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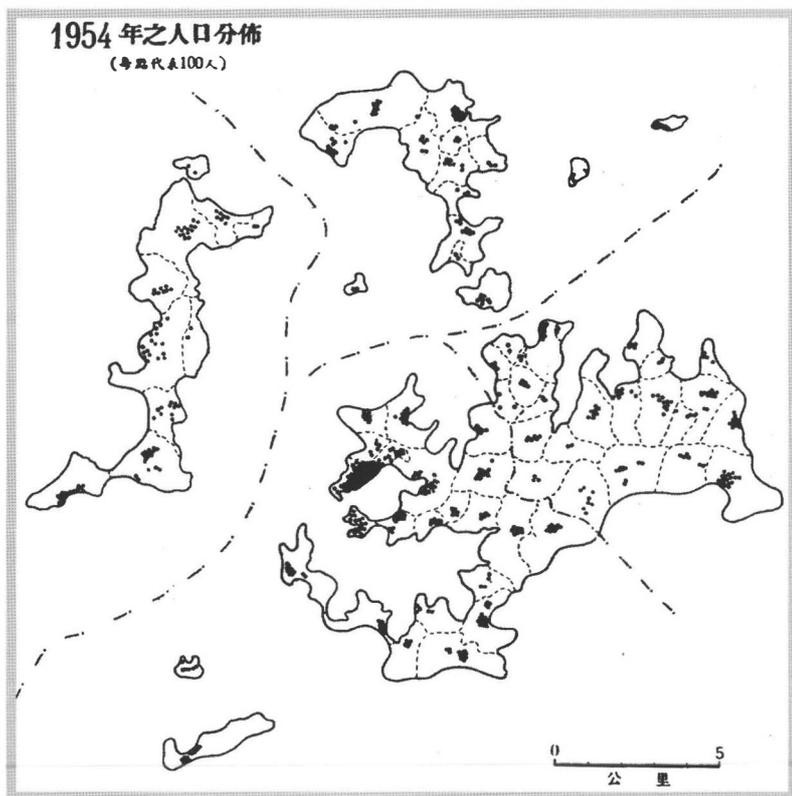
## FISHING AND FISHERS IN PENGHU, TAIWAN, 1895–1970

史 Sigrid Schmalzer

In the Taiwan Strait that separates the Chinese mainland from the main island of Taiwan lie sixty-four small islands that together constitute what is today the county of Penghu 澎湖 in Taiwan. These are the islands Portuguese sailors named the Pescadores (Fishers') Islands. The Portuguese have not been alone in conceiving of Penghu in this way. The Qing<sup>1</sup> (1683–1895), Japanese (1895–1945), and Chinese Nationalist (1945–) states have all seen in Penghu an archipelago of fishers. Yet, what it meant to be a fisher in Penghu changed dramatically over the course of their successive rules. This is true in two senses: people's lives

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**Figure 1**

*Population distribution in Penghu, 1954. Each dot represents 100 people. The most densely populated area surrounds Magong 馬公, the county seat. The scale is in kilometers. Source: Chen Zhengxiang, Penghu xian zhi [Gazetteer of Penghu County] (Penghu: Penghu Xian Zhengfu Chubanshe, 1955), pp. 50–1 (insert)*

<sup>1</sup> Romanization of Chinese words follows the *pinyin* system developed in the People's Republic of China. While the Wade-Giles system is still dominant in Taiwan, *pinyin* has increasingly become standard in English-language writing on China.

**Figure 2**

*A house made from rocks. These men are preparing to dry and smoke eel (reproduced, with permission from the publisher and from the photographer Zheng Yingxie, from Lin Guibin, ed., Baisha fengqing: Penghu huaijiu zhaopian zhuanji [View of Baisha: a photo album in memory of Penghu] [Magong: Penghu Xianli Wenhua Zhongxin, 1997], p.72)*

**Figure 3**

*A stone fish trap (shihu 石滬). These devices, still in use today, consist of long levees of stones built several feet high that stretch in a wide v-shape into the ocean. During high tide, fish searching for food swim between these levees, which guide them toward a small opening that funnels into a heart-shaped structure. At low tide, fishers close off the opening and use nets to scoop up the trapped fish. I have been unable to determine how ownership and profit distribution is arranged regarding these structures. Source: Wen-yan Chiau, "The role of religion in coastal resource management: the case of Kupo Island, Penghu (Pescadores), Taiwan," Coastal Management 26 (1998): 19–20*



changed, and understandings of their group character changed.

The Penghu islands possess many characteristics that distinguish them from the lands to their east and west. While densely populated (see Figure 1), they have been characterized as poor and backward since at least the Qing dynasty, and this depiction lasted well into the Nationalist period. The Penghu fishers were also strikingly different from the Tanka 蛋家 fishers of the New Territories (Xin jie 新界) made familiar by anthropologist Barbara Ward. The Tanka lived exclusively on their boats and were perceived to be of different ethnic background from the land-dwelling farmers.<sup>2</sup> Penghu fishers lived on land in houses made from the same rocks that form the reefs and coastline of the islands (Figures 2–3). Not only were they ethnically undifferentiated from farmers, they *were* farmers. Farming and fishing went hand-in-

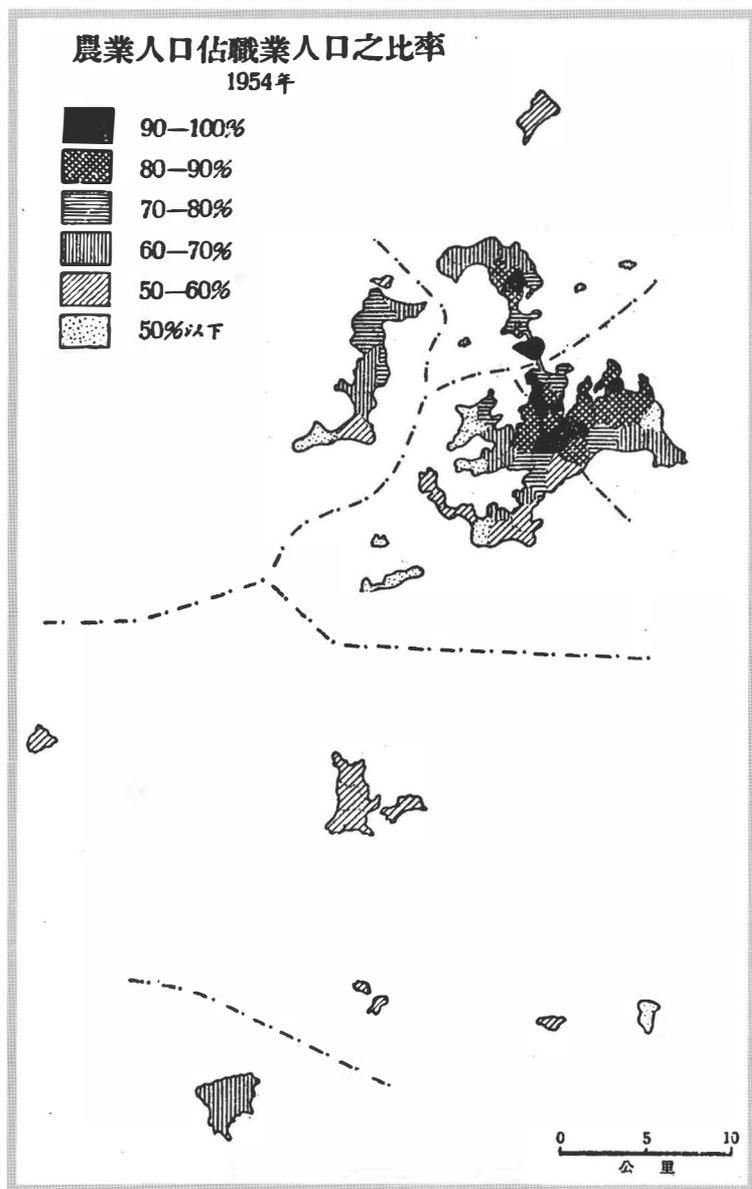
<sup>2</sup> Barbara Ward, *Through other eyes* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1985), pp.3–4.

hand. Moreover, despite the oft-stated assertion that fishing constituted Penghu's main industry, fishing did not occupy more labor or generate more produce than farming did during the period under investigation (Figures 4–5 and Table 1). How the people of Penghu themselves, in addition to the states that governed them, nevertheless came to understand their home as an archipelago of fishers is the subject of this paper. I suggest that the formation of a fisherfolk identity, distinct from that of farmers, was produced through increased state involvement and changes in discourse, social organization, and material culture.

