Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Social Psychology and Humanity Studies
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/82/2025.MU20501

Samurai, Pagan, or Ming Loyalist? The Reconstruction of Zheng Chenggong's Literary Images in the Netherlands, Japan, and China, 1710-1910

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Abstract: This paper compares depictions of Zheng Chenggong in Dutch, Japanese, and Chinese popular literature, focusing on plays and opera. Zheng's multifaceted identity and historical events have been reinterpreted by writers from these three countries to explore their proto-national identity. Dutch literature portrays Zheng as a barbaric pagan, Japanese literature emphasizes his Japanese ancestry and loyalty, while Han Chinese revolutionaries depict him as an anti-Qing leader. Zheng's complex character, including his loyalty to the Ming, aggressive invasion of Dutch Taiwan, and mixed military tactics, makes him susceptible to various literary reinterpretations. Authors cherry-pick elements from Zheng's life to fit their own proto-national narratives, resulting in diverse and often contrasting images of him.

Keywords: Zheng Chenggong, Multifaceted identity, Multicultural legacy.

1. Introduction

The disheveled and drunken pirate gnashed his teeth and bit his fingers, muttering something about a scandalous loss. "[R]unning distracted he bit off a piece of his tongue, which occasioned such a Flux of Blood, as could not timely be staunched, so he died of it."[1] The Dutch ambassador to Muscovy wrote these words, which depicted the death of Ming General Zheng Chenggong in a dramatic manner. Is this, however, how Zheng Chenggong died? What would be the Dutch's motivation for portraying him in this manner?

Zheng Chenggong (1624-1662), often known as "Koxinga," has been the subject of numerous stories throughout the world. He was a Ming dynasty (1368-1644) loyalist who led a military army to repel the Manchu Qing's invasion of the Ming and its remnants (modern-day East China and Taiwan) from 1618-1683. In 1662, he captured the island of Formosa (Taiwan) from the Dutch and utilized it as a base of operations.

Perhaps because of his military exploits against the Dutch, Zheng was viewed as a savage pirate invader from the Netherlands perspective. However, the Dutch weren't the only ones who interpreted him in such a manner. In Japan, Zheng was revered as a hero and even worshipped by some. In China, Zheng was regarded as a symbol of Han Chinese solidarity, particularly anti-Qing sentiment. These disparities pose an important question: How do the playwrights in different countries use the images of Zheng Chenggong to cultivate their proto-national identity?

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Scholars have examined Zheng Chenggong's achievements and his posthumous literary representations. However, there has been no comprehensive cross-culture comparison of Zheng Chenggong's literary images and historical legacies so far. Historian Hang Xing studies the rise and fall of Zheng Chenggong's maritime empire. He argues that Zheng found it difficult to legitimize his commercial empire as an independent regime, because there was no precedent empire filled by trade in Chinese history.[2] His research presents the practical concerns of Zheng Chenggong, forming a good contrast with those in literary works. Then, in terms of literary representations, Donald Keene contends that Zheng Chenggong's biracial identity enabled playwrights in Japan to use him as a container of Japanese cultural superiority.[3] Wang Chong investigates both historical and literary interpretations of Zheng in Chinese and Japanese plays, focusing on the dramatization of characters.[4] Their work, while informative, falls short of providing a sufficient comparison between the historical and literary images of Zheng. More importantly, the Western (Dutch) portrayals of him remain understudied. My research contributes to existing scholarship by providing a fresh cross-culture comparative lens from both Asian and European perspectives.

This paper seeks to explore the reconstruction of Zheng Chenggong's image in dramas and plays written after his death in the Netherlands (1793), Japan (1715), and China (1906). By comparing the accounts of Zheng Chenggong in historical records and literary works, my research aims to understand how Zheng's multiethnic identity may have appealed to audiences in different cultural contexts. This paper argues that Zheng's multicultural identity provided a framework open to interpretation for writers to claim a prototype of nationalism in an early-modern historical setting by emphasizing cultural superiority over other countries.

