



Tonio Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's first Great Victory over the West* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011, xv + 431 pp., ISBN 978 0 691 14455 9).

To start with the verdict: this monograph is a triumph of narrative brilliance *and* academic depth at the same time, appealing to the casual non-academic reader as well. *Lost Colony* takes us back to the seventeenth century and narrates the rise of a powerful Chinese pirate organization in the province of Fujian and its eventual war with the Dutch East India Company (VOC) over the possession of Taiwan. Literally book-ending the narrative is an old, but still hotly contested debate: what are the roots of Europe's eventual rise to world hegemony and where should we situate the start of this phenomenon in time? Andrade chooses to approach this question from a military perspective. On the side of the scholars who claim early modern Europe possessed initial advantages vis-à-vis the rest of the world, the Military Revolution Theory has long held sway. Its assumption is that the introduction of gunpowder weapons in European warfare sparked a revolution in military affairs in the sixteenth century, which to a large extent explains the West's rise over the rest in succeeding centuries. The adoption of gunpowder weapons led to the creation of new types of fortresses and warships. Armies had to be meticulously drilled and disciplined in order to make the most of the cumbersome firearms and their low rate of fire. What Andrade sets out to do is add new perspectives to the debate by looking at one of the biggest defeats of a European military force by a non-European one.

The seventeenth century, Tonio Andrade notes, was one witnessing an unusual amount of natural catastrophes and calamities on a global scale. In Ming China (1368-1644) they contributed to internal unrest and rebellion. Whilst the Ming were preoccupied with this problem *and* the bellicose Manchus in the northeast, it could no longer control the coastal frontier as well as it had in the past, leading to an upsurge in piracy and smuggling. This especially happened in Fujian province where too little agricultural land had to feed too many mouths, and thus employment as pirate-cum-merchant was appealing. In this context the Zheng organization emerged in the 1620s, which, unlike most other pirate coalitions, proved to be more durable, lasting as it did until 1683. A couple of years after the fall of the Ming dynasty Zheng Chenggong (1624-1662), also known as Koxinga, acted on his loyalty to the Ming and rallied most of the Zheng organization to his side, aiming to overthrow Manchu rule in China. Tonio Andrade thinks this stress on loyalty to the Ming might be due to his inculcation with Japanese *bushido* warrior virtues during his youth

spent with his Japanese mother's family. By 1661 Koxinga was hard pressed by the Manchus and Zheng Chenggong's eye fell on Taiwan as a new base of operations. In order for that to happen, the Dutch VOC presence had to go resulting in the conflict that is the central focus of the book.

Tonio Andrade combines a solid grasp of the Chinese written sources with the command of various European languages. Andrade's narrative bristles with colourful anecdotes throughout, drawn from diverse sources such as diaries held by the Dutch governor of Taiwan, records of Zheng Chenggong's private chronicler Yang Ying, memoirs of a German mercenary VOC soldier and Chinese regional histories. After a nuanced and detailed argument he concludes that the Military Revolution Theory has merit, nuancing his previous revisionist scepticism. The Dutch had fortified Taiwan with a trace italienne fortress, and Koxinga's forces were not able to conquer it after their successful landing. On land however, the Zheng were more successful in defeating a Dutch musketeer force with their own highly disciplined troops, who were nonetheless equipped with bow-and-arrows and saber-staves. At sea the small Zheng junks had trouble dealing with the Dutch ships, although in shallow coastal waters the numerical superiority of the Chinese junks and the danger of attack with fire-ships seem to have led to a naval deadlock in the bay containing the Dutch fortress. The Dutch, however, had a surprise in store: unbeknownst to the Zheng, a Dutch ship had managed to escape Taiwan and sail *against* the wind to VOC-held Batavia to raise alarm. In response, a fleet of twelve Dutch ships arrived to relieve the besieged VOC garrison to the astonishment of Koxinga and his army. This is where we reach the only weak part of the Tonio Andrade's argument in favour of European military superiority: he argues that if the Dutch fleet been deployed to cordon Taiwan and cut off Koxinga from his maritime supply routes, his troops would have starved and revolted, thus ending the war in favour of the VOC. I, on the other hand, still doubt if a naval blockade would have worked well enough, considering the numerical superiority of the Zheng fleets and the ability of Chinese junks to outrun and outmanoeuvre the bigger Dutch ships. In the event, the Dutch fleet was wasted in fruitless actions in the bay. The other evidence Andrade unearthed pointing to European superiority is more convincing. A defector from the Dutch side eventually had to point out how to make effective siege works to subdue the fortress.

One of the merits of Andrade's analysis is that he avoids falling in the deficit analysis trap: he does not merely provide a list of one-sided haves and have-nots, but also points to the advantages the Chinese had vis-à-vis the Dutch. He points out that the Chinese troops were better trained, disciplined and led and provides evidence that China's rich tradition of military theory influenced Koxinga's successful decisions, as his chronicler Yang Ying explains many events with reference to precepts in Sunzi's *Art of War*. Rounding off the list of advantages enjoyed by the Chinese, the Zheng troops were excellent artillerymen, managing a rate of accurate fire that astounded their Dutch adversaries.

Reaching the end of my review, I must confess that I am still uncertain about gauging relative military backwardness with reference to the Military Revolution Theory. Instead, I would argue that the differences between the VOC's forces and Koxinga's army appear to reflect different strategic and tactical priorities. Had the Chinese wanted European-style warships, they would have built them, as indeed happened in the 1630s. Given time and sustained encounters with European fortresses, the Chinese could probably have learned new siege methods. In conclusion, I can only hope that Andrade's study will encourage other area studies specialists to examine the Military Revolution Theory in the contexts of their fields. This, as Tonio Andrade rightly points out, is a necessary step on the way to a more accurate perspective on the reasons behind the *Great Divergence* between the West and the rest. In the meantime, however, I will remain a revisionist.

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