### *Inexhaustible Resources and Hopeful Prospects*

Both the Japanese and Nationalist regimes sought to make fishing in Penghu a more modern and scientific enterprise.<sup>3</sup> Inherent in these modernization projects was the challenge of describing diverse fishing practices and people in a coherent and systematic way, especially so that such descriptions could be used as materials in the emerging discipline of fisheries science. Thus, the production of knowledge about fisheries was itself a process through which changes in the fishing industry were realized.

What type of statement explains what it means to consider a group of islands to be fishers' islands? For the Qing dynasty, the following statement from the 1771 *Penghu ji lue* 澎湖紀略 (Penghu Annals and Summary) is typical of official perspectives on the area: "The land of Penghu is very saline, and very little can be cultivated. [The people] all use the ocean as their fields."<sup>4</sup> That this phrase was saturated in the discourse can be seen in the 1884 *Penghu ting zhi* 澎湖廳志 (Penghu Sub-Prefectural Gazetteer), in which the author notes that typhoons regularly prevented people from going out to fish, so



**Figure 4**

This map displays the percentage of people in each area who farm. Note that the minimum value is set at 50% and below. The scale is in kilometers. Source: Chen, *Penghu xian zhi*, p.52

<sup>3</sup> An influential fisheries periodical during the Japanese colonial period, unfortunately unavailable in the United States, was *Taiwan suisan zasshi* [Taiwan fisheries magazine]. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for *EAH* for this information.

<sup>4</sup> Taiwan Yinhang Jingji Yanjiu Shi, ed., *Penghu ji lue* [Penghu annals and summary] (1771; reprint ed., Taipei: Taiwan Yinhang, 1961), p.149 (hereinafter *Penghu ji lue*).

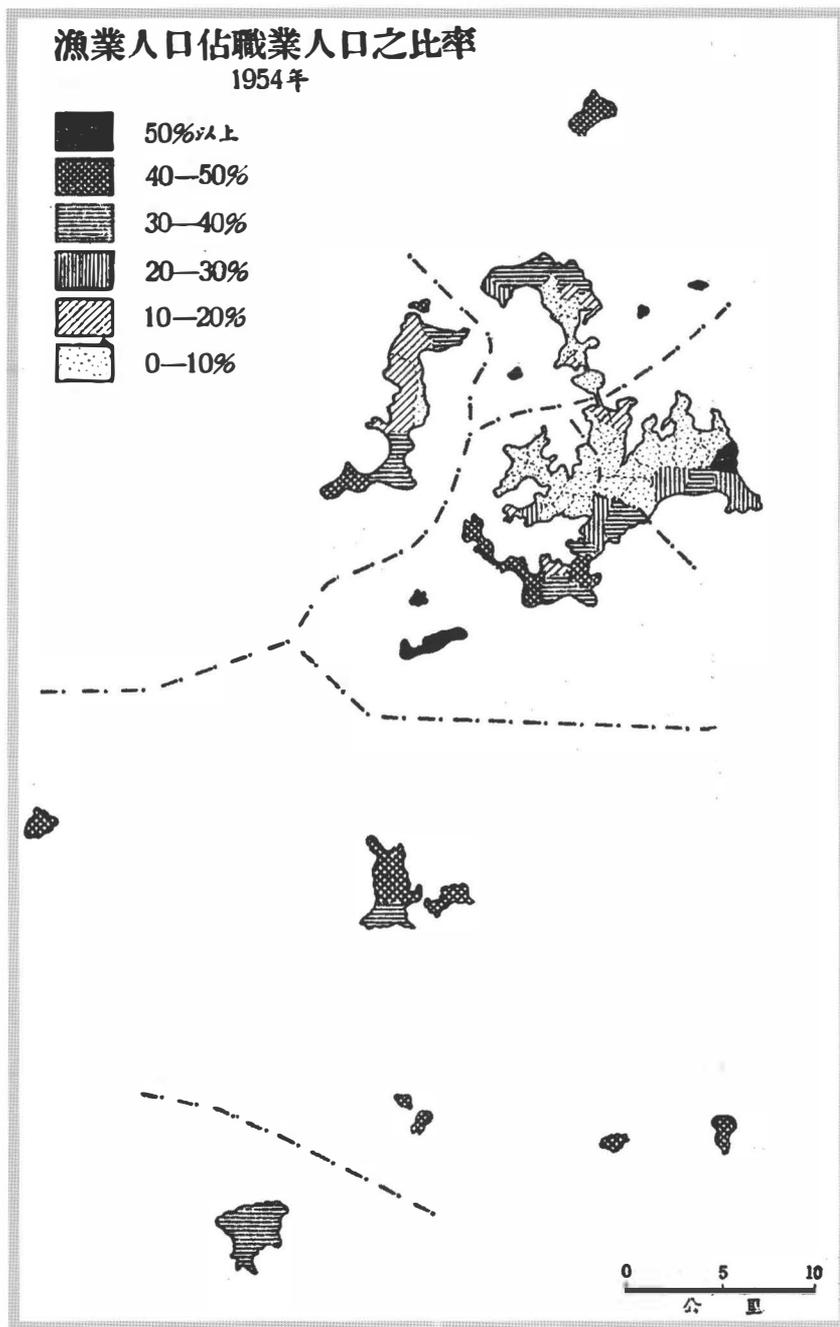


Figure 5

This map shows the percentage of people in each area who fish. Note that the maximum value is set at 50% and above. The scale is in kilometers. Source: Chen, *Penghu xian zhi*, p. 70

that “the so-called ‘using the ocean as fields’ after all is not an accurate expression.”<sup>5</sup> The author questions this stock phrase not to suggest that islanders relied on farming rather than fishing, but rather to emphasize the extreme poverty of people dependant on the fickle sea for their means of livelihood. Thus, the description of Penghu as an archipelago of fishers was intimately connected to the lack of productive land: fishing was what people without good land did as a last resort to keep themselves fed. This emphasis reinscribed the historical preoccupation in China with agriculture as the foundation of society.

A passage from the introduction to the *Penghu ji lüe* section on “aquatic products” (*shuichan* 水產) provides a similar, though more positive, interpretation.

The people of Penghu use the ocean tides as their fields, and use fish and clams for their livelihood. The products of the ocean are equivalent to the output of the grains. Take them and they are without limit; use them and they are not exhausted. All [people] rely on aquatic products.<sup>6</sup>

Waxing poetic, the author of this passage draws from Daoist ideas and phrasing.<sup>7</sup> It stands in marked contrast to an earlier passage introducing the section on land products, which characterized the land as barren, windy, and short on rain.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Lin Hao, ed. *Penghu ting zhi* [Penghu sub-prefectural gazetteer] (1884; reprint ed., Taipei: Taiwan Yinhang Yanjiu Shi, 1962), vol. 2, p. 349.

<sup>6</sup> *Penghu ji lüe*, p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, chapter four of the *Dao de jing* 道德經: “The Way is empty, yet use will not drain it” (D. C. Lau, trans., *Tao te ching* [New York: Penguin Books, 1963], p. 11).

<sup>8</sup> *Penghu ji lüe*, p. 160.