To achieve this purpose, this paper analyzes three plays from different countries to demonstrate how playwrights of different countries picked elements of Zheng to match their own proto-national identity. *The Tragedy of Formosa* [5] tells the story of a Dutch priest's martyrdom as he encourages his fellow men to battle against the "evil" Zheng. *The Battles of Koxinga* [6] focuses on Zheng's conquests and triumphs, highlighting his Japanese warrior spirit, while disregarding Zheng's primarily Chinese upbringing. *The Records of a Maritime National Hero* [7] highlighted Zheng's heroic exploits during his defeats and attempts to make peace with the Qing.

Japanese, Chinese, and Dutch writers have given Zheng Chenggong three different names. Japanese playwrights refer to him as Koxinga, which translates as Lord of the Imperial Surname in Minnanese/Fujianese. Western playwrights prefer a more Westernized spelling, Coxinga. Chinese writers kept his original Chinese name. This paper will use these names accordingly in respective sections, with Zheng as an abridgment for Zheng Chenggong.

2. Zheng's Presence in the East and West

To understand the construction and reconstruction of Zheng's image in literary works, an overview of his life from various dynastic histories is required. Zheng was born in Japan in 1624 and was given the name Zheng Sen (森), which means "forest" in Japanese.[8] Because his Chinese father was away most of the time, Zheng received a Japanese upbringing from his mother.

When Zheng was six years old, he moved to Fujian, his ancestral home. There he would meet his father, Zheng Zhilong (1604-1661, referred to as Zhilong in this paper), whom he barely knew. Zhilong pushed him to study diligently to gain admission to the prestigious Nanjing Imperial Academy.[9] Zheng, like his mentor Qian Qianyi, aspired to be a Confucian scholar and official. Zheng attended the Imperial Academy after completing his preliminary studies for the academy.[2] He also studied military texts such as *The Art of War* during his time at the academy. After completing his education at the Academy, Zheng began to play an increasingly important role in his father's trade empire.

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In 1645, Zheng started to serve under the pretender Emperor Ming Shaozong (Era name Longwu, 1645-1646). Though Ming Shaozong was not a legitimate emperor by succession, he was a former Prince and a genuine descendant of the first Ming Emperor.[10] Shaozong was so impressed by Zheng that he decided to confer many titles on him. He gave Zheng the name "Chenggong," which means "achieving merit," and the imperial surname Zhu. This is why Zheng is now revered as "Koxinga," (国姓爺), which means "Lord of the Imperial Surname."

However, the good times did not last long for Zheng. Three tragedies occurred in 1646. First, the Qing captured and killed Shaozong. Soon after, Zhilong defected to the Qing, tempted by the Qing's offers of territory and power.[11] However, the Qing later broke its promise after his defection. Zhilong was apprehended and deported to Beijing, never to return to his hometown of Fujian. In order to gain trust, Zheng Zhilong destroyed arsenals and left critical passes accessible when he defected to the Qing. As a result, while Zhilong was being taken north, the Qing were able to send forces straight to his base of Anhai. The entire city, including Zhilong's mansion, was pillaged and torched by the Qing. Zheng's mother, Tagawa Matsu, was raped and even forced to commit suicide.[9] These three key incidents pushed Zheng over the edge, prompting him to raise the "Ming loyalist" banner and battle the Qing.

From 1646 to 1652, Zheng expanded his empire and acquired numerous counties and islands, including the twin islands of Xiamen and Jinmen.[2] Zheng attempted to forge an alliance with other Ming loyalist forces, but his efforts were thwarted by Qing involvement.[12] As a result, Zheng reverted to his underground trading network in Qing China. Through exporting products to places such as Japan or charging passing ships for protection "passes," Zheng was able to raise sufficient funds to support his army.[2]

Following this period, Zheng began to suffer an increasing number of defeats due to defections and anti-trade measures. Two of his most brilliant commanders defected, destroying the Zheng trade network. After a humiliating defeat in Nanjing, it was clear that Zheng needed to relocate. Formosa (Taiwan) was certainly the best option, as his father Zhilong had developed contacts there, and the Chinese settlers approved of Zheng. In fact, Zheng had always intended to recapture it. He had been planning the military effort since the 1650s. This, however, would mean de facto war with the Dutch, who had already colonized the island.

