

CHAPTER 1

CULTIVATING AND EXPLOITING A “PRIMITIVE” ISLAND

From Hainan’s Early History into the Twentieth Century

This chapter provides some of the cultural, political, economic, and social landscape of early Hainan, including the islanders’ complex relationship with mainlanders and other external observers in the early twentieth century. Rather than a strict chronological telling of Hainan’s history, I lay out some characteristics of the island and its place in the region and the world. In addition, using mostly contemporary accounts, I develop some of the most prominent and recurrent themes in the island’s history through the early twentieth century. In chapter 2, I begin a more chronological exploration of Hainan’s history.

An Outsider’s Story

It is often in violence toward unwelcome visitors that we first hear anything at all from the Hainanese in the early historical record. Until the twentieth century, like many regions at the margins of empire, Hainan island’s native inhabitants could not tell their own stories beyond their home region. The indigenous Li people and the settled Han Chinese of the island had their history written for them by guests, some welcome and some not. These voices are heard only indirectly in descriptions of battles or magistrates’ records of the interrogations of captives.¹ Only in the 1920s did Hainanese actors begin to make their own voices heard in sustainable political terms, advocating their position as loyal, but increasingly autonomous, members of the Chinese polity.

Before the 1920s, for written sources on Hainan, we must look to the stories told by the island’s guests—the outsiders’ stories. In the early decades

of the twentieth century, a growing interest developed around Hainan for political, military, economic, and religious reasons. Through the writings of mainland Chinese and foreign observers of Hainan, the island's social and political ecology begins to come into focus in this time period. These sources provide an outsider's understanding of Hainan, and the island world out of which clearer Hainanese voices emerged.

Beginning in the spring of 1919, Peng Chengwan (1880–1978) led a six-month survey tour of Hainan, commissioned by the National Assembly in Beijing and with cooperation from prominent southern political leaders. Throughout the tour, Peng assessed the conditions of the island with a focus on Hainan's potential for development. At the time of his survey, Hainan's island neighbor, Taiwan, had already been under Japanese rule for a quarter century. Flourishing in many ways as a Japanese colony, Taiwan's success reinforced Hainan's still unrealized potential as another "treasure island" (*baodao*). Next to Taiwan, the lack of development on primitive Hainan was a reminder of the political and economic weakness of the new Chinese republic founded in 1912. Less than a decade before Peng's survey, he and some of his colleagues had served the now defunct Qing empire (1644–1911), and in 1919 they were working to establish the ambitious boundaries of the Chinese nation-state. The establishment of the republic's borders was not a foregone conclusion, however, and there were challenges from within and without the former Qing borders.²

In his thorough report published the following year, Peng Chengwan began with a note on this topic of Hainan's neglected potential:

With its riches in lumber, mining, salt, rubber, coconuts, and coffee . . . if Hainan's natural resources are developed, the island's wealth could very well surpass that of Singapore or Taiwan. . . . It could soon become a tropical breadbasket of China, and it is a pity that it remains an undeveloped stone field. . . . It could become a land of plenty. In my humble opinion, in order to develop the natural wealth and benefit of Hainan, we must improve transportation and communications there, and make of Hainan a regional hub; further, we must guide the indigenous Li people, and teach them to be the pioneers and trailblazers of Hainan.³

Developing infrastructure and gaining cooperation from the Hainanese people, especially the indigenous Li, were the two stubborn challenges that Peng Chengwan perceived in plans for development that would benefit the

island and the mainland. Neither obstacle had an easy solution, and they occupied most of his attention in the survey.

While comparisons between Hainan and its more developed neighbors were both unavoidable and painful, they also imbued Peng's mission with a sense of urgency. Peng and several other contributors to the report noted that development on Hainan could not be delayed due to several key factors. Cen Chunxuan (1861–1933), a leading figure in southern politics, wrote in his preface to the report that effective development of Hainan's resources could be the saving grace of the weak Chinese economy. Timely action was essential, since Hainan's prime location in the South China Sea, along with its great economic potential, made it a tantalizing site for foreign imperial development.⁴ While foreign powers had not yet developed Hainan, Cen's concerns reflected an awareness in China that Hainan could be carved away in another "scramble for concessions" as had occurred twenty years earlier. This rush by foreign governments to carve out "spheres of influence," urban concession areas, and outright colonies had followed the Japanese naval defeat of the Qing in 1895 and coincided with the catastrophic Boxer Uprising from 1898 to 1901. In the opening chronicle ("Chronique") of an 1898 issue of the sinology journal, *T'oung Pao*, the editor commented on a Li uprising on Hainan:

We know that Hainan Island is located in the waters of the French possessions of Tong-king, and therefore in the French sphere of influence. The French flag flies there already. If the Chinese regular army fails to restore order, we will be required to intervene energetically. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly urgent to see French influence affirmed in southern China where disorder is a permanent condition, and definitely and firmly plant the French flag on the entire island of Hainan.⁵

Hainan remained the object of covetous imperial designs through the early republic, indeed until the eve of the Japanese occupation that began in 1939.⁶ Cen's call to strengthen China's hold on Hainan in 1920 was echoed by a second contributor to Peng Chengwan's survey, who noted the urgency of establishing clear Chinese claims to sovereignty on Hainan through economic development and modernization guided by the mainland regime.⁷ A third contributor to the survey, Li Genyuan (1879–1965), pointed out that modern colonial powers in the region, like Japan on Taiwan, the British in Malaya and Hong Kong, the French in Indochina, and the Americans in the Philippines, were all developing their respective regions. To prove

itself worthy of being considered a modern nation among equals, China must take immediate action to develop Hainan.⁸ Li Genyuan was another prominent figure in the shifting southern revolutionary movement. At the time of the survey, he was stationed on Hainan with a popular fighting force that had recently defeated Long Jiguang (1860–1921), a former ally of the notorious “father of the warlords,” Yuan Shikai (1859–1916).⁹ Long and other militarists had tried to use Hainan as a temporary refuge from the battles raging on the mainland.