**Table 1**

With the exception of 1956 (when poor weather conditions resulted in low harvests) and 1957, agricultural output always surpassed fisheries output. Moreover, this is without including vegetables, fruit, and animal products. According to the Gazetteer of Penghu County, in 1930, agriculture comprised 40% of Penghu's total production, fisheries 31%, livestock 20%, and industry only 10%. In 1935, while fisheries made up 37% and agriculture 33%, if livestock were added to agriculture the total would doubtless surpass fisheries. In 1940, plant agriculture alone again outstripped fisheries 41% to 33%. See Chen Zhengxiang, *Penghu xian zhi*, p.62. Looking again at the table, between 1949 and 1960, the increase in fisheries output exceeded the increase in agricultural output by a factor of four. Note that fisheries increases were concentrated in the first half of the decade, while agriculture increased more significantly in the second half. Source: *Penghu xian tongji yaojian* (see n.27) 1950–1, 1957–60

Year	Ag. output* (in kg)	% change since 1949	Fisheries output (in kg)	% change since 1949
1949	15,146,275		3,388,835	72%
1950	22,014,044	145%	2,446,605	144%
1951	23,108,044	153%	4,894,533	161%
1952	26,387,783	174%	5,457,366	161%
1953	23,695,721	156%	5,170,477	153%
1954	20,416,275	135%	14,616,915	431%
1955	21,699,316	143%	17,560,037	518%
1956	13,712,831	91%	22,024,943	650%
1957	22,081,982	146%	26,739,006	789%
1958	33,458,843	221%	29,003,657	856%
1959	40,010,403	264%	30,551,007	902%
1960	35,825,615	237%	32,079,330	947%
<b>% change 1949–54</b>		135%		431%
<b>% change 1955–60</b>		165%		183%

\* Agricultural output includes only the six most important staple crops. Vegetables, fruit and animal products are excluded.

Unlike the land, the waters of Penghu are said to offer an inexhaustible resource for the people in their search for a means of livelihood.

The notion that Penghu's fisheries, unlike its agriculture, represented an unlimited resource was to remain a common theme throughout the Japanese and early Nationalist periods. The implications of this characterization, however, changed significantly. A 1929 Japanese survey of Penghu put it this way: "Possessing this unlimited storehouse, but with the fishing industry still in its infancy, the prospect for Penghu's fishing industry is hopeful."<sup>9</sup> The

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, *Hōko jijō* [Conditions of Penghu] (Taihoku [Taipei]: Chengwen Chubanshe, 1985 [1929]), vol.1 (hereinafter *Hōko jijō*, vol.1), p.59.

<sup>10</sup> See note 5 above.

<sup>11</sup> Taiwan Sōtokufu Minseikyoku, ed., *Shokusanbu hōbun: suisan shi bu* [Report from the Bureau of Increasing Production: Fisheries Section] (Tokyo: Dai Nippon Suisan Kai, 1896), pp.69–77.

<sup>12</sup> *Hōko jijō*, vol.1, p.57.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Li Rangzhi, “Penghu yuye jin mao” [The recent face of Penghu’s fisheries], *Yu you* [Fishermen’s friend] 15, 25 July 1953, p.20.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase, “experienced fisherman’s island,” is a pun on the name of one of the islands in the archipelago—Yuwengdao 漁翁島. Li Rangzhi, “Penghu yuye,” p.20.

<sup>15</sup> Chen Zhengxiang, *Penghu xian zhi* [Gazetteer of Penghu County] (Penghu: Penghu Xian Zhengfu Chubanshe, 1955), p.62.

<sup>16</sup> Lin Shuihuo, “Jieshao Penghu shuichan zhixiao” [Introducing Penghu’s Professional Fisheries School] *Yu you* 21, 29 October 1953, p.21.

crucial distinction between this description and those of Qing-dynasty Chinese writers lies in the move toward a future-oriented discourse. Unlike the Qing state, the Japanese colonial government actively sought to modernize Penghu’s fisheries as part of a larger effort to make Taiwan a productive part of its expanding empire. In true colonial spirit, this official publication found Penghu fishing practices to be immature and thus inefficient in exploiting the archipelago’s natural bounty. The full exploitation of these resources existed in an imagined future made possible by state-directed, modernizing inputs.

That the Japanese government showed an unprecedented interest in developing Penghu’s fisheries can also be seen in their descriptions of the islands’ geological features. While such Qing texts as the *Penghu ting zhi* highlighted the dangers posed by typhoons,<sup>10</sup> Japanese sources noted the excellent harbors Penghu’s natural topography provided. For example, in an 1896 survey of Taiwan’s fisheries conducted just one year after Japan claimed the islands, colonial officials took care to note the particular suitability of certain areas for the anchoring of fishing boats (and, notably, military vessels).<sup>11</sup> The 1929 Japanese source cited above further points out that the sunken reefs surrounding Penghu did more than pose hazards for boats: they provided excellent living conditions for a great variety of fish, and thus excellent fishing conditions for the islands’ inhabitants.<sup>12</sup>

Writings from the early Nationalist period shared both the positive attitude to Penghu’s coastline<sup>13</sup> and the future-oriented approach to describing Penghu’s fisheries. An article in a 1953 issue of the periodical, *Fishermen’s Friend*, introduced the fisheries of Penghu thus:

A long time ago, Penghu became famous for being an island of experienced fishermen. Now, fisherfolk are still the foundation of the social organization here... There is not much arable land, and in addition the land is very flat and so has lots of wind and blowing sand. The land does not hold water when it rains. Thus, the prospect for agriculture is very limited. However, the surrounding vast ocean contains unlimited fish resources. In recent years, under the government’s positive encouragement and assistance, Penghu’s fishing industry has already turned a new page.<sup>14</sup>

This picture of Penghu fisheries resonates with those found in both the Qing-era texts and the Japanese publication quoted above. Like the Qing documents, this article contrasts bountiful ocean with barren land. However, it shares with the Japanese source an explicit concern for Penghu’s economic future, a future considered optimistic under government planning and aid. Other early Nationalist writings echo these sentiments, calling fisheries “the most hopeful of all Penghu’s production industries”<sup>15</sup> and stating that “the development of the ocean is her [Penghu’s] only way out [and] Penghu fisheries are in the process of making great strides forward.”<sup>16</sup>

### *Seeking from the Sea, Engaging in Fisheries*

The passages quoted above also point to another type of statement that identify Penghu as fishing islands, one that focuses on the fishers themselves. The Qing *Penghu ji lüe* described Penghu's residents to "all use the ocean as their fields" and "all rely on aquatic products." The early Nationalist author just cited asserted that "fisherfolk are still the foundation of the social organization" in Penghu.<sup>17</sup> Although these texts share an understanding that Penghu's residents were predominantly fishers, the question of how their activities characterized them as such underwent dramatic changes over the periods examined.

The 1771 *Penghu ji lüe* describes the practice of fishing in the following beautiful prose:

Men in the daytime ride on the tide and open their nets. At night, they drive their boats into the ocean to fish. The women also follow the ebb and flow of the tides all day long. They go to the ocean to collect shrimp, crabs, snails, clams, and other animals. They call this "seeking from the sea" [*taobai* 討海].<sup>18</sup>

A 1903 Japanese source describes the same scene, perhaps drawing from the Qing-era text.<sup>19</sup> A Japanese source from 1896, however, provides a more extended meaning for the term "seeking from the sea." According to the authors, "fishermen" (*yufu* 漁夫) are called "people who seek from the sea" in the local Penghu language,<sup>20</sup> and thereafter the authors use the two terms interchangeably. "People who seek from the sea" does not appear in any of the other materials I have found. What replaced this term is the subject of the following investigation.

From the beginning of its rule of Taiwan, the Japanese colonial government showed an interest in Penghu's fisheries. The 1896 text cited above is a thorough investigation of fisheries practices in several Taiwan locations. The chapter on Penghu occupies fifty of the almost two hundred pages. In addition to surveying the species caught, types of gear used, and social organization of fishers, the book includes a description of many of the archipelago's villages. For most villages, it provides figures for the number of dwellings, people, fishermen or people who seek from the sea, and often boats and nets as well. In contrast, the Qing-era texts examined above provided only numbers of households and people for all of Penghu, supplemented in at least one source by the number of adult males (for tax purposes) in eleven towns.<sup>21</sup> They did not inquire into the numbers of fishers, boats, or gear. Thus the Japanese colonial government, unlike the Qing government, sought not just to describe Penghu as a fishers' archipelago, but to become involved in its transformation, beginning with a quantification of resources, capital, and labor.

<sup>17</sup> See notes 4, 6, and 14 above.

<sup>18</sup> *Penghu ji lue*, p.149. *Tao* could also be translated as "to beg." If this was the meaning intended, it may have carried a connotation that the activities of fishers were no better than those of common beggars in contrast with the respected work of farmers. Alternatively, it may have been connected with a religious notion that fishers were at the mercy of the sea personified by the goddess Mazu 媽祖 ("Matsu" in the Wade-Giles romanization system).