After a year of planning and debate, Zheng finally launched this military operation in 1661. Zheng was superior in terms of the size of his military forces (his entire army of thirty thousand men and four hundred ships against a few thousand Dutch and a handful of junks). Zheng also had a large number of sympathizers in Taiwan, making it extremely difficult for the Dutch to defend themselves.[13] The Dutch attempted to stall him with their technologically superior navy while waiting for help from Batavia, their base of operations.[2] However, Zheng's numerous battleships were able to destroy the technically advanced Dutch flagship *Hector* simply by bombarding it from every possible angle.[13] Soon, the two sturdiest Dutch fortresses were under siege, and by July 1661 only one, *Zeelandia*, remained. In May 1661, Zheng Chenggong laid out his capitulation terms: Safe departure with essential belongings, or all the Dutch would be slaughtered. Dutch reinforcements arrived on July 30 but were stranded due to Zheng vessels blocking a critical supply route, leaving them with depleted food and water supplies. Finally, on January 27, the Dutch agreed to Zheng's terms of capitulation.

Zheng died on June 23, 1662, at the age of thirty-seven. As stated in the introduction, varying accounts of his death existed. The Dutch claim he bled to death after biting off his tongue, whereas the Chinese say he died of a severe cold while kneeling in front of the first Ming Emperor's testament. According to early Qing scholar Liu Xianting, minutes before Zheng's death Zheng began pulling off his own facial flesh.[13] Though why he deliberately hurt himself remains a mystery, the various points of contention between the Chinese and the Dutch are evident – activities prior to death, cause

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of death, and so on. Historical narratives usually strive to be more objective and impartial than literary sources. If are already inconsistent in so many areas, literary narratives must be even more different.

In his life, Zheng was simultaneously a pirate, a merchant, and a general. As a pirate, his navy was the foundation of his empire, and he would charge merchants hefty levies for "passes" to trade with the Japanese or travel safely. When necessary, he would also use military force to eliminate competitors. As a merchant, Zheng established a vast underground trade network throughout China, generating substantial profit. Though the Qing eventually destroyed the network, it served as the foundation for future Qing-Japan trade. Finally, as a general, Zheng Chenggong was able to successfully gather thousands of soldiers and fight the Qing. He was a talented commander who won many decisive battles. Even though the Qing's sheer number of soldiers eventually forced Zheng's authority on the coast to a halt, he was still able to capture the island of Formosa (Taiwan) and continue the Ming resistance.

3. The Dutch Tragedy of Formosa (Taiwan)

The Zheng-Dutch links appear to be centered on Formosa (Taiwan), but there is more to it. Zheng's family had a history with the Dutch, who, following Zheng's acquisition of Formosa (Taiwan), created the play *The Tragedy of Formosa* and claimed a religious supremacy over Coxinga, Zheng's name in the play.

3.1. Competition Between the Zheng Family and the Dutch East India Company

The Dutch and the Zheng family both attempted to monopolize the trade between Japan and Southeast Asia. The Dutch colonization of Formosa (Taiwan) in 1624 marked the beginning of the interactions between the two powers. His father Zhilong was an important supplier of "gold, silk, and piece goods" to Japan.[14] Meanwhile, the Dutch provided a unique product in return: Dutch cannons, which were technologically advanced and highly sought-after by both the Qing Empire and the Ming resistance forces. The Dutch, however, frequently saw the Zheng empire as a "thorn in the flesh."(direct account from the Dutch), because Zhilong, like the Dutch, also traded with the Japanese, but offered premium goods. After the Japanese banned Dutch presence in their ports in 1628 over a conflict, Dutch trade began to decline, whereas Zheng empire trade flourished. However, the embargo was abolished in 1633, and in 1646 Zhilong surrendered to the Qing, leaving a power vacuum in his trade empire.

