

The French occupation of Keelung and Penghu in 1884 ultimately led to the Qing Dynasty's decision to develop Taiwan

The war between France and Qing Dynasty-ruled China, which began in Dec. 1883 over control of northern Vietnam, spilled into Taiwan in Oct. 1884, when the French captured the northern port city of Keelung.

A few months earlier, the Qing government had appointed Liu Ming-chuan (劉銘傳) as imperial commissioner for the defense of Taiwan, which the French had been eyeing for its strategic importance.

Born into a poor farming family, Liu quickly rose through the Qing ranks as a military leader during the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion.

A month after Liu arrived in Taiwan, the French attacked Keelung, but Liu's forces kept the enemy from landing. The French broke through Liu's defenses during the subsequent October invasion and Liu was forced to retreat to Taipei.

According to official information from Longshan Temple, after hearing that Liu had planned to abandon Taipei and head further south, local elders gathered at the temple and wrote a petition to Liu stamped with the temple seal and also sent people to close the gates leading south. Liu finally relented and with the help of civilian troops, was able to hold on to Taipei.



Another version, according to JW Davidson's 1903 book, *The Island of Formosa, Past and Present*, claims that an angry mob attacked Liu's party and locked him in the temple until he agreed to defend Taipei.

Sun Kaihua (孫開華) was able to repulse French forces invading Tamsui a week later, confining the enemy to Keelung. After a few months of minor skirmishes, it was cholera and typhus outbreaks that eventually reduced the French forces in half. Unable to advance, the French were still able to enforce a naval blockade of Tamsui, Tainan and Kaohsiung.

Lieutenant Colonel Jacques Duchesne assumed command in January 1885 with reinforcements, and the French scored a few more victories, finally reaching the Keelung River. Meanwhile, Admiral Amedee Courbet successfully occupied the Penghu (澎湖) islands.

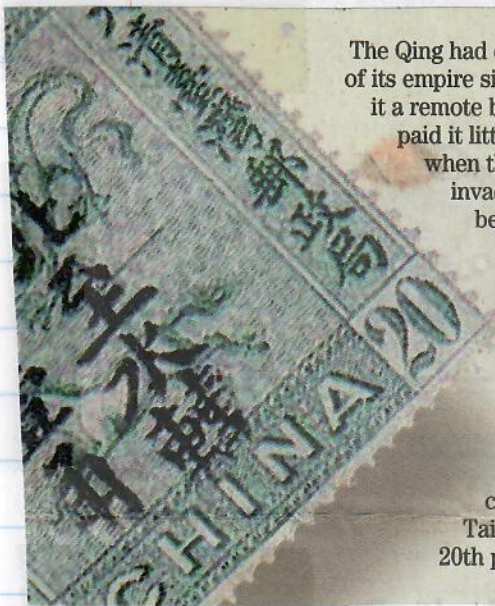
Yet, Duchesne's troops weren't strong enough to continue, Liu's troops stood their ground and the battle reached a stalemate. No more major operations were carried out from either side for the rest of the war.

Peace talks began in April, and the French lifted the blockade while the Chinese began their withdrawal from Tonkin. On June 9, the Treaty of Tianjin (天津條約) was signed, effectively recognizing French control over Vietnam and establishing trade rules, border demarcation plans and other commercial stipulations. The ninth article mandated French withdrawal from Keelung and Penghu.

French troops stayed in Keelung until June 22 to ensure Chinese withdrawal from Vietnam. Duchesne was reportedly the last one to board the departing ships headed to Penghu, which would remain in French hands for another month.

LEFT: A portrait of Liu Ming-Chuan, first provincial governor of Taiwan under the Qing Dynasty.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



The Qing had claimed Taiwan as part of its empire since 1693, but considered it a remote backwater territory and paid it little attention until 1874, when the Japanese successfully invaded Taiwan in what would be known as the Mudan Incident (牡丹社事件).

After the French incident, the Qing fully realized the strategic importance of keeping Taiwan under its control. On Oct 12, 1885, the imperial court decided to separate Taiwan from Fujian as its 20th province, with Liu as

provincial governor.

Liu is remembered locally as a progressive administrator who made great strides to modernize Taiwan, but it's also said that his "opening up the mountains and pacifying the Aborigines" (開山撫番) campaign was overly oppressive with frequent use of force. His achievements include bolstering Taiwan's defenses, setting up electric streetlights, establishing a postal system and also setting up a Western-style school. Taiwan's first railroad project was initiated in 1887 under his watch, eventually linking Keelung and Hsinchu by 1893.

Qing Dynasty development of Taiwan was short-lived, as Liu resigned in 1891 due to "health reasons" and returned to China at age 56. Four years later, the Qing ceded Taiwan to Japan.