Other outsiders came to the island from Europe or the United States, sometimes as diplomats or merchants, but most of them were Christian missionaries. As early as the 1630s, Jesuits came to Hainan in hopes of educating and converting the locals. More than two centuries later, B.C. Henry, a Protestant American missionary observed a graveyard that marked the plots of hundreds of Chinese Catholic converts, as well as German and Portuguese Jesuits who died and were buried on the island in the 1680s.¹⁰

Like Peng Chengwan, the American Presbyterian missionary and schoolteacher, Mary Margaret Moninger (1891–1950) first came to Hainan as an outsider. Unlike Peng, the Iowa native made Hainan her home for much of her life, studying the local Hainanese dialect, directing mission work, and educating the young women of the island. She lived there from 1915 until 1942.¹¹ After a few years of living on Hainan, she was already a seasoned resident and she wrote a book about the island to inform an Anglophone audience, and also to invite other Presbyterian missionaries who might consider mission work there. In 1919, four years after arriving on the island, Moninger wrote:

For the new missionary coming to the island there are the usual pitfalls—the despair at the beginning of language study, the dirty streets of the Chinese town, the strange climate and the longing for home and home friends. But the language is a fascinating study with all its interests and ramifications, the dirty streets are full of human interests, one attack of malarial fever dispels our fear of it, letters and papers link us to the homeland, and the new friends, both among the members of the mission and among the Chinese, prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the promise in Matthew 19:29: “And everyone that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold.” So we bid you a hearty welcome, you who we hope will hear the call and come

to labor in this far corner of the Master's vineyard, and promise you a hearty greeting as you too enter into our goodly heritage.¹²

Peng Chengwan and Margaret Moninger published their impressions of Hainan within a year of each other. Their backgrounds and interests in Hainan diverged greatly, but they observed many of the same places and activities. They shared the view that Hainan was a remote and largely neglected place especially in its relationship with the Chinese republican government. Peng's account is a sober analysis of the obstacles to modern development, as well as an appraisal of the island's strengths. Both obstacles and potential strengths are found in the people of the island, and especially in the indigenous Li people living in the island's interior. Moninger's text portrays a quiet island, peopled by farmers and fishers who led slow, rural lives when they were free from the violence between natives and newcomers, bandit raids, or the activities of mainland armies temporarily garrisoned there.

Moninger's account of Hainan in the early twentieth century actually dovetails surprisingly well with the official Chinese Communist history of prerevolutionary Hainanese society written decades later—one of bucolic self-sufficiency that was preyed upon by exploitative militarist and imperialist forces.¹³ While Peng also notes the predatory mercantile forces on Hainan, his account is chiefly concerned with the benefit Hainan could have for all China. Moninger's observations provide a more intimate portrait of Hainan from the perspective of an outsider to China who was increasingly at home on the island. And so, amid the paradoxes of Hainan in this period, it was possible in 1919 for an Iowan schoolteacher to take the role of host on the island, and a Beijing official to be the outsider. Using these and other sources, a picture of the unique island begins to emerge.

Geography and Social Ecology

Hainan's neglect is evident in the inaccurate mapping of its territory as late as the nineteenth and twentieth century. Its harbors were never properly measured so that only in the past seventy-five years have the best natural ports in the south been developed into modern naval docks, beginning with the Japanese occupation (1939–1945). Until that time, visitors to the island approaching from the Chinese mainland immediately to the north risked running aground on the hazardous shoals of Haikou and Qiongzhou harbors along Hainan's northern coast.¹⁴ At the shortest crossing, these ports

are just more than ten miles across the Qiongzhou Strait from Guangdong's Leizhou Peninsula.

Despite this proximity, travel to and from Hainan was inconvenient at best through the Strait, and the poorly charted shoals and inlets made the short trip impossible for all but the most expert pilots and sailors even into the nineteenth and twentieth century. In 1882, the American missionary, B.C. Henry, visited Hainan, and in his 1886 account, Hainan was "here laid open for the first time to the reading world [being] of much special interest from a political, a commercial, a geographical, and an ethnographical point of view."¹⁵ As with Peng and Moninger, he felt that he was opening Hainan to the outside world. Henry wrote of his trip to Hainan:

Our journey from Hong-kong to Hoi-how [Haikou] was made in a wretched little steamer. . . . All arrangements of the ship were admirably fitted to produce discomfort and disgust, which were intensified by the slowness of speed, two days and the intervening night being consumed in traversing the two hundred and ninety miles between the two ports. . . . [T]he rocks and the currents are so treacherous and the channel so intricate, that no ship will go through in the night.¹⁶