Zheng Chenggong did not successfully fill the power vacuum. While he took over and even somewhat expanded the trade empire (1646-1650), with the defection of key personnel, his empire weakened structurally, and started to transform into a processor rather than a producer of raw goods. [2] This meant a loss of economic and military power for Zheng in Taiwan. Since Zheng viewed Formosa (Taiwan) as his land—his father had established contacts there, and there were many Chinese settlers—he tried to make up for his loss of economic power by gaining political influence, ensuring that he could easily capture the island if necessary. One of these was obtaining control over Formosa (Taiwan) ports through a spy (high-ranking) in Dutch ranks, but there were almost certainly many more undocumented activities that facilitated Zheng's takeover of the island in 1661. The governor of Formosa (Taiwan), Frederick Coyett, had already noticed Zheng's activities and called for action in 1657.[13] Upon uncovering Zheng's spy in 1659, Coyett realized that an invasion would be imminent and called for a warning against it. However, due to the arrogance of Coyett's troops and the false promises of the Zheng trade empire, Coyett's warnings went unheeded. Zheng would storm across the Taiwan Strait and conquer Formosa (Taiwan) two years later.

These interactions generated much hate towards Zheng Chenggong in the Netherlands. The Dutch wanted to find a way to comfort themselves after the loss of Formosa (Taiwan). To achieve that, they would have wanted to put Zheng down. Zheng's invasion of Formosa (Taiwan) was immoral and

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barbaric because he abused the Dutch's trust. Since moral standards/restrictions are frequently derived from religion, the pious Dutch attributed Zheng's acts to his lack of faith, transforming him into a pagan.

3.2. Zheng Chenggong, the Barbarian

Johannes Nomsz (1738-1803) wrote the play *The Tragedy of Formosa (Taiwan)* in 1795. His stepfather died when he was twenty-three, leaving him a substantial inheritance that enabled him to compose plays with financial security. During his prime, 1755-1783, his plays would have accounted for nine percent of all the plays performed in Amsterdam. *The Tragedy of Formosa (Taiwan)* was well-received among critics, as it served not just as a play, but also as a reminder to the Dutch: despite their diminished military power, they still needed to maintain their cultural and theological superiority.

The play takes place during the siege of *Zeelandia* (1662), a fortress that will inevitably fall, when Zheng tries to persuade the Dutch to surrender in order to reduce losses on both sides. Zheng dispatches his envoy Xamti and Dutch priest/prisoner Antonius Hambroek to *Zeelandia* to convince the Dutch. However, rather than following Zheng's orders, Hambroek encourages the Dutch to continue fighting. Upon returning, Hambroek is summarily executed by Zheng in front of Hambroek's family. This was a factual story that demonstrated Hambroek's high moral standards. Note that Zheng's Dutch literary character is referred to as Coxinga, as this is the spelling used by the Dutch.

Coxinga's name appears thirty-five times in the play, but each time he is referred to with rage and contempt, as if Coxinga himself was the devil and a bloodthirsty barbarian. Cajet (Fredrik Coyett, Governor of Formosa (Taiwan)) in the play describes Coxinga as a "tyrant" who makes "his men fight desperately," while a local, Elizabeth, corroborates by stating "[h]e wants to satisfy his desire for revenge in the enemy's blood."[5] Based on these images, the Dutch audience would naturally perceive Coxinga as a horrible tyrant, comparable to Russia's Ivan the Terrible. This despot would control his men, threaten them the way he did to Hambroek, and force them to perform his will. The word "desperately" indicates that Coxinga's soldiers have no choice but to fight; if they do not, Coxinga might slaughter their entire family. In fact, Nomsz portrays Coxinga as a sadist who only inflicts pain on others. However, Coxinga does not physically appear even once during the play. Coxinga presides over the play as a looming shadow, making him an all-encompassing, ever-watching villain, instilling fear and hatred in the audience towards Coxinga.

Hambroek and Coxinga are also notable examples of virtue and evil respectively. Their contrast highlights Dutch religious dominance. When Hambroek delivers Coxinga's letter to Cajet, he describes Coxinga and his men as barbarians with nothing but a "desire for revenge, spite, and murder." He claims they demonstrate "treachery," "hate," and "cunning." This is almost a description of the devil and his associates, rather than just a description of Coxinga's army. Nomsz cleverly highlights this by having Hambroek refer to Coxinga as having a "mind ruled by hellish fury." In fact, the direct reference to "hell" and the extreme vocabulary employed help elicit even stronger emotions from the audience. These intense emotions rob the audience of any sense of logic, causing them to only see things in terms of "good" and "evil." As a result, Hambroek would be glorified while Coxinga would be demonized, culminating in a victory for Dutch religion.

