CHAPTER FOUR

DEPOPULATION AND DIASPORA

Forced migration of island populations as an instrument of colonial strategy was not rare in the early history of VOC conflicts with local opponents in Asia. The most striking example was in 1621, four years after the appointment of Jan Pietersz. Coen as Governor-General, when Banda, the sole producer of nutmeg and mace in the world, became the target of the Dutch. To take revenge on the local regents who failed to honour the terms of the contracts they had signed, Coen conquered the Banda Islands. Almost the whole population of around 15,000 people was either killed or rounded up and shipped to Batavia. A few managed to escape the mayhem and fled elsewhere. After the depopulation of the island, Coen moved in Dutch perke

ners, who were allotted plantations, with their slave workers. In 1651, about 12,000 inhabitants of West Ceram, one of the centres of clove production, were also uprooted from their original villages and resettled in Amboina and Manipa.1 In the case of Formosa, the Dutch had some knowledge of the outer islands of Formosa—Botel, Tatachel, Sanna Sanna, and Lamey. In the first half of the 1640s, the Dutch authorities thought of removing the islanders of Botel to Formosa but it did not take long to reject the idea.2 In Lamey, however, the Dutch meant business. The events which have become notorious as the Lamey Massacre have been studied in detail by Blussé and Ts’ao.3 But the whole story is recounted here again in the broader context of the Dutch–Formosan encounter to give substance and depth to this picture of Dutch colonialism.

An island of legend

Lamey Island, nowadays Hsiao Liu Chiu (小琉球), is located to the southwest of Taiwan, about 6.5 kilometres off Kaohsiung. This small island has a surface area of only 6.8 square kilometres and is girt with coral reefs, and honeycombed with caves and caverns. The island is now populated by Han Chinese, but a cave on the island named ‘the Cave of the Black Spirits (or Ghosts)’ (烏鬼洞) by the locals suggests the existence of a past which was peopled by other inhabitants. Documents from the Ch’ing period mention that ‘black spirits’ who were slaves of the Dutchmen lived there. Until the late 1960s, a different version was still known locally. The thrust of this legend was that dark people with gill-like tattoos on their necks from the
island used to be skilled divers. When these people had murdered the crews of shipwrecked foreign ships and refused to allow the Chinese to settle on their island, this incited a deadly revenge by the Dutch, the English, and the Chinese. No matter whichever party sought revenge, the theme was the same: there were caves where the dark people hid themselves and the invaders finally smoked them out. Overcome by the fumes, many people suffocated and the survivors were relocated on the mainland of Formosa.4

In the VOC archives, names like Liugiu, Gouden Leeuw (Golden Lion), Matthijssen, and Lamey were used to refer to the island, though Gouden Leeuw and Lamey are those which appear most frequently. Lamey was the name given by Formosan mainlanders.5 As a sad postscript to this tragedy, what the islanders themselves called their island is not known.

**Shaping the image of Lamey**

On 28 July 1622, Commander Cornelis Reyersen first set eyes on the island of Lamey. From the sea, the island seemed to him a fruitful land abound- ing in coconut palms. No people were observed along the coast. Reyersen intended to send some sailors accompanied by a Chinese interpreter ashore to fetch water, but the Chinese interpreter refused to go because he claimed there were about 400 ‘evil and cannibalistic’ inhabitants living on the island. The islanders used to hide themselves whenever strangers arrived, but about three years earlier they had managed to kill more than 300 Chinese. Adding to the difficulties, there was no suitable landing-place.6 The reluctance shown by the Chinese interpreter indicates how the Chinese viewed the island and its inhabitants.

As they were far less familiar with local conditions, this evil reputation may not have bothered the Dutch navigators overmuch. A few months later in October 1622, crewmen of another ship, the *Gouden Leeuw*, went ashore to fetch some water on the island. They and Merchant Mathijs Jacobsz. disappeared into the vegetation and failed to return. Hit by a severe squall, the *Gouden Leeuw* was forced to leave without being able to send a search party. Some years later it was reported that the islanders had eaten all the missing crewmen. After this incident, the Dutch called the island Gouden Leeuw (Golden Lion) or Matthijssen to commemorate this event, burdening the island with the stigma of this tragic encounter.7

In his ‘Discourse’ of 1628, the Reverend Georgius Candidius describes the islanders as exclusionists who did not trust outsiders. This information was apparently obtained from the local Chinese and the inhabitants of Soulang. The islanders refused to allow any foreigners on their island. Chinese traders were obliged to remain on their junks and wait for the islanders to come to barter. It was said that what the islanders offered with their right hands,