CHAPTER SIX

CONQUEST, CONTEST, AND CONNECTION

Since the fifteenth century, Spanish global expansion had provided a textbook example of the pursuit of gold.\(^1\) For instance, the Spanish ‘discovery’ of the Igorot people in northern Luzon in the Philippines occurred simply as part of an exploratory expedition in search of gold.\(^2\) Rumours about the existence of gold in Formosa also reached the ears of the Spaniards. The Dutch thought that the Spaniards had stolen a march on them by laying their hands on the gold before they had when they heard the latter were said to have appeared in a certain gold-producing village situated in the high mountains outside the Spanish territory.\(^3\) Nevertheless, Formosa did not become a competitive arena for gold since the Spaniards were not even involved in the gold trade between the Formosans and the Chinese.\(^4\)

The Dutch conquest of Spanish Formosa in the north of the island turned a new page in the history of gold exploration. It allowed the Dutch to explore gold sites from Quelang and Tamsuy to the east via Cavalangh. In their eagerness to acquire gold, the Dutch authorities pacified Formosan tribal villages in order to link Tayouan with the remote north-east, paying particular attention to the mysterious gold village, Taraboan. However, the painstaking search proved fruitless when the Dutch finally unveiled the truth about Taraboan. Urging the Tayouan authorities to come down to earth and face reality, the Gentlemen Seventeen stressed that: “The Company’s true silver- and gold-mine is the China and Japan trade.”\(^5\)

The demise of the Spanish regime

Fifteen years after the Spaniards established themselves at Manila in 1571, the Governor of the Philippines suggested further expeditions to and the pacification of at least twelve other islands including Isla Hermosa (Formosa).\(^6\) This project was taken more seriously after the strategic position of Formosa as ‘China’s trading gate’ dawned on the Spaniards.\(^7\) This also led to their awareness of the abundant resources of Formosa. It was even said that sticks of the nutmeg tree were found in the firewood collected by the local people. Such rumours nurtured the Spanish dream of a spice trade in Formosa. If the Spaniards could take Formosa, this would also enable them to open up a lucrative trade not only with China, but also with Cochin China, Siam, Cambodia, and Japan.\(^8\) The establishment of the Dutch settlement in
south-west Formosa in 1624 galvanized the Spaniards into taking steps to protect the Chinese and Spanish shipping plying between the Philippines and China. The Spanish occupation of northern Formosa was a strategic move made in reaction to the Dutch menace.

It was not long before the decision to conquer the island triggered a debate in Spain. In 1626, the proposed conquest was justified by a religious imperative and supported by the burgeoning legacy of civilization. The Spaniards saw it as their ‘divine duty’ to propagate the Gospel in all parts of the world, and to unify the natives who should link up with other nations as members of the international community on the basis of the *ius gentium* (human law). It was believed that if the Spaniards strove sincerely to demonstrate their good intentions towards the natives, they would be permitted to build a fort to offer the Spanish soldiers protection. They in turn could guard the missionaries. In May 1626, the Spaniards arrived in Quelang and started to build Fort San Salvador on Quelang Island, present-day Hoping Tao. Two years later they occupied Tamsuy and built the redoubt of Santo Domingo there.

Nevertheless, after one decade of occupation, the Spaniards admitted they had experienced unexpected frustrations in Formosa. First, their dreams of setting up trade with China were dashed. It was said that so far no more than 2,000 *pesos* had been earned from this trade. Second, after several Spanish priests were murdered by local people, the Spanish High Government in the Philippines drew the conclusion that it was impossible to convert the natives. Third, adversely affected by the local insalubrious climate in northern Formosa, many Spaniards died and more people from Pampanga Province in the Philippines had to be recruited for the garrison, which had numbered around 500 men at the beginning of occupation. In late 1637, the Spaniards demolished the redoubt in Tamsuy and concentrated all their military power in Quelang. The following year, some Chinese came to Tayouan and reported to the Dutch that the Spaniards were on the verge of taking their departure from Quelang. The Dutch did not act immediately but waited until the time was ripe for expelling the Spaniards from northern Formosa. In August 1642, after besieging Quelang for five days, Captain Hendrik Harrouzee commanding some 700 soldiers and sailors forced the remaining 330 Spaniards and Pampangans to surrender. In March 1644, the fort of San Salvador was rebaptized North Holland and the round redoubt on top of the mountain was given the name Victoria. By the end of 1645, the construction of a new redoubt called Antonio was finished. This new redoubt was in Tamsuy.