Nomsz highlights the power of religion by illustrating how even the devil's associate (Coxinga's messenger) Xamti respects Christianity. First, Hambroek addresses Xamti as "You, slave of Coxinga", establishing Xamti's association with the devil. Then, when Hambroek and Xamti arrive at Cajet's fortress, Xamti criticizes Cajet's associates as being "Christians without virtue," and their hearts as being "dishonorable." The fact that Xamti needs to emphasize the fact that Cajet's associates don't have "virtue" shows that being Christian is respectable; it is their lack of virtue that is not. Finally, after Hambroek delivers his famous speech about the glory of facing fate (his death) and its

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association with Christianity, Xamti comments: “What a hero!... He almost forces me to become a Christian!” This shows that, despite being a devil-like creature, Xamti still respects Christianity. If even the devil respects a religion, it must be extremely powerful. Putting this in the context of Coxinga's terror and his lack of religion, Nomsz has Dutch audiences despise Coxinga while proclaiming Dutch’s theological superiority.

3.3. Antichrist Zheng

Nomsz dehumanizes Coxinga by transforming him into an anti-religious pagan. Throughout the play, he tells descriptions of the treacherous and spiteful Coxinga rather than giving him a role on stage. This leaves readers room to imagine how evil Coxinga is; it is easier to hate something when one cannot see it with their own eyes. By contrasting Coxinga (and his envoy) with Hambroek, Hambroek’s superiority is highlighted. The superiority is then linked with religion (Hambroek is a devout Christian) to achieve the ultimate goal of asserting religious dominance over the Chinese.

An attentive reader will see that the play focuses primarily on Hambroek rather than Coxinga. Compared to the Japanese and Chinese plays this paper analyzes, Coxinga resembles more of a distant entity than a person. His primary purpose in the play is to develop the plot; his envoy, Xamti has far more personality than he does. Coxinga’s marginal involvement demonstrates that nations are more concerned with putting themselves up than with putting other nations down. After all, a nation considers itself and its importance to be the center of everything; anything else is secondary.

4. *Bushidō* and the Battles of Koxinga

Zheng Chenggong, with his biracial origins and vast trading enterprise, had a one-of-a-kind presence in an otherwise closed-off Japan. Chikamatsu, a Japanese playwright, used Zheng’s unique background to write ***The Battles of Koxinga***, which portrayed Koxinga (the Japanese name for Zheng) as an international Samurai. The blockbuster emphasized Koxinga's Japanese features and asserted Japan's cultural superiority over China.

4.1. Zheng Chenggong’s Presence in Japan

Although the name “Zheng Chenggong” is a Chinese one, Zheng was, in fact, biracial – his mother was the daughter of a Japanese samurai. Zheng spent his childhood in Japan as a Samurai youngster, where he learned the *bushidō* warrior culture and was introduced to sports such as archery and swordplay. Thus, Japanese principles, particularly Samurai ideals, were deeply imprinted in him.

During the early Tokugawa period (the 1630s), the bakufu imposed a maritime embargo, thus cutting Japan off from the rest of the world. Naturally, this piqued the locals’ curiosity in people who had connections to the external world. Most people knew Zheng, or "Koxinga," not only for his military achievements and Japanese ancestry, but also for the fact that he oversaw a massive commercial empire. The Zheng-Japan trade flourished so much that in 1641, a total of ninety-seven Zheng ships arrived to trade at Nagasaki.

4.2. The Battles of Koxinga

Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724), a low-born samurai-turned-playwright, wrote *The Battles of Koxinga* in late 1715 when he was under pressure to produce a play to save the collapsing Takemoto Theatre.[1] To achieve this, he took risks to create something revolutionary: he put Japanese and Chinese cultures in comparison by focusing on Koxinga (Zheng). Throughout the play, he emphasized the hero’s “Japanese Spirit”, asserting Japanese superiority over China and winning the hearts of the audience. It was so successful when it debuted that it was performed every night at the

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Takemoto Theatre for seventeen months, saving the theatre and thoroughly humbling its rivals. Everywhere there were other plays, novels, poems, and toys with the name "Koxinga." The blockbuster play immortalized the name "Koxinga" in Japan.