Henry goes on to describe the extreme inconvenience of the shallow, muddy harbor around Haikou, where every passenger and every piece of cargo must make a three-mile trip to shore on a smaller boat designed for this purpose, taking five hours in Henry's case. In his survey, Peng Chengwan also acknowledged the limits of Haikou as a harbor more than thirty years later, and recommended instead the further development of Hainan's southern fishing towns, Yulin and Sanya, the former as a naval base. The republican government was unable or unwilling to act on Peng's prescient survey, however, and only under Japanese occupation and today under the People's Republic of China (PRC, 1949–present) did these natural deepwater southern ports enjoy the attention that connected Hainan to more convenient maritime travel, commerce, defense, and most recently, tourism.¹⁷

Haikou would require significant investment in order to serve as a safe and commercially viable harbor. Peng noted that even if one negotiated the difficult shoals and tides, policing piracy was another perennial challenge, and resources for government protection of the sea lanes to the mainland were extremely limited. A military presence in the south of Hainan, therefore, would establish a clearer authority in the region not only for dealing with piracy but also for asserting maritime sovereignty. These maritime

claims, so crucial to the twenty-first-century discourse on the South China Sea, were not enforceable by Beijing at the remote southern end of the island.¹⁸ At the time of his survey, official mail to and from the island only made the trip twice a month, and depending on the season, conditions, and destination, could take anywhere between one day and three weeks to reach the mainland.¹⁹

Peng's survey includes maps of six ports, some with depth markings and dotted lines that indicate ambitious plans for prospective jetties and other harbor development. Studies of Hainan's geography in the first half of the twentieth century, however, reflect a relative dearth of knowledge both in mainland China and among foreign observers. Even on the most fundamental geographic attributes of the island, it seems that the lack of political and economic interest was reflected in the lack of cartographic accuracy. From extant survey statistics between 1927 and 1987, measurements of the island's area have fluctuated by tens of thousands of kilometers, with the largest and most inaccurate measurements coming as late as a Chinese survey in 1927.²⁰ In earlier Chinese maps, Hainan's cartographic neglect is reflected in one Qing-era map of 1817 that depicts Guangdong coastal settlements with striking accuracy, while Hainan itself is both misshapen and not to scale.²¹

Hainan island's area is between 13,100 and 13,200 square miles, or between about 33,920 and 34,180 square kilometers. (It should be noted that these are the figures for Hainan *island*, and the current Hainan *provincial* area is significantly larger including most of the South China Sea and various smaller islands.)²² In 1928, a French observer with access to Chinese records noted Hainan island's area to be as high as 14,700 square miles (more than 38,000 square kilometers).²³ Ten years later, *National Geographic* also overestimated the island's size at about 14,000 square miles (more than 36,200 square kilometers), almost a thousand square miles off the mark.²⁴ It is significant that these estimates of Hainan's size incorrectly suggested that it was larger than its neighbor, Taiwan. They also naturally reflected the significant lack of knowledge of Hainan's most basic geographical characteristics. By the middle of the twentieth century, no thorough survey of the island had been conducted in such a way as to provide an accurate figure of the island's geography. Only in 1956 did survey figures finally begin to stabilize and home in on a number closer to the island's geographical reality noted above.²⁵

The inaccessibility of the island's interior and the hostility of the Li people who lived there had once been the reason for this ignorance. But trade routes gradually increased the contact between the southern highlands and the coastal settlements so that Peng could declare in 1919 that Hainan's

interior was not, in fact, as remote as the prejudices of his fellow mainlanders might suppose. While the inconvenience of traveling between Hainan and mainland China was an obstruction to commerce and development, Peng noted that the natural waterways of the island were conducive to passenger and commercial traffic aboard a range of vessels. These included everything from steamboats, to junks, to rafts, and finally, to large hollow gourds serving as flotation devices to safely cross a mountain stream.²⁶

Six rivers flow from the island's highest mountain, Wuzhishan, or "Five-Finger Mountain," named for its five prominent and narrow peaks. The rivers run through the lush forests that cover the southern mountains, and the main branches run to the western coast, flowing into the Gulf of Tonkin. Wuzhishan is in the south-central mountainous region of the island. The northern portion of the island is relatively flat with extremely fertile soil, watered by streams that flow from the southern highlands to the eastern central region. Water also comes from the heavy seasonal rains that sweep over the island through the late summer, autumn, and early winter. Besides bringing occasionally dangerous seasonal typhoons, these rains blow in from the northeast and make the northeast of Hainan rich farmland, and historically it has been the wealthiest part of the island. In 1920, the island's farmers mainly grew rice, but also exported lumber, sugar, rubber, coconuts, live pigs, bananas, and coffee.²⁷

The southern mountain forests produced the lumber, but a lack of modern or efficient transportation prevented this industry from developing into a major part of the Hainanese economy. In the final years of the Qing, overseas Hainanese living in Singapore pushed investment in Hainan's agriculture for export to Southeast Asia, especially in bananas and coffee. Beginning in 1906, improved cultivation methods spurred an increase in tropical agriculture that carried into the PRC era, but still did not serve as a basis for significant modern development.²⁸ Peng hoped that the mining potential of the island could be realized, but again infrastructure limitations prevented that until the Japanese occupation of 1939 brought a light-rail connecting the Shilu iron mines of western Hainan with the natural southern ports.²⁹ Here again, Peng's survey is prescient in proposing mining development for the island that would only be realized by later regimes.