<sup>19</sup> Tōgō Yoshitarō, *Hōkotō* [The Penghu Islands] (Tokyo: Aoki Suzando, 1903), p.30.

<sup>20</sup> Taiwan Sōtokufu Minseikyoku, *Shokusanbu*, p.70.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, *Penghu ji lüe*, pp.86–7.

<sup>22</sup> Taiwan Sōtokufu Shokusan-kyoku Suisanka, *Taiwan suisan tōkei, Shōwa 11* [Taiwan fisheries statistics, 1936] (Taihoku [Taipei]: Suisanka, 1938).

<sup>23</sup> Chen Liang, “Wei shenme yao qingzhu nongmin jie” [Why (we) should celebrate a Farmers’ Festival] *Yu you* 3, 25 January 1953, p.11.

<sup>24</sup> Chen Zhengxiang, *Pengbuxianzhi*, p.62.

<sup>25</sup> Chiao-min Hsieh, *Taiwan—Iba Formosa: a geography in perspective* (London: Butterworths, 1964), p.292.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in numbers: the pursuit of objectivity in science and public life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.42.

Statistical volumes produced by the Japanese colonial government intensified this trend. The 1936 volume of *Taiwan Fisheries Statistics* (Taiwan suisan tōkei 臺灣水產統計) counts “people engaged in fisheries,” and it breaks this group down into a dazzling array of categories.<sup>22</sup> After Japan relinquished Taiwan to the Chinese Nationalist government in 1945, the Nationalists based their system of counting fishers on that established by the Japanese colonial government. The shift in representation of fishers between the Qing and early Japanese sources on the one hand, and these statistical volumes on the other is striking. The statistical tables represented not “people who seek from the sea” but people engaged in an industry. The people were defined in terms of their relationship to the larger economy and not in terms of the material practices that made up their lives. This new discourse supported a distinctively modern categorization of the economy. As one early Nationalist observer put it, “following current advances in science,” such activities as “agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and salt production are classified independently.”<sup>23</sup> Modern economic materials published by states and other commercial interests thus as a rule address these activities in separate volumes or at least separate chapters or sections.

Efforts to quantify the fishing activities of local people were clearly *representative* of the move, begun in the Japanese period and continued in the Nationalist period, to transform fishing in Taiwan into a modern industry governed by scientific methods. However, they were also *instrumental* in changing the ways Penghu fishing and fishers could be described. For example, the 1955 *Penghu County Gazetteer* (Penghu xian zhi 澎湖縣志) pointed to the existence in 1950 of 27,927 people “engaged in fisheries” as evidence of the importance of fisheries to the county’s economy.<sup>24</sup> Another source, written in 1964, could claim that “four-fifths of the employed population of the island of Penghu are fishermen, either full time or part time” in contrast with 7% for the total population of Taiwan.<sup>25</sup>

The significance of this new discourse lies in the abstraction of fishing from people’s daily lives, and the consequent congealing of a social group of fishers. In *Trust in Numbers*, Theodore Porter draws on the work of French historians to demonstrate the extent to which these seemingly disparate processes are intertwined. A case in point is the French class of *cadres* that emerged during the war to distinguish engineers and managers from plutocrats on the one hand, and working classes on the other. In postwar France, *cadre* became cemented as a social category in official statistics, and today “one can read in French newspapers about what the cadres think on the issues of the day, or how they dress and what they read.” Porter further cites Laurent Thévenot’s analysis of the issue, in which “social classes... are inseparable from the instruments of social statistics that contribute to their articulation.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, through the use of statistics, fishers in Penghu could be discussed as a coherent social group making up some definite portion of the islands’ population.

The specific statistical categories employed further permitted Penghu to be identified concretely as a fishers' archipelago. In 1951, the *Penghu Statistical Yearbook* (Penghu xian tongji yaojian 澎湖縣統計要覽) added another set of population statistics to the first. In addition to counting the number of people "actively engaged in fisheries," they counted the number of fisherfolk households (defined as households where fisheries income exceeded 50% of total income) and the numbers of males and females in these households. Furthermore, the household statistics replaced the earlier employment figures as the definition of "fisherfolk." The 1957 *Penghu Statistical Yearbook* includes a table showing changes in the number of fisherfolk over thirteen years. While the 1950 figure stood at 27,927 (the same number as the total for people employed in fisheries), the 1951 figure was 53,685 (the total number of people in fisherfolk households).<sup>27</sup> The new method of counting fisherfolk could be exploited to inflate the number of fishers so as to emphasize fishing as the foundation of Penghu's economy.

The entire population [of Penghu] is more than 80,000 people, and the number of full- and part-time fisherfolk reaches 52,000 people, constituting 65% of the total population. There are so many Penghu fisherfolk that this is the highest percentage of any county.<sup>28</sup>

The author of this passage was able to double the number of people employed in fisheries by substituting the number of people living in "fisherfolk" households (for figures, see Table 3 below). This move strengthened his argument for modernizing Penghu's fisheries while also strengthening the notion that Penghu was *in fact* an archipelago of fishers.

### *From Fishers' Gatherings to Fishers' Associations*

Changes in social organization further established Penghu fishers as a coherent social group. The 1896 book on Taiwan's fisheries produced by the newly arrived Japanese surveyors provides a window into the material and social worlds Penghu islanders inhabited before Japanese colonization. According to the book, and in contrast with the frequent depictions of Penghu's land as unsuitable for agriculture, "seven- to eight-tenths of [Penghu's] dense population worked as farmers,"<sup>29</sup> growing enough *gaoliang* 高粱, sweet potatoes, and peanuts to support an export market to the Chinese mainland. Significantly, the book further noted that few people "specialized in fishing," while relatively many engaged in fishing on a part-time basis. Some men traveled to the main island of Taiwan during spring and autumn to perform seasonal work, while women and youths raised chickens and pigs for export. Nonetheless, fish products constituted the majority of exports, while imports consisted chiefly of a type of dried potato, clothes, tools, and construction materials for boats and nets.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Penghu xian zhengfu zhujishi, ed., *Penghu xian tongji yaojian* [Penghu statistical yearbook] (Magong: Penghu Xian Zhengfu Zhujishi, 1958), p.103 (hereinafter *PXY*). Note that the households counted represent only those in which fishing constituted 50% or more of the total income. The households of most if not all part-time fishers were excluded.

<sup>28</sup> Li Rangzhi, "Penghu yuye," p.20.

<sup>29</sup> Taiwan Sōtokufu Minseikyoku, *Shokusanbu*, p.87.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.87–8 and 59–60.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.62.

<sup>32</sup> Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Civil affairs handbook: Taiwan (Formosa), the Pescadores Islands* (Washington D.C.: Navy Department, 1944), p.19.

<sup>33</sup> Taiwan Sōtokufu Minseikyoku, *Sbokusan-bu*, p.62.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.69. I have translated the Japanese phrase *gyofu no kai* as “fishers’ gatherings.” During the Qing dynasty and early Japanese colonial period, Magong was written 媽宮, a name that honored the goddess Mazu (see n.18).

<sup>35</sup> Samuel S. Ho, *Economic development of Taiwan, 1860–1970* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978), p.63.

<sup>36</sup> *Hōko jijō*, vol.1, pp.59–60.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp.60–1.

<sup>38</sup> Penelope Francks with Johanna Boestel and Choo Hyop Kim, *Agriculture and economic development in East Asia: from growth to protectionism in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.181.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.182.