Like most traditional Japanese plays, it had archetypal characters. There was the main character/hero, the main antagonist (and other less important ones), and the romantic partner. The main character was, of course, Koxinga, who was able to embody the *bushidō* (Japanese warrior spirit) through his victories as a war hero and contest China's status as the superior nation.

The play's plot revolves around Koxinga, a Japanese general who leads an army to defend the Ming and destroy the Tartars (Qing). Watōnai (Koxinga's previous name) and his brother-in-law, a general from the Qing camp named Kanki, join forces to battle the Tartars. Kanki's wife and mother-in-law both commit ritual suicide in order to settle the two brother-in-laws' disputes. Following this display of bravery, Kanki bestows the name "Koxinga" on Watōnai, the same way Shaozong gave the imperial surname of "Zhu" to Zheng Chenggong. Soon after, the allied forces of Koxinga stormed Qing-held Nanjing, the former capital of Southern Ming, and captured the Tartar King. Koxinga also rescues his father, who was held hostage.

Chikamatsu's play displayed Japanese pride in three ways: by having Koxinga embody *bushidō*, by including a Japanese romance, and by comparing Chinese and Japanese cultures. These are the key reasons for the play's popularity, demonstrating why the name "Koxinga" is still revered today.

Koxinga's *bushidō* may be observed in his loyalty, bravery, and integrity, which were three significant qualities of *bushidō* during the Tokugawa period. Koxinga demonstrates his loyalty by negotiating with the Qing general Kanki. When Koxinga is falsely informed that Kanki will not join forces with him, he shows loyalty to the Ming by immediately "[drawing his] sword," and swearing to fight Kanki to "take [his] head." Kanki was a Qing general, so if he did not ally with Koxinga, he would immediately become Koxinga's enemy. Chikamatsu emphasized Koxinga's loyalty attributes rather than the Chinese cause he was loyal, further strengthening the bond between Koxinga and Japanese *bushidō*. Throughout this part of the play, there is absolutely no mention of the Ming or the Qing. The only mention of the word "Chinese" is when an enraged Koxinga yells at Kanki for being a "dirty Chinese." Since the passage revolved around Koxinga's Japanese pride, the Tokugawa period audience would associate this patriotic pride with loyalty, forming a connection between Koxinga and *bushidō*.

Furthermore, Koxinga's courage, skill, and bravery are demonstrated by his heroic rescue of his father. The villain Ri Tōten holds Koxinga's father hostage and tells Koxinga to leave lest he wishes to see his father die. However, Koxinga's father reminds him of his mother's suicide, which gives Koxinga the courage to "[rush] up" to Ri Tōten and "cut away his father's bonds." Chikamatsu uses this scene to highlight Koxinga's bravery in attacking Ri Tōten as well as his martial arts prowess. Koxinga was able to run up to his father before Ri Tōten could react, displaying his strength and power. Courage and skill are key elements of *bushidō*, and through this scene, we can see a tribute towards the Samurai class audience—there are no fights for them to participate in, but they can watch someone else fight like a fellow Samurai and crush opponents. This is how Zheng embodies Japanese culture.

Moreover, Koxinga's integrity is exemplified through his encounter with both his wife Komotsu and Ming Princess Sendan. "[O]pen your eyes and stop being jealous," Koxinga tells his wife Komotsu, emphasizing that "we cannot abandon [Princess Sendan]" because "[s]he is in a piteous state." This shows Koxinga's benevolence; Koxinga does not hesitate to help someone in need despite knowing she is a liability—Sendan has little practical value and is a target for Qing forces as a captive. But he is also fair: though Koxinga loves his wife, he still does not hesitate to reprimand her for making snide comments about Sendan. In this scene, Chikamatsu makes Koxinga symbolize honor

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and righteousness, and since these are both vital aspects of the *bushidō*, Chikamatsu transformed the historical Zheng Chenggong into a Samurai Koxinga.