As of a 2006 study, agriculture in Hainan continued to make up nearly 50 percent of the island's economy, a larger proportion than any other province. In the early republic, agriculture encompassed an even larger portion of the economy.³⁰ Margaret Moninger noted in 1919, "Agriculture is preeminently the industry of this tropical island. Nearly all other industries are side issues, to be worked in the leisure periods." She wrote of the

various other sideline industries of the island: "The factory whistle is not heard in Hainan. . . . The industries of the people are the simplest kind, requiring no complex machinery, and no power other than that supplied by man and beast. . . ." Moninger goes on to playfully list the vocations of the Hainanese that she has observed using every letter of the alphabet (including Q for "Quacking" to describe the work of shady medical practitioners, and V for "vermicelli" to describe Hainan noodle shops).³¹ The production of dyes, incense, fans, glue, rope, and salt were other significant occupations in Hainan in 1919, but all of them were handicrafts and cottage industries even while factories had begun to appear in mainland cities. Still in 1931, according to another member of the Presbyterian mission community, "Manufacturing is practically nil. Some weaving is done on home looms, some firecracker shops make their own products. . . . The recent influx of kerosene and gasoline tins has given the tinsmiths a new field of endeavor . . ." but clearly the island had been passed by in the early years of Chinese industrialization.³²

Han-Li Relations on Hainan

Peng Chengwan hoped to accelerate modern development on Hainan, and change the persistent mainland biases about the island's backward ways. He believed that steady investment and development of Hainan would win the favor of the islanders. Though various claims to the island overlapped through the first half of the twentieth century, Peng believed that responsible government and adequate investment would win Hainan for Beijing. Peng praised Hainan's potential as a breadbasket (*tianfu*), a term usually reserved for the fertile western province of Sichuan. His blunt assessment of the Li problems and the island's undeveloped infrastructure led to his recommendation for tax relief and central government investment in Hainan. Neither was forthcoming, however, and perceptions of the island continued to waver between another potential Taiwan, and a remote and primitive island ruled by a weak mainland government.

In Edward Schafer's study of Hainan's early history, *Shore of Pearls*, he gave full range to the contradictory perceptions of the island from a mainland perspective. It could be Heaven or Hell, and in the mainlander imagination, tropical islands can often be both, simultaneously representing paradise and the inferno.³³ Schafer's focus was on Hainan from its earliest history until 1100, which was the year one of China's most beloved scholar-officials, Su Dongpo, perished on a return journey from his exile on Hainan. In imperial China, Hainan was the most remote destination of

banished officials, and Schafer conveyed the shame and mortal fear associated with banishment to the island. But Su Dongpo's wit and genius made his ordeal seem less miserable than another official's experience on Hainan might have been, as is apparent from this preface and poem written during his exile in 1098.

Having drunk some wine, I went out alone for a walk and visited
the house of four Li families, Tzu-yün, Wei, Hui, and Hsien-chüeh.

Half-sober, half-drunk, I call on the Lis;
Bamboo spikes, rattan creepers tangle every step.
Following the cow turds I find my way back—
Home beyond the cattle pen, west and west again.³⁴

Su Dongpo and many other imperial officials were sent to Hainan in exile, and while there, they were charged with governing the wild Li people as well as the Han Chinese settlers of the island. In the preface to this poem, Su wrote that he was stumbling home after a night of drinking with four different households of the indigenous minority Li people. Su is remembered on Hainan as a great official and an adopted son of the island. His playful poems reflect his good spirits during his exile and his good rapport with the local people, but for the Hainanese, he also worked tirelessly to establish academies and teach countless skills from efficient farming methods to geomancy and water management.

These issues of Li conflict and transportation were also central to the Ming official, Hai Rui (1513–1587), who suppressed several Li uprisings, and aimed to open better roads and more military outposts on the island.³⁵ But unlike Su or Hai Rui, most tenderfoot officials were not equipped for a life in the frontier wilds of Hainan. A special term was used for such environments—*zhangqi*, best translated as “miasma” but conveying also a sense of natural dangers more terrible than the malaria that it usually denoted. Hainan was described in this way even through the twentieth century.³⁶

It was Chinese official convention to think of Hainan in such savage terms, but the island's current label as a luxuriant and heavenly “Hawaii of Asia” is also not without precedent. Even in the early days of the Japanese full-scale invasion of China, and two years before the occupation of Hainan, the island was being heralded as the “Paradise of China.”³⁷ Still, even under such a title, in 1937 Han Chinese mainlanders generally found the aboriginal Li population to be bizarre, barbaric, and sometimes terrifying.

They have the piercing eyes of the eagle, the cunning of the fox, and also at certain times a feline bestiality. They feel they are disliked by the Chinese, and consider themselves as hunted beasts, which, if they come out of their dens, run the risk of being ill-treated. Born free, high in the hills, they have got into the habit of running over mountains and valleys. They know every single path or secluded spot of the forest where they wander about with a gun, ready to shoot a bird, as much as to rob a traveler. Poor, they have nothing to lose on their expeditions but often on the contrary, everything to gain.³⁸

The Li people, lacking an accurate census of their population, were estimated to constitute about 15 percent of the island's population, which meant they numbered around half a million in the early twentieth century. Hainan's population in 1950, at the time of the Communist takeover was approximately 2.3 million, and at the time of writing is about 8.2 million. The rest of the island's non-Li population was a mixture of mostly Fujian and Guangdong Han Chinese, with less than 1 percent of the population made up of Miao (Hmong) and Hui people.³⁹

