

Towards a History of Climate Disasters in Taiwan: the Case Study of the 87 Flood in 1959

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This paper takes the 87 Flood in 1959 as a case study to investigate the thought of water-control in the history of Taiwan. Taiwan has a changeable climate due to its unique geographical position and complex terrain. For this reason, there have been many natural climate disasters in history. From the viewpoint of environmental history, a natural disaster is always a human-made disaster because the meaning of disaster is socially determined. Floods caused by rain are natural phenomena, but they are defined as disasters when threatening people's lives and ways of life. Besides, human actions are sometimes implicated even in what we think of as purely natural catastrophes.

The most serious floods in Taiwan occurred on August 7, 1959. It claimed more than 600 lives, while over 300,000 people became disaster victims. The torrential rains in south and central Taiwan created catastrophic flooding. However, high concentration of people living in high-risk environments, which resulted from the ambition to control and civilize the environment since the colonial period, could be seen as the social factor of this disaster. On the other hand, in order to promote the reconstruction work, vast human resources have been mobilized to "fight for the country". "Disasters Make a Country Stronger" or "Man can Conquer Nature" have become the slogans of the government. They also have guide the thought of water-control of post-war government in Taiwan for a long time.

Keyword: climatic disaster, 87 Flood, water control, history of disasters