The book also notes the existence of a strong set of organizational practices related to fishing capital and profits. Surveyors found that large nets, boats, and other significant investments were generally collectively owned by several people. When necessary, fishers also borrowed money from fish merchants in the markets, although high interest payments and risks associated with damage to the gear made this a less favorable alternative.<sup>31</sup> Fishers divided the profits from fishing according to a scheme largely unchanged by the end of Japanese occupation<sup>32</sup>; each fisher received one equal part, while owners of the boats and gear received one or two parts depending on the size and type of the equipment.<sup>33</sup> “Fishers’ gatherings” in the main town of Magong provided fishers and merchants with opportunities to negotiate the purchase and sale of gear and fish.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most important and long-lasting agricultural reforms realized by the Japanese colonial government was the establishment of Farmers’ Associations in 1900 and farmers’ cooperatives by 1913.<sup>35</sup> Parallel organizations for fishers quickly followed. In 1903, the Japanese government in Penghu established a prefectural Fishers’ Association that collected funds from members and the government for fisheries improvement projects. Over the years, its responsibilities grew to include boat building, disaster relief, and experiment stations for aquaculture and processing.<sup>36</sup> In 1924 and 1925, fisheries cooperatives were set up to organize the collective use of boats and gear and the marketing of the catch, in addition to which they also served to mete out disaster relief.<sup>37</sup>

While modeled on similar organizations developed for the reorganization of farming in Japan proper, these forms of shared investment and collective work had clear precedents in the existing practices of Penghu fishers. The important difference between these institutions and the previously existing forms lay in state involvement: through the Fishers’ Associations, the Japanese colonial government gained increased control over fishers while providing services that modernized fishing practices and integrated Penghu’s fisheries into a larger plan of empire advancement.

The Nationalists’ Fishers’ Associations formed by far the greatest mechanism of continuity for fisherfolk between the Japanese and Nationalist periods of rule. The Associations established by the early Nationalist government combined the roles of the colonial-period Associations and cooperatives. Like the Farmers’ Associations on which they were based, the Fishers’ Associations served several functions. First, they helped fishers organize and receive services for local and regional needs. Second, they provided a means through which the government could collect taxes and generally keep track of and control fishers’ activities. Third, they could help fishers communicate their concerns to the government.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of Farmers’ Associations, this third function was clearly the most underutilized: they did not “use their crucial position in the administrative structure to act as pressure groups on behalf of farmers.”<sup>39</sup> The patterns for Fishers’ Associations were quite similar, although throughout the 1950s and

1960s the Fishers' Associations suffered from poorer organization and financing than did the Farmers' Associations.<sup>40</sup> Membership was mandatory,<sup>41</sup> and so nearly universal. In 1958 (the first year with reliable records), the regional Penghu Fishers' Association had 26,121 members, and only 29,686 people "actively engaged in fisheries."<sup>42</sup> However, as we will shortly see, fishers did not always have confidence in the Associations' effectiveness, and the Associations were not necessarily places where fishers could turn with concerns about fisheries policies.

Moreover, conflicts arose repeatedly over the composition of the Associations' members. Of particular concern was the disproportionate influence of nonfishers involved in fishing-related business and industry. In 1951 and 1964, new regulations sought to limit this influence and reshape the Associations to better represent fishers.<sup>43</sup> These events helped to define the social category of fishers more clearly, thus cementing them as a social group. Another type of transformation further solidified this trend: the move from part-time to full-time fishing.

### *From Part-Time to Full-Time Fishing*

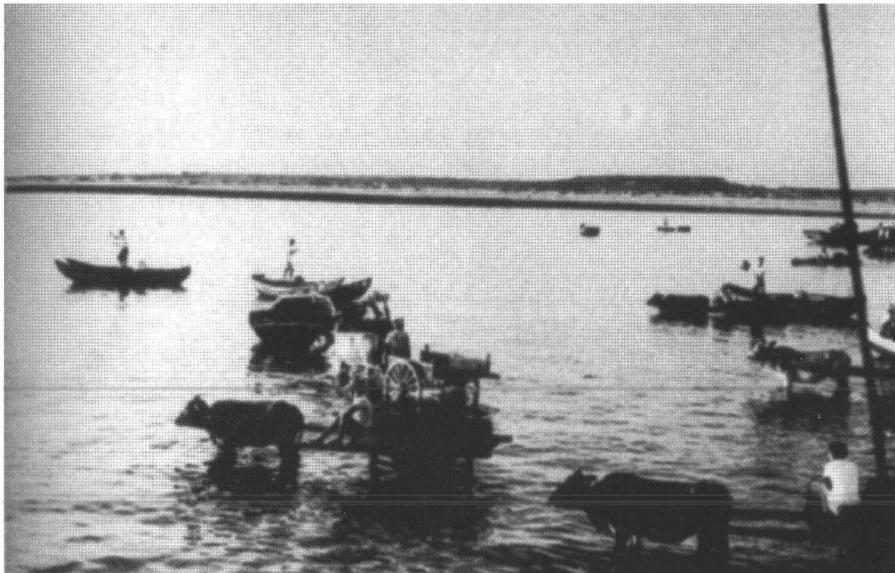
Investments in technology and infrastructure during the Japanese colonial and Chinese Nationalist periods of rule made possible a dramatic increase in fisheries production. Moreover, these changes in material culture allowed or even required a change in the occupation of fishing. Penghu fishers rapidly went from fishing part time alongside their predominantly agricultural work to fishing as their main source of income.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph A. Yager, *Transforming agriculture in Taiwan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp.174–6.

<sup>41</sup> Those who did not register in the Associations could not receive licenses to fish. Chen Zhengxiang, *Penghu xian zhi*, p.73.

<sup>42</sup> *Taiwan yuye nianbao* [Yearly report on Taiwan's fisheries] (Taipei: Taiwan Sheng Zhengfu Nonglin Ting, 1958), pp.2–3, 6–7.

<sup>43</sup> Yager, *Transforming agriculture in Taiwan*, pp.174–5.



**Figure 6**

*Fishers used ox carts on a daily basis to transport batteries back to shore for recharging. It is unclear when the photograph was taken (reproduced, with permission from the publisher and from the photographer Lin Dezheng, from Lin Guibin, Baisha fengqing, p.73)*

**Table 2**

*Penghu fisheries catch from coastal and offshore waters. Units are in kilograms. The small percentages in 1950 and 1951 can be explained by the substantial wartime losses of large and motorized fishing vessels. Sources: Taiwan Sōtokufu Shokusanjyoku Suisanka, PXTY (1950-1, 1957-60), and Taiwan yuye nianbao [Yearly Report on Taiwan's Fisheries] (1953-63, 1966). Data for 1952 and 1964-5 not available)*

Year	Coastal catch	Offshore catch	% of total from offshore waters
1936	3,821,541	2,273,997	37
1950	1,979,154	204,210	9
1951	4,392,707	344,920	7
1953	3,693,885	1,476,492	29
1954	9,111,025	5,505,890	38
1955	10,742,709	6,817,328	39
1956	9,807,041	12,217,902	55
1957	9,206,420	17,532,586	66
1958	7,561,767	21,441,890	74
1959	4,038,802	26,512,205	87
1960	3,151,005	28,928,325	90
1961	3,425,740	34,626,160	91
1962	3,660,490	36,371,370	91
1963	3,303,400	39,010,850	92
1966	1,632,000	26,779,000	94

<sup>44</sup> *Hōko jijō*, vol. 1, 59.

<sup>45</sup> Taiwan Sōtokufu Shokusanjyoku Suisanka, *Taiwan suisan tokei*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> The “land to the tillers” reform was a significant departure from the continuity between the Japanese and Nationalist regimes that I have emphasized in this paper. On another point, “boats to the fishers” was in some ways quite unlike “land to the tillers” in that the latter redistributed existing resources while the former created and distributed new resources.

<sup>47</sup> Li Rangzhi, “Penghu yuye,” p.20.

<sup>48</sup> *PXTY* 1951, p.67; *PXTY* 1961, pp.152-3.

<sup>49</sup> Other technologies introduced during the Japanese colonial and early Nationalist periods—for example, new type of nets, factories for making nets, and processing plants—also helped transform fishing as a way of life. Space limitations prevent full investigation of these technologies here.