In assessing Han-Li relations on Hainan, Peng Chengwan shamed previous and current mainland administrations of the island. He outlined the history of Han-Li relations, and his narration of historical trends and the state of affairs in 1919 was pessimistic. "Past officials would bend all their mental efforts to the task of achieving internal peace [on Hainan] but all of their work was not sufficient to solve the problem." Officials complained of the difficulty of pacifying Hainan's interior. Simply put, Li uprisings or disturbances on Hainan constituted *the* perennial issue for the island's officials. "Since the Han Dynasty [more than two millennia earlier, when Han settlement of coastal Hainan began] there has not been a single dynasty that has not had trouble in their dealings with the Li."⁴⁰

The Li were and are not simply a single tribe of ethnically distinct people inhabiting Hainan's interior from prehistoric times. They were granted official status as an ethnic minority (*shaoshu minzu*) of the People's Republic of China when these groups were established in the ethnic identification project during the early years of the PRC.⁴¹ The Li, led by Wang Guoxing, played an important role in preserving and aiding the Communist revolution on Hainan, and as a result, they were one of the earliest groups granted this status as an official national minority group, which allowed them certain privileges, and in their case, an "autonomous" territory in southern-central

Hainan. But the PRC's broad categorization of the Li is not adequate to understand the complexity of these people of Hainan who are thought of as the indigenous Hainanese.

Indeed the origins of the Li on Hainan predate any written history, and the lack of a written Li language prevents accurate speculation on the earliest dates of their settlement on the island. Similarities in costumes, crafts, rituals, and a simple subsistence lifestyle characterize the people I will continue to refer to here as the Li.⁴² Early Han settlers on the island encountered the Li people, who were already living in the island's "belly," the southern mountainous jungle region of Hainan. The Han newcomers found the flatter and more fertile plains of northern Hainan more suitable to the lifestyle they had known on the mainland. Interaction between the Han and Li peoples was sporadic and often violent for most of the two thousand years between the earliest Han settlement, and Peng's survey.

For the Han, the rugged mountains and jungles of the south were not suited to their agrarian tradition or their walled villages; and in turn, the Li people needed little from these settlers. But with the newly arrived Han came the availability of some things that would make the lives of the Li easier, and the Han wished to trade for some luxury items that the Li could bring them from the jungles. Plentiful rice, salt, and fish would relieve some of the burden on Li hunters, and ease the environmental strain of their slash-and-burn growing techniques. A special local incense was the main commodity available to the Li that was sought by Han merchants. The divine smell of Hainan's "sinking wood" (*chenxiang*) incense filled the ceremonial halls of Beijing and all those throughout China who could afford it.⁴³ The incense itself was actually at a stage in the rotting of an aloeswood or agarswood tree, and its nickname of "sinking wood" was apt, as its density was greater than water. The early interactions between Li and Han were based mainly in this trade, but besides this limited exchange of goods, from the perspective of Qing officialdom, the wild Li of the island's interior were better off left alone.⁴⁴

Han migration to Hainan also was a factor in contributing to the complexity of the Li people. Coming mainly from Guangdong to the north, and Fujian to the northeast, most Han settlers remained on the coasts and the northern plains of Hainan, but for various reasons, some of the newcomers ventured farther inland, and sometimes settled in Li villages. From earliest times, Li villages and Li families welcomed some Han guests as participants in their community. And reciprocally, some Li changed their dress—and under Qing rule, their hairstyle—and joined the coastal community. These were known in imperial Chinese vocabulary as "cooked" (*shu*) Li, while those Li who maintained their own culture separate from the coastal settlements were known as the "raw" (*sheng*) Li. This was a common cultural and

political distinction in Confucian Chinese encounters with frontier peoples and different ethnic groups. It reflected the universalizing aspect of Han Chinese civilization, which placed all peoples on a spectrum of civilization and barbarity, with the possibility to move along that spectrum based on increasingly "civilized" dress, customs, and often, obedience to imperial rule. But Li uprisings were common, especially in the troubled last century of Qing rule. Most of these uprisings were related to unaddressed Li complaints pertaining to exploitative, violent, and rapacious behavior on the part of Han merchants in their territory.⁴⁵

In his survey, Peng lists some of these newcomers who had joined the Li, based on his interviews with Li villagers throughout the island. Chinese from what is today Yunnan, as well as natives of Southeast Asia traveled to Hainan and sometimes settled in Li villages. Some criminals evaded punishment by fleeing to Hainan, and they sometimes began their lives anew as part of a Li village and family. Soldiers garrisoned on Hainan sometimes deserted to the villages and tribes that they had been sent to pacify.⁴⁶ Japanese sailors and merchants also occasionally joined the Li community, as did some Chinese traders whose conduct the Li chiefs considered sufficiently upright and respectful. A small number of descendants of exiled officials, and even some Ming loyalists who fled to Hainan to escape the Manchu rule of the Qing dynasty, also joined the Li people in Hainan's interior.

Despite this complex makeup of Hainan's Li people, most imperial efforts to pacify Hainan put the Li into a single group, just as the PRC authorities have done. And it was the suppression of this homogenized group that most frustrated peaceful Chinese rule of the island. Peng researched the long and troubled history of Li-Han conflict on Hainan, and he drew many conclusions that placed the blame clearly with the Han newcomers to the island, of which he himself was naturally another. His observations are based on extensive interviews across the island, from top officials to the supplications of the poorest villagers, including inhabitants of most regions of the island and most cultural groups. He also used the compiled resources of centuries of official records to compose his survey. His resulting observations provide a broad impression of the general trends in political, social, and economic conditions on the island. His survey is meant for advisement and policy recommendations, and not for historical richness or anecdotal entertainment. So his tendency is to sketch trends rather than provide statistical and anecdotal substantiation of his case.