Chikamatsu further "Japanized" Koxinga by making his wife Japanese. The relationship between Koxinga and his wife Komotsu embodies closeness and emotion in Japanese culture, allowing audiences to connect Koxinga and the play to a representation of Japanese pride. Komotsu was Japanese character in the play. But in real life, Zheng Chenggong's wife was Chinese, and Zheng had little contact with Japanese women apart from his mother. The "Japanized" romance helped to foster a sense of unity between Koxinga and Japan. Romance is unique because no other relationship can embody the closeness the audience desires with their hero Koxinga. When Koxinga was planning to depart Japan for China, Komotsu "clung to her husband's sleeve and began to weep and wail." Japanese audiences at the time would have taken this personally—their beloved Koxinga was leaving Japan—as opposed to viewing it as an emotional fit from Komotsu. Through skillful elicitation of audiences' patriotic sentiments, Chikamatsu tied Koxinga's relationship with Komotsu to intimacy and emotion with the Japanese culture.

Finally, Japanese women such as Komotsu play a significant role in the play, and Chikamatsu contrasts this with less important Chinese characters to show Japanese dominance. When Koxinga and his family visit the general Kanki, they discover that foreigners, even if they are relatives, are not allowed to enter the castle due to the war. However, the guard is reasonable and lets them in as long as they are dressed as "criminals," so there will be an excuse in case the King of Tartary (Qing) finds out. This command enrages Koxinga, who feels humiliated and yells "Dirty Chinese!" However, Koxinga's mother reprimands Koxinga for letting his dignity get in the way with his "cause of righteousness." Koxinga's mother then requests that she be restrained. Japanese audiences would sympathize with Koxinga, viewing the Chinese guard's order as discriminatory and unfair. Koxinga's mother's altruism creates a stark contrast with the ignorant and stubborn Chinese soldier. Thus, the audience would have disliked the "[d]irty Chinese" while taking pride in the selflessness of their countrymen.

Historically speaking, Zheng was universally agreed by many countries as an exotic, biracial warrior with no parallel in terms of origin and achievements. Based on this consensus, however, the Japanese literary works "Japanized" Zheng by adding *bushidō*, Japanese romance, and Japanese patriotism to this historical figure and immortalized the name "Koxinga," which further transformed this conflicted warrior into a patriotic symbol.

4.3. International Samurai

Zheng's historical presence in Japan differed significantly from his subsequent literary presence. Historically, his only affiliation with Japan was growing up there and trading with the country. But Chikamatsu Monzaemon transformed Zheng into the famous Koxinga in his play *The Battles of Koxinga*. Koxinga, unlike Zheng, is a true Japanese Samurai. He is a patriotic Japanese warrior who fights the Tartars, not a Ming loyalist.

Chikamatsu chose to shape Zheng as the "ideal" Samurai due to his fame in Japan and lack of competitors/alternatives. As mentioned before, Japanese locals had very few sources of information on the outside world in the mid-1600s (early Tokugawa period). Among all the heroes in Asia, Zheng was the only one who was simultaneously famous (Ming loyalist) yet also present in Japan (through his traders). Since the Tokugawa period was peaceful, combat plays, like The Battles of Koxinga, provided an entertaining pastime for the Samurai.

Through Chikamatsu's play, Zheng was molded into an international Samurai, bringing glory to Japan by fighting against the Qing. The "Japanization" of Zheng (*bushidō*, romance, patriotism) elevated Japanese culture over Chinese culture, transforming Zheng's status from an overseas pirate-

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/82/2025.MU20501

general into a symbol of Japanese patriotism, demonstrating that a nation will go to great lengths to shape characters for political purposes.

5. Ming Loyalist and the Record of a Maritime National Hero

In China, Zheng's image was often used to promote Chinese nationalism as the most prominent symbol of Ming resistance. However, in Yu Risheng's play ***The Record of a Maritime National Hero***, Zheng is shown to prioritize the nation above all else, representing the ideal nationalist and serving as a model for twentieth-century Chinese nationalists. His capture of Formosa (Taiwan) could be regarded as a display of nationalism by either mainland China or modern-day Taiwan, albeit the original intent was far less political.