<sup>50</sup> The categories “part-time” and “full-time” are highly abstract, since an arbitrary line (probably 50% of time or income) separates the two. Thus a “full-time” fisher may well have invested considerable time and resources in agriculture or other activities, while for a “part-time” fisher, fisheries may well have occupied close to half his or her

One of the chief activities of the Japanese colonial fishing associations and cooperatives was the promotion of motorized boats. In 1929, there were 32 motorized boats for the 20,742 fishers on the island<sup>44</sup>; by 1936, there were 108 for 22,140 fishers.<sup>45</sup> Wartime destruction reduced this figure significantly: in 1950 only 12 remained. However, under the Nationalist government's policies, the number of motorized boats quickly escalated once again. One of the most important reforms the Nationalists instituted after 1949 was the “land to the tillers” (*gengzhe you qi tian* 耕者有其田) program of land reform. As a corollary, the government introduced a “boats to the fishers” (*yuzhe you qi chuan* 漁者有其船) initiative that loaned money to county governments for the construction of new motorized boats to be leased to fishers.<sup>46</sup> Penghu fared particularly well in this regard<sup>47</sup>; the number of motorized boats grew from one for every 2,327 fishers in 1950 to one for every 47 fishers in 1960.<sup>48</sup>

This newly expanded use of a techno-

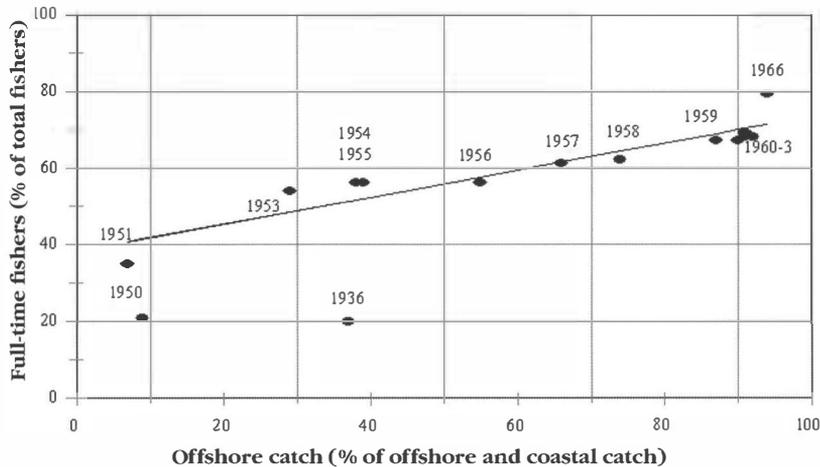
logy introduced under Japanese rule fueled a move toward deeper waters in search of larger catches of fish and greatly increased total fisheries catch. In turn, this move dramatically changed what it meant to fish in Penghu.<sup>49</sup> In the early Japanese colonial regime, fishing had already begun to occupy more of people's daily lives. The 1898 Japanese survey had noted that few people “specialized in fishing.” In 1900, only 2,858 people were reported to fish full time in contrast with 21,021 full-time farmers.<sup>50</sup> By 1920, the number of full-time fishers had grown by 38%.<sup>51</sup> During the Nationalist period, the dramatic increase in the percentage of the catch coming from offshore as opposed to coastal fishing grounds<sup>52</sup> transformed fishing from a part-time to a full-time

/total income. What is certain is that “full-time” did not imply a forty-hour work week or the absence of other activities or other sources of income.

<sup>51</sup> Chen Zhengxiang, *Penghu xian zhi*, p.50.

<sup>52</sup> The distinctions between coastal, offshore and deep-sea fisheries were based on the type

### The Rise of Full-time Fishing with the Move to Offshore Waters



**Figure 7**

This graph plots data from Tables 2 and 3 to show the relationship between the move toward deeper waters made possible by motorized vessels and the transformation of fishing into a full-time occupation. The 1936 value from the Japanese period clearly detracts from the correlation, demonstrating that other historical circumstances also affect the relationship between the two variables. The regression line is calculated without the 1936 data. The two variables have a Pearson Correlation of 0.906 significant at the 0.01 level. If the 1936 data had been included, the correlation would have been 0.844, also significant at the 0.01 level

**Table 3**

“Fisherfolk population” refers to the total number of people in “fisherfolk households.” Sources: Taiwan Sōtokufu Shokusanakyoku Suisanka, PXTY (1950–1, 1957–60), and Taiwan yuye nianbao (1953–63, 1966). Population figures for 1953–6 and 1961–6 not available. Data for 1952 and 1964–5 not available

occupation. In 1950, 21% of all people engaged in fisheries worked in the industry as their primary occupation, and 9% of the total catch came from offshore waters.<sup>53</sup> In 1966, these figures were 79% and 94% respectively (see Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 7).<sup>54</sup> The changes in material culture effected by the introduction and expansion of motorized boats thus brought Penghu fishers closer and closer to the already existing notions that they “all use[d] the ocean as their fields” and were “the foundation of the social organization.”<sup>55</sup>

/of boats and gear used. In general, coastal fisheries involved non-motorized boats: offshore fisheries required small motorized boats, and deep-sea fisheries used large motorized boats. While distance from shore was not a part of this technical classification, it had an obvious and direct relationship to the size and power of the boats used. In this paper, I have used the term “offshore” in place of the more frequently encountered “inshore” because, when comparing this category with coastal fisheries, the term “offshore” more recognizably implies waters relatively far from shore.

<sup>53</sup> Taiwan Sōtokufu Shokusanakyoku Suisanka, *Taiwan suisan tokei*, pp.2–3, 58–9, 70–1.

<sup>54</sup> *Taiwan yuye nianbao*, 1966, pp.5–6, 109–20

<sup>55</sup> See notes 4 and 14 above.

Year	Population	Fishers	Full-time (%)	Fisherfolk households	Fisherfolk population
1936	68,613	22,140	20		
1950	77,993	27,927	21		
1951	80,731	24,628	35	7,839	53,685
1953		24,312	54		
1954		24,118	56		
1955		24,722	56		
1956		25,147	56	9,662	50,708
1957	87,937	26,094	61	9,740	59,358
1958	90,864	29,686	62	9,951	59,993
1959	93,874	31,711	67	10,210	61,652
1960	96,986	33,324	67	10,646	62,441
1961		33,592	69	10,679	64,102
1962		33,756	68	10,718	64,528
1963		34,376	68	10,809	65,781
1966		29,294	79	11,062	68,824

<sup>56</sup> The 1960 yearbook did show a sharp decrease in the number of agricultural households. However, this is probably an error, since the population figure stayed in the same range. It is not possible to compare the numbers of agricultural and fishing households since the criteria used in such designations is not constant. In each year for which such statistics are available, the number of agricultural households combined with the number of fishing households exceeds the total number of households in the county.

It would be interesting to be able to compare these numbers with agricultural data. Such data could provide an indication of what other activities had occupied the time of part-time fishers and whether such activities were curtailed with their move to full-time fishing. From the qualitative accounts cited earlier, we can be reasonably certain that full-time fishers used to farm. (Of course, many probably continued farming to some degree: "full-time" does not imply no other sources of income.) Statistics on agricultural output show a substantial increase, but of far less magnitude than that in fisheries (see Table 1). Unfortunately, the *Pengbu Statistical Yearbook* did not collect statistics on the number of people "actively engaged in" agriculture or other occupations as they did for fisheries. However, it did record the number of farming households and the population living in those households. These statistics show no drop in the agricultural population corresponding to the rise in full-time fishers.<sup>56</sup> Nor is there a significant drop in the cultivated area (see Table 4). While it is not possible to arrive at a firm conclusion, it is probable that when members of households who previously engaged primarily in farming converted to full-time fishing, their agricultural labor was replaced by other members of the household and the increased use of mechanized equipment.