The poor quality of the civil officials posted to Hainan was a crucial problem, in Peng's view. This view was shared by the Minister of Transportation, Zhao Fan, who also wrote a preface to Peng's survey. Zhao noted that improving the quality of the local and mainland officials serving on

Hainan was central to further developments there. Peng and Zhao blamed the middle officials, the magistrates who were sent to Hainan to govern the Li and Han there. It was their clumsiness, according to Zhao, that accounted for the Li uprisings, though he makes no mention of another likely problem—the perennial and systematic exploitation of the Li people, and the encroaching settlements, by newly arrived Han mainlanders.⁴⁷

The problem of poor quality officials had not been solved, according to Peng, and the recent officials posted to Hainan were no improvement on the long line of inadequate administrators sent to govern Hainan. Their laziness and corruption prevented the deft handling of the ethnic conflict on the island. In keeping with the commonly invoked Confucian attack on mid-level bureaucrats, these officials, sweating in the tropical heat, were always slow to address the minor appeals of the Li, and they brushed off the concerns of the tribal subjects. As a result, minor conflicts gained momentum. Villages were linked through counsels among Li leaders. Arrow heads were passed through the villages as a signal for a counsel, and the chiefs of villages and tribes convened to share their complaints. This led in turn to significant uprisings, that might have been settled by some earlier action taken by the official, who had likely hoped to kick the problem along to his successor, after his three-year term.⁴⁸ While Peng is most likely indicating an important failing in the character of many officials posted to Hainan, it bears noting that this is a stock Confucian critique, leveled at both mid-level bureaucrats and their moral shortcomings. Classical Confucianism favors the ethical cultivation of a supreme group of officials to rule through benevolent example, and in this model, failures of government can be pinned on the personal failings of an individual magistrate, rather than a systematic failure of governance or a subject's unanswered and legitimate grievance.

The grievances of the Li people were long-standing issues mainly stemming from neglect of their political concerns and exploitation at the hands of avaricious merchants. At the top of Peng's list were the greedy merchants who exploited the innocence and naïveté of the Li people. Again we may fault Peng for engaging in a classic Confucian anticommmercial argument, though the record does indeed bear out the regularity of duplicity on the part of Chinese merchants in their interactions with the Li. An American missionary, B.C. Henry, noted near the end of the nineteenth century that the Li "are victimised in many ways, as to the weight and quantity of the goods they bring on the one hand, and in the payment they receive, either in money or goods, on the other."⁴⁹ Other outside sources confirm that the Li-Han troubles were often related to the merchants who traveled into Li territory to sell and trade, well into the twentieth century. These merchants,

however, did not constitute a uniform group, and were often made up of criminals escaping the law on the mainland, agents of the Chinese military or civilian government, or members of the Li community who had been integrated into the coastal or northern Hainan Han villages. Some of the merchants, then, were trusted by the Li communities, whereas some divided the communities and exploited them.⁵⁰

During the Qing and earlier dynasties, in response to duplicity, exploitation, or violence from the coastal Han community, the Li launched raids. In 1919, though, Margaret Moninger wrote, "Of late years, no great [Li] raids have taken place, but in earlier times whole ruined villages were witness to their enmity with the Chinese."⁵¹ The 1910s and 1920s saw a shift in Li-Han relations, as Moninger observed. During the temporary garrisoning of Long Jiguang's soldiers on Hainan, the Li took part in uprisings led by Hainanese Han fighters against the mainlanders. In these sporadic and poorly documented uprisings, a precedent was established for cooperation between the Li and Han of Hainan in a common cause.⁵²

While these occasional political alliances between the Li and Han developed, economic practices were slow to change. Among other products, the merchants brought alcohol, cigarettes, and opium into Li villages in the late Qing and through the early republican period. The drugs were sold to the Li people on credit at first. The prices were inflated, but the unfamiliar and appealing idea of credit, according to Peng, made the Li eager to accept the novel drugs for what seemed like a minimal price. These debts accumulated, and once a year, the merchants would settle the accounts, and collect on the debts. For those Li who could not pay the debts, according to Peng's study, the merchants took several courses of action. They sometimes demanded the precious few animals that the Li possessed as payment of their liquor and cigarette debts. The same merchants who made these claims had often brought the same livestock into the jungles in the first place and traded them to the Li.⁵³

Further, according to Peng's survey, cattle were not the only precious collateral claimed by exploitative merchants in exchange for the debts that the merchants had encouraged the Li to pile up throughout the year. If the Li debtor in question had a daughter, the merchant might take her in exchange for the debt. If the debtor had no daughter, his son might be taken; and if he was childless, he could be taken into bondage or servitude himself.

