controlled by the former royal family or retainer of the Ayutthaya dynasty. In 1769, King Taksin mounted an expedition to Nakhon Sithammarat and Songkhla, and consolidated his power in the south. In recognition of the loyal services of Wu Jang during this period, King Taksin appointed him excise officer for swallow's nests on two islands in Songkhla Lake, enobled him with the title of Luang, and took his third son back to the capital as a royal page. Wu Jang was an efficient tax farmer and regularly remitted the annual revenues to the capital. In 1775, King Taksin duly rewarded his loyalty and ability by appointing him governor of Songkhla. Wu Jang survived the change of dynasties in 1782, and served as a governor until his death.

Subsequently, the governorship of Songkhla was passed on by hereditary succession until the eighth governor retired in the reign of Rama the fifth of the present dynasty. It is a noteworthy fact that an overseas Chinese and his descendants maintained local political power for such a long period, i. e., about one hundred and twenty years.

2 The author examined the twenty-one tombstones and six ancestral tablets mentioned by Wu I-lin, referring also to Thai records. The author found that the tombstone No. 19 listed by Wu I-lin did not, in fact, belong to the Wu family. The author also felt that, in certain cases, there was insufficient evidence to identify the particular members of the family to whom some

of the Wu tombstones belonged.

The author observed that the personal names in Chinese characters found on the tombstones or ancestral tablets can be divided into three categories: (1) True Chinese names, that is, Wu Jang, his sons' names, most of his grandsons' names, etc. (2) Transliterations of Thai names: for example, Mien 綿 (Fukienese pronunciation: Min), the name of the sixth governor, is merely a transliteration of his Thai name, *Men*, and his brother's name, Shêng 省 (Fukienese: Sieng) is also a transliteration of his Thai name, *Saeng*. (3) Combinations of the tzŭ-pei 字輩, or the Chinese character used to distinguish the different generations (Each member of any given generation has the same character in his name, so that his position in the genealogical tree can be determined), and the transliteration of the Thai name: for example, Hsüan Lieh 宣列 (Fukienese: Soan Liet), the name of the first son of *Men*, is a combination of 宣 which is the tzŭ-pei of the fifth generation of this family, and the transliteration of his Thai name, *Net*; the names of all his brothers are also composed in this manner. The above-mentioned examples are merely a few among the many in this category. Generally speaking, from the great-grandchildren of Wu Jang downward, Thai names occur with increasing frequency.

Wu Jang and his group came to Songkhla from China as agricultural emigrants during the last period of the Ayutthaya dynasty, when Siam was in chaos. Since Wu Jang was appointed governor of Songkhla, his family and descendants were dedicated servants of the successive Thai kings, and various titles were conferred upon them. Consequently, the Wu family were rapidly assimilated into Thai society, although part of the Wu family did attempt to preserve their Chinese cultural heritage. It seems that in general, assimilation was already well under way in the days of Wu Jang's great-grandchildren, and the Chinese cultural identity of the family eventually disappeared.

Finally the author sincerely hopes that the tombstones of the

Wu family will be restored as soon as possible, since some of them are already in ruins.

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However, the author himself must assume sole responsibility for the opinions expressed in the present article, and for any errors which may appear therein.