**Table 4**

*Farming population and cultivated land in Pengbu. (I suspect the 1960 figure for farming households to be in error given the increase in farming population. Moreover, while cultivated land decreased somewhat, if it had done so in proportion with the decrease in farming households, it would have plummeted to 6671 hectares.) If this table is compared with Table 3, it becomes apparent that different methods are used to identify farming and fishing households. For example, when the 1956 figures for farming and fishing households are added together, the total is 20,900 compared with only 15,664 total households in all of Pengbu. It is likely that these inflated figures helped fishers' and farmers' associations in some manner. Source: PXTY (1950-1, 1957-60)*

Year	Total Households	Total Population	Farming Households		Farming Population		Cultivated Land (hectares)
			#	%	#	%	
1950	14,147	77,993	10,050	71	52,099	67	7,505
1951	14,205	80,731	10,024	71	58,161	72	7,469
1952	14,743	82,193	10,297	70	58,449	71	7,614
1953	14,676	82,636	10,176	69	59,370	72	7,522
1954	14,570	83,037	10,725	74	62,021	75	7,821
1955	14,909	84,502	10,948	73	64,806	77	7,433
1956	15,664	85,926	11,238	72	65,450	76	7,434
1957	15,933	87,937	11,277	71	65,724	75	7,371
1958	16,234	90,864	11,375	70	66,527	73	7,413
1959	16,664	93,874	11,748	70	69,744	74	7,403
1960	17,072	96,986	10,673	63	71,275	73	7,283

### *Specialization through Education*

Formal education for fishers intensified the trend toward increased specialization. In 1922, the Japanese colonial government established Taiwan's first fisheries school in Magong, Penghu. The choice of location testifies to the state's recognition of Penghu's fisheries as a worthwhile investment for the future of the empire. The timing is significant as well: in the 1920s Taiwan enjoyed an education boom resulting from a period of liberalism during and after World War I. During this period, the Japanese governors-general established vocational schools for Taiwanese people, marking a move toward providing islanders with technical skills rather than simply importing skilled labor from Japan as had previously been the case.<sup>57</sup> Following the pattern of replicating for the colonies only the lower tier of the Japanese educational system, the fisheries extension school established in Magong was vocational, and not an élite academic or research institution. The goal was to train "future leaders of fishing villages" who could better exploit the "inexhaustible storehouse" of Penghu's fishing resources.<sup>58</sup> For this purpose, the school offered courses in fishing, navigation, and maritime weather among other subjects, and it provided practical training in fishing, processing, and systems management.<sup>59</sup> By 1934, the school had graduated 132 students,<sup>60</sup> and by 1945, 392 students.<sup>61</sup>

The fisheries school marks another form of continuity between the Japanese and Nationalist periods. In 1948, the school briefly added an upper division for successful students from the lower one, which had to be closed owing to low enrolments.<sup>62</sup> The successful admission in 1953 of 11 students (out of 15 who took the test) to the Gaoxiong 高雄 higher-level fisheries school gave new impetus to this effort,<sup>63</sup> and in 1954 the upper division was successfully instituted.<sup>64</sup> In 1961, the school had a total of 628 students, and 80% of the recent graduates had remained in Penghu to work in local fisheries organizations.<sup>65</sup> In addition to providing a general education at the middle-school level, coursework included natural history, fisheries studies, fisheries biology, oceanography, meteorology, mechanics and piloting of motorized fishing boats, fishing, cultivation, and processing. As in the Japanese period, the school required hands-on training in addition to classroom work. In the words of the headmaster in 1953, "Sailing a boat on land' has never reached a fish."<sup>66</sup>

Of course, the number of graduates was small compared to the more than 30,000 people actively engaged in fisheries. However, while comparatively few people became educated in fisheries, the effect on fisheries as an industry was much greater, since hundreds of people received training to fill specialized jobs. Education also helped to increase the degree of specialization in fisheries practices. Not only did Japanese- and Nationalist-era classes provide specialized training in particular aspects of the fishing industry, but by the 1950s students in the upper division were divided into separate majors for fishing and processing.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>57</sup> E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Japanese colonial education in Taiwan, 1895–45* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p.88.

<sup>58</sup> *Hōko jijō* (Taihoku [Taipei]: Chengwen chubanshe, 1985 [1936]), vol. 3, 38.

<sup>59</sup> *Hōko jijō*, vol. 3, 39.

<sup>60</sup> *Hōko jijō*, vol. 3, 38.

<sup>61</sup> Lin Shuihuo, "Jieshao Penghu," p.22.

<sup>62</sup> Wang Cangming, "Taiwan de shuichan jiaoyu" [Taiwan's fisheries education], *Yuye luntan* [Fisheries Forum] 1 (1 June 1961): 11.

<sup>63</sup> Lin Shuihuo, "Jieshao Penghu," p.21.

<sup>64</sup> Wang Canming, "Taiwan de shuichan," p.11.

<sup>65</sup> The 'organizations' referred to here probably include both commercial and government organizations. *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>66</sup> Lin Shuihuo, "Jieshao Penghu," p.22.

<sup>67</sup> Wang Canming, "Taiwan de shuichan," p.11.

### *A Friend for Fishers*

<sup>68</sup> Li Rangzhi, “Penghu yuye,” p.20.

<sup>69</sup> Chen Tiansheng, “Yu you she bao shu xiansheng” [To the Editor of *Fishermen’s Friend*], *Yu you* 5, 25 February 1953, p.33.

<sup>70</sup> According to page 78 of the 1959 volume of the *Penghu statistical yearbook (PXTY)*, 10% of the population then aged 12 to 40 lacked any formal education.

Fishers in the early Nationalist period did not have to attend the fisheries school in order to be exposed to educational materials about fishing. Literature produced during the Nationalist period specifically for fisherfolk sought to professionalize the industry by canonizing a body of knowledge all fisherfolk should know. The semi-monthly periodical *Fishermen’s Friend* (*Yu you* 漁友) stands out in this regard. Articles in *Fishermen’s Friend* presented a wide variety of information, including reports on local fishing conditions, the plight of fishers in mainland China, identification of local fishes, what a fish is in scientific terms, how to cook fish, the pleasures of raising goldfish in the home, government efforts to modernize fisheries, and the importance of accurate fisheries statistics.

*Fishermen’s Friend* stood in a very interesting position between fisherfolk and the government. The periodical received considerable input from the Fishers’ Associations, and the Associations were responsible for collecting subscriptions and distributing issues. *Fishermen’s Friend* proved an effective organ for circulating state propaganda (as in the numerous articles printed on the evils of the People’s Republic of China), for boasting about state accomplishments in fisheries modernization, and for encouraging fishers to participate in state-sponsored insurance programs and associations. On the other hand, *Fishermen’s Friend* also provided a space for élites in the fisheries world to voice concerns about the inadequacies of government efforts. For example, one article noted critically that the excellent fish market once found in Magong had been taken over by stationed troops for use as a hospital and as of 1953 “still had not been returned.”<sup>68</sup>

Of even greater interest is the role the periodical played in mediating between fisherfolk and the state. Each issue contained a “letterbox” that printed letters to the editor on issues important to fisherfolk. These letters were often direct appeals to the editors for assistance in rectifying perceived problems in official practices and regulations. In 1954, a fisher from Penghu wrote to complain about methods of statistics collection.

Regarding surveys and research statistics, I don’t know where other places obtain their statistics, but in Penghu statistical figures come from the daydreams of public office administrators and Fishers’ Associations leaders in rural villages [as they sit] at the table concocting statistical materials.<sup>69</sup>

The language used indicates that this letter writer was not a member of the élite, but rather a fisher of limited education.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, he proved quite capable of questioning the reliability of officially produced information on fisheries.

In another letter, a fisher from Penghu complained that a type of “improved gas lamp” used to attract fish had been declared a “death light” by the county assembly and had been banned. He had concluded that “the

main reason [the county] prohibited it was to protect the development of the torch-light net fisheries.” He went on to explain that safe use of the new lamps was feasible, that the lamps had greatly increased production, and that the number of fishing boats using the technology had recently increased from only two to twenty-one. Demonstrating great proficiency with the rhetoric of scientific improvement, he concluded: “If we want to meet the needs of the day and have scientific production methods, [and yet] if the government prohibits [this technology], I believe the prospect for Penghu’s fisheries will certainly be very dark, the increase of fisheries production hopeless, and the fisherfolk’s lives uncertain.”<sup>71</sup>

These examples demonstrate that at least some fishers saw *Fishermen’s Friend* as representing their interests, and the letterbox gave them a forum to voice their concerns. The emergence of a periodical targeted specifically at fishers, along with the establishment of fishers-only associations, the rise of fishing as a full-time occupation, and the definition and compartmentalization of knowledge about fishing, worked to delimit a coherent social group of fishers.

### *The National Fisherfolk Festival*

On 25 January 1953, *Fishermen’s Friend* printed a number of articles on the upcoming Farmers’ Festival. First established by the Nationalist Government in March 1941, this festival later came to be an annual event coinciding with the beginning of spring. In popularizing this event, the editors of *Fishermen’s Friend* first faced the challenge of convincing fishers that this was their festival as well.