In summary, Peng wrote that there was a huge and perhaps unbridgeable gap (*honggou*) between the Han and the Li populations. In the language of the recent revolution and the social upheaval that was taking place throughout Chinese cities even as Peng conducted the survey, he wrote

that the most recent Li movement (*yundong*) could be described as the Li people's anti-Han revolution (*geming*).⁵⁴ And here, Peng finally broke with the paternal language of his Qing predecessors. Like Han or Manchu observers of the Li who came before him, and the Communists who would come later in the 1950s and 1960s, Peng criticized the administration of the island by the local officials who could not resist the temptations of graft and corruption, being so far from the punishing hand of Beijing. In describing the Li movement as something more than violent and unruly bandits who were reacting to oppressive and extractive individual officials, Peng was taking a longer and less conventional view. The Li were a force to be reckoned with as the original hosts of Hainan, and in the next three decades, the Japanese and the Nationalists would learn this firsthand. The Li were the cultural, political, economic, and geographical heart of the island.

Peng Chengwan was not the only outside observer who took a keen interest in the Li people as an essential element to the development of Hainan. Ten years after Peng's survey, the German anthropologist, Hans Stübel made two trips to Hainan to observe the Li people, out of which came his encyclopedic volume, *Die Li-stämme der insel Hainan* (The Li tribe of Hainan Island). Stübel traveled to Hainan in 1931 and 1932, and published his lavishly illustrated tome on Li ethnography in 1937. Ten years later, when Hainan was under Japanese occupation, Tokyo University's Kunio Odaka published *Economic Organization of the Li Tribes*. Using maps made by the Japanese Nitrogen and Electric Company, and enjoying the hospitality of the Ledong Japanese Marine base, Odaka published his study on a smaller group of Li villages with an emphasis on their usefulness to the Japanese governance and economic development of the island.⁵⁵

These three surveys—Peng's in 1920, Stübel's in 1937, and Odaka's in 1942—all point to the Li as a crucial factor in the development of Hainan. Clearly separable from the Han majority of the island, the three observers saw the Li as a great potential resource. Of course, the three men did not plan to completely circumvent any interaction with the mainly coastal-dwelling 85 percent of Hainan's Han inhabitants and relate only to the Li people. But the latest of the three observers, Odaka, hoped to separate the Li from the Han, and to think of the Li as a buffer between the Japanese and those Chinese of the island who were hostile to Japanese rule and economic development.

While Peng's view of the Li people was perhaps more accurate than his predecessors, his plans for dealing with them was similarly shortsighted. He pointed them out as an obstacle to development and he noted the strength and potential of exploiting the Li in making Hainan a new bread-

basket for China. And for Peng, the "training" or "breaking" (*xun*) of the wild Li people was an essential ingredient to this formula of development. Stübel's aim in his survey of the Li people was less explicit in its plans for the development of the island. This is to be expected considering that the German interest in the region was minimal at this time, especially compared with the Beijing officials of the 1920s and the Japanese occupiers of the early 1940s. Stübel's sought to establish the lineage of the Li people as traced through their material culture.

Odaka, on the other hand, is perfectly explicit in the preface to his study when he outlines his goals for this study of the Li.

This survey of the condition of the social and economic organizations of the Li of Hainan has been undertaken in the hope that the information obtained will be useful to the [Japanese] administration in governing them. . . . As part of the policy to maintain order, it is necessary to use the Li section of the island as a buffer region against the Chinese, especially against the guerillas, in order to provide a stable background for our military bases. As to the problem of developing the island, it is not necessary to utilize its natural resources, but the Li themselves must be utilized as a source of labor.⁵⁶

Odaka believed that the Li people were potential allies for the Japanese against the coastal Han Chinese of Hainan.⁵⁷ In the 1910s and 1920s, the Li situation was only one of a two-part problem preventing the successful development of Hainan. The other was the poor infrastructure, which was in a sense, the other side of the same coin. "Civilizing" the Li, or changing their ways of agriculture, education, and political organization, would be impossible without adequate communication and transportation networks on the island.

Transportation, Communication, Isolation

Peng Chengwan's assessment of the transportation infrastructure on Hainan was mixed. Some aspects of the transportation system were predictably primitive compared to the mainland, like the complete lack of railroads and paved roads. But in other areas, like water transport and access to the island's interior, Peng sought to dislodge stubborn mainlander opinions about Hainan as hopelessly backward and in need of endless investment. He did not suggest Hainan was not in need of great attention and funding,

but he urged a more pragmatic and informed approach to the specificities of Hainan's strengths and weaknesses in its transportation infrastructure.

In 1919, Peng Changwan found three automobiles on Hainan island. They had been recently brought to Hainan by a businessman who purchased them in Hong Kong. In December of 1918, the cars arrived in Haikou to local excitement, according to Peng. They sat six passengers each, and were in constant need of repair. This was still the dawn of motoring throughout the world, but even so, the three vehicles already appear pathetic in Peng's description. They jostled their passengers relentlessly along the ten-kilometer road between Haikou and neighboring Fucheng in the north.

At the time of their purchase, the company, headed by one Li Jinlong, had boasted that they would be able to run the cars from Haikou to Ding'an, dozens of kilometers away, and then on to the relatively cosmopolitan town of Wenchang on the northeastern coast of the island. Wenchang was the ancestral home of the famous Song family and many prominent generals, as well as being the traditional home of the political and cultural elites of Hainan, supplying the island's government with most of its low-level officials and educated workers.

But the plan to connect Wenchang and Haikou by automobile was abandoned when it became apparent that the cars simply could not sustain the pounding that the bumpy roads would inflict on them; nor could they escape the muddy ruts and washouts that resulted from any significant rainfall. So the planners adjusted their goals. The ten-kilometer trip from Haikou to Fucheng was much more modest, but it still was not easy. The huge puddles were too deep for the cars to cross in wet weather. The automobiles were already out of date and they would have needed constant repair even without the hazards of tropical weather and poor quality roads.

Peng wrote of the cars with somewhat amusing language, but he also expressed a cautious optimism about the enterprise. Of course, he noted, these cars were merely a novelty to wealthy Haikou dwellers who could pay 40 *jiao* for a ride to Fucheng and another 40 for the ride back. Li Jinlong's initial investment in buying the cars was 20,000 *yuan*, according to Peng, and the investment seemed at first to be symbolic considering that one fully loaded car brought only 4.8 *yuan* for a round-trip from Haikou to Fucheng. But Peng praised Li's initiative with this little business, noting that the three cars could make sixty round-trips each day, bringing in a maximum potential net income of 864 *yuan* for the small company. Of course, this was considering all conditions were perfect, the cars did not break down en route, and every car was fully loaded with passengers.

In reality, Li Jinlong’s business actually did manage to turn a tidy profit in several months between the arrival of the automobiles in December of 1918, and the time of Peng’s survey visit in the spring of 1919. On average, Li’s company turned 100 *yuan* in profits every day, significantly less than Peng’s ambitious and fanciful calculations for the venture, but still, a brisk business. Peng was impressed with the industriousness of this businessman, and the cleverness of the Hainan people more generally. He concluded that it was not merely a symbolic venture, but held promise for future enterprises in transportation innovation.⁵⁸

What Peng Chengwan could not have known in 1919, or when the survey was published a year later, was that this little enterprise was in fact a harbinger of a later trend of Hainanese professionalization in work related to the automobile. Especially in the Southeast Asia Hainanese communities, auto mechanics and chauffeurs became vocations in which the Hainan community was most prolific.⁵⁹ The number of cars on Hainan island was not significant through the early and mid-twentieth century, but in 1920, Peng Chengwan saw potential in the development of Hainan’s infrastructure through efforts like Li Jinlong’s.

While praising the industrious Li Jinlong, Peng Chengwan still did not avoid the blunt conclusion that Hainan’s roads would need extensive investment and labor in order to sustain anything more than this modest motoring route between two northern towns. Horse and ox carts were more suited to the transportation realities of Hainan, and these—especially ox carts—were not in short supply. Horses were not as common. At the end of Qing Dynasty in 1911, a unit of the Hunan Army’s cavalry that was stationed in Hainan was abruptly demobilized. The demobilization left the cavalymen with no vocational opportunities or assets, except for the thirty or forty steeds of their unit. Again, Peng takes this chance to make an example of the industriousness and enterprising savvy that combined into good business potential on Hainan. Several of the cavalymen joined together and formed a company that provided the use of their horses and carts for the transportation of people and goods. Peng notes wryly that the steeds were generally more reliable than Li Jinlong’s automobiles, and they usually got their passengers to their nearby destinations in about the same amount of time.⁶⁰

Peng’s optimism for change on Hainan was not misplaced. Less than a decade later, M. Savina, a French observer who visited Hainan in 1928, referred to the northern Hainanese towns of Haikou and Qiongzhou as the island’s “pride,” noting that they offered access by automobile and even

airplane. Savina wrote that on his visit, wireless telegraph, telephones, and electricity were common in Haikou, and that the city featured large boulevards, lined with modern buildings and stores. The city walls that one observer noted in 1919, had been destroyed by 1928, and the city was moving toward a more modern design that allowed migrant workers to move in and out of the city more freely. For Savina, this prevented an accurate estimate of the northern city's population of about sixty thousand, but it also was a sign of a move away from the strict and stultifying distinction between rural and urban workers.⁶¹

Three years later, in 1931, a Presbyterian mission newsletter noted the increasing profile of automobiles and related occupations: "the advent of the Ford and its competitors has given rise to new professions, the chauffeurs especially being persons of considerable economic importance . . . The motor car is the factor most responsible for material change in Hainan during these past fifty years and is perhaps the forerunner of many modern improvements yet to come."⁶² Li Jinlong's little motoring business had indeed inspired a trend on Hainan.

Besides the anecdotal examples of the Hunan cavalry horses and Li Jinlong's three-car automobile company, Peng Chengwan was eager to note that Hainan's transportation infrastructure had significant potential, and in fact was already quite developed in several ways. According to Peng's findings in 1920, tales of the dangers and inaccessibility of the island's interior were greatly exaggerated among mainland and foreign prejudices. Peng disabused the reader of notions about Hainan's completely inaccessible interior.

He wrote of an amusing example during the late Qing, when several conflicts erupted between imperial troops and the local Li people of the interior. Feng Zicai (1818–1903), a general in the imperial army and hero of the Sino-French War in 1885, led Qing forces in suppressing a Li uprising in 1887. At the conflict's resolution, Feng memorialized the emperor, reporting the successful campaign and adding that he would take this opportunity to improve access to the island's remote interior regions by building new roads.⁶³

The new roads, according to Feng Zicai, would connect the southern ports to the Li villages, where luxury goods like incense, teak, and sandalwood could be bought from the Li. Feng claimed that these interior villages had never been connected to the coastal villages and cities, and that his work would bring these Li people and their products into the imperial fold for the first time in the history of the Chinese empire. These claims of inaccessibility correspond to similar ones made by the Americans, B.C. Henry and Leonard Clark, in 1886 and 1938, respectively. All three men