In ancient times, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and salt production were all called “agriculture,” or forestry, fisheries, and salt production were considered by-employments of agriculture... Although following current advances in science, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and salt production are classified independently, they are still a part of the same administrative system. [When] our people engaged in fisheries participate in celebrating the 1953 Farmers’ Festival, they are paying appropriate attention to ritual and not forgetting the original meaning [of the term “agriculture”].<sup>72</sup>

Another article and a schedule for the festival printed in the same issue further encouraged fishers to attend.

While fishers did participate actively in the festival, they were not all convinced that they belonged. In July, *Fishermen’s Friend* published an article by Zhang Baoshu 張寶樹 entitled “My views on the establishment of a ‘Fisherfolk Festival’” (“Wo duiyu zhiding ‘Yumin jie’ de yijian” 我對於制定“漁民節”的意見). The editor’s introduction recounted, “Many fisher friends who participated [in the festival] asked, ‘Why do we not have a Fisher-

<sup>71</sup> The editor’s response clarified that the issue involved the suspected risk posed to fish. He stated: “The situation you describe has developed into a key dispute in improved gas lamps. Does it or does it not harm the physiology of the fish? And how great is the harm? Currently we have no way of confirming this.” He went on to say that he had already forwarded the message to a fisheries experiment station for investigation, the results of which would “be provided to the government as a reference.” Unfortunately, I have not been able to find what result, if any, this action yielded. Chen Wenrui, “Yu you ban yue kan she” [Dear *Fishermen’s Friend*], *Yu you* 33, 25 April 1954, p.42.

<sup>72</sup> Chen Liang, “Wei shenme yao,” p.11. The phrase “paying appropriate attention to ritual” (*shen zhong zhu yi yuan* 神終追遠) usually refers to scrupulous attention to funerary rites for parents and the worshipping of ancestors.

<sup>73</sup> Zhang Baoshu, “Wo duiyu zhiding ‘Yumin jie’ de yijian” [My views on the establishment of a ‘Fisherfolk Festival’], *Yu you* 15, 25 July 1953, p.5.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.6–7.

<sup>75</sup> Hong Qinghan, “Yu you she gong jian” [An open letter to *Fishermen’s Friend*], *Yu you* 29, 21 February 1954, p.32.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid monarchy: power and pageantry in modern Japan* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998).

folk Festival?”<sup>73</sup> The article then noted that the Taiwan provincial, Jilong 基隆 municipal, and Penghu County Fishers’ Associations had all requested that the government establish a separate festival specifically for fisherfolk. According to the article, the Executive Yuan had agreed to solicit suggestions regarding the appropriate date for such a festival.

Zhang Baoshu proceeded to list ten possible dates, of which he deemed four most appropriate. Significantly, all of the dates commemorated state actions to modernize fisheries. Equally significantly, Zhang Baoshu ended his article with a specific word of caution about a date to be avoided. According to him, 23 March, the birthday of the goddess Mazu (usually romanized as “Matsu” in Taiwan), should not be chosen lest it lend strength to fisherfolk’s superstitions. Such a move would run counter to one of the main goals he sought in the establishment of a Fisherfolk Day: to replace old superstitious beliefs with a faith in science.<sup>74</sup>

Needless to say, Zhang Baoshu’s opinions cannot be taken to reflect the views of fisherfolk themselves. However, and while we do not know which date they would have chosen, it is clear that at least some fisherfolk wanted a day of their own. In February of the following year, a fisher wrote to the *Fishermen’s Friend* letterbox to call for the promulgation of a Fisherfolk Festival.

[F]isherfolk have cried out in battle for a long time for their needs. We want to be the same as farmers, to have our own holiday—a Fisherfolk Festival. But as of today, we still do not have one. This publication is the organ of the fisherfolk. I hope you can use this letter to appeal for the government’s attention.

The reply was brief: “[A] recent central government decision has determined that relevant fisheries organizations can decide this for themselves, and [those organizations] are already beginning to discuss it.”<sup>75</sup>

The significance of this exchange lies in an interesting reversal in the positions of state and fisherfolk. Historians often interpret the establishment of national holidays as state-serving ritualistic actions seeking to promote a symbolic link between citizen and nation.<sup>76</sup> Zhang Baoshu’s discussion of the subject feels familiar in this regard. In this case, however, it was fisherfolk themselves who appeared to clamor for the unresponsive state to recognize them as members of a distinct social group with their own reasons to come together in celebration. Paralleling shifts in discourse and the material and social organization of production that identified them as members of a distinct social group, fisherfolk themselves thus began to speak publicly about their self-identification as fishers.

## Conclusion

When Portuguese sailors colonizing the area visited Penghu, they noted the importance of fishing to the local economy and so dubbed the archipelago the Pescadores or “Fishers’ Islands.” Qing, Japanese, and Chinese Nationalist observers shared this understanding. Yet, at no point in the period under investigation did sea production ever truly outweigh land production either in terms of the number of people involved or the amount of production achieved. Why, then, did the characterization prove so ubiquitous and resilient? This paper has shown that what it meant to consider Penghu an archipelago of fishers changed dramatically over the course of Japanese and early Nationalist rules. Qing commentators discussed reliance on fishing primarily in terms of the relative lack of productive land. While this notion can also be found in Japanese and early Nationalist discourses, another motif gained ascendancy. This was the idea that fisheries presented the most “hopeful prospect” for the islands in the context of modernizing development. And, following considerable investment and other forms of encouragement on the part of the state, Penghu’s fisheries lived up to this prediction, at least through the 1960s.

The process through which this transformation occurred links the discursive, social, material, and cultural spheres. Motorized vessels allowed for greatly increased exploitation of offshore waters, resulting in both larger catches and the transition from part-time to full-time fishing. Education in new vocational schools and publications directed specifically at fishers further contributed to the specialization of the fishing industry. Fishers’ Associations, in which membership was mandatory for all fishers, provided the state with a mechanism both for supplying fishers with needed services and for controlling their activities. At the same time, statistics furnished a way to describe fishing and fishers as coherent entities independent from agriculture and abstracted from the complex web of people’s daily lives. This new discourse did not merely reflect the specialization accompanying modernization: it was instrumental in the process itself. Statistical analysis made possible claims about the character of Penghu’s people and the condition of their livelihood that in turn justified increased state investment and control.

Moreover, fishers themselves incorporated the rhetoric of specialization to claim a fisherfolk identity independent from that of farmers. Yet, this should not be taken to imply total harmony between fishers, states, and élites. Ironically, élites promoting the state-sponsored Farmers Festival attempted in this instance to convince fishers that they *were* in fact a subset of farmers, while fishers “cried out in battle” that they were *not*. Fishers also proved

<sup>77</sup> Wen-yan Chiau, "The role of religion in coastal resource management: the case of Kupo Island, Penghu (Pescadores), Taiwan," *Coastal Management* 26 (1998): 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.19–21.

willing and able to use the voice afforded them by the periodical *Fishermen's Friend* to fight government controls on fishing practices and to question the state's ability to produce reliable information about fisheries. The notion that fishing was a distinct occupation and fishers a coherent group of people, together with the statistical discourse that made this notion possible, thus became tools with which people from all sides sought to advance their own interests.

Understandings of the character of the Penghu islands and their inhabitants have continued to shift along with broader changes in the region and in the world's oceans. Today, the archipelago's marine resources are no longer unambiguously heralded as the best hope for the islanders' future. In the 1990s, both Penghu's total population and the percentage of employed people who worked in fisheries decreased as young people migrated in greater numbers to the main island of Taiwan in search of more profitable

**Figure 8**

*Villagers rush out to collect nori 海苔 seaweed on the uninhabited island of Gupo 姑婆. While the exact date of this photograph is uncertain, it predated by at least several decades the transformation of the traditional nori-collection festival into an eco-tourism event (reproduced, with permission from the publisher and the photographer Guo Jinlong, from Lin Guibin, Baisha fengqing, p.96)*



employment.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, and paralleling similar trends around the world, local people and government officials have increasingly focused on the risks posed by ecological degradation and mismanagement. Their increased awareness of resource limitations has led to the greater exploration of eco-tourism—ranging from sportfishing to a pick-your-own seaweed festival run by a local temple (Figure 8)—to help educate the public about environmental conservation while producing needed economic opportunities.<sup>78</sup> Such changes will inevitably have profound implications for fishers' lives and fisherfolk identity in Penghu.

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