5.1. Zheng Chenggong as a Nationalist in twentieth-century China

At the turn of the twentieth century, anti-Qing nationalism was at an all-time high, which led to a surge in the popularity of Han Chinese national heroes. The Qing implemented a series of policies to suppress the Han Chinese, including forcing Han Chinese to shave their heads and dress according to Manchu tradition or face death.[2] Such policies offend Han Chinese ideals of manhood and Confucian injunctions, destroying Han Chinese national identity and demonstrating the Qing's hardline attitude towards the Han Chinese. Those anti-Han policies were only reversed/disregarded towards the end of the Qing, when peasant rebellions were rampant.

In this context, it is simple to see why the anti-Qing revolutionary Zheng became the center of different plays and legends—Zheng's anti-Qing sentiments resonated with and embodied those of the twentieth-century Han Chinese. From 1900 to 1912, a period of unrest preceding the founding of the Republic of China, Zheng became prominent in Chinese literature as an anti-Manchu warrior, serving as an inspiration and a potent symbol of Han Chinese national identity.

5.2. Zheng Chenggong the National Hero

Yu Risheng wrote the play ***The Record of a Maritime National Hero*** in 1906, inspired by national outrage over Manchu rulers' unequal treatment of Han Chinese. The first three acts of the play (and the preface) were published in the widely recognized Chinese newspaper *People* in July 1906, and, possibly due to popularity, the following three acts were published three months later in the same newspaper. However, the Japanese government banned the Tokyo-based newspaper *People* in 1908, so the rest of the play was never published. Nevertheless, the titles and synopses of the unpublished nine acts were listed in the preface, giving us a sense of what the rest of the play might have been like.

The play focuses on Zheng Chenggong's anti-Manchu efforts. It begins with a description of his childhood in Japan (Acts 1-4) and then moves on to his experiences in China (Acts 5). He meets the emperor Shaozong (Act 6), pledges loyalty to Shaozong's anti-Qing cause (Act 7), and battles the Qing (Act 8). Soon after, he departs the coast and defeats the Dutch (Act 9), capturing Taiwan. Then Zheng passes away (Act 10), and his power is passed on to his descendants (Act 11), who eventually surrender to the Qing (Acts 11-15).[7] We can see that this play is quite historically accurate, demonstrating that changing only a few specific aspects of a story can affect the point of the narrative. Note that the name Yu Risheng was most likely a pen name because the surname of Yu (浴), meaning bathing in the sun is very uncommon. Also, the author "Yu Risheng" was only known to have written this one play, making one suspect even more that this is a pen name.

In Yu Risheng's play, nationalism is represented by using the word "Chinese" rather than "Ming", as the playwright wishes to relate Zheng to the twentieth-century Chinese revolutionaries and transform him into a modern-day nationalist. By comparing his Japanese mother with the disloyal

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/82/2025.MU20501

Zheng Zhilong, the drama stresses his Japanese mother's reverence and commitment to the Chinese. Also, it should not be surprising that nationalism is portrayed similarly to Chikamatsu's *The Battles of Koxinga*; both want to suit Zheng for their own purposes.

Zheng's loyalty to his cultural identity as a Han Chinese is an integral part of the play. In this play, he despises the Qing from a young age—as a child, he asks his parents if Tartars are "dogs or wolves" and asks them to "buy [him] one to play with." The playwright utilizes Zheng's childish innocence to elicit patriotic feelings in the audience and demonstrate how deeply rooted Zheng's Ming loyalty (anti-Qing sentiments) is. The use of the words "dogs and wolves" helps associate the Qing with barbarian characteristics—as strong as dogs or wolves but lacking in cultural sophistication.

Zheng is portrayed as a supporter of trans-dynamic Chinese civilization. When Zheng leaves Japan, he announces that he will "recover the Chinese culture and show its power." Instead of talking about Ming culture, Zheng calls himself "Chinese." In fact, he even uses the modern-day symbol of China, Hua (華), twice in his sentence. This skillful use of vocabulary ties Zheng to Han nationalism rather than Ming loyalism, evoking patriotic sentiments within the nationalist audience. They aspire to be heroes like Zheng, leaving Japan for China to fight the Manchu Qing. We can assume that in the unpublished acts of the play, Zheng, like the Japanese Koxinga, finds allies and inflicts crushing defeats upon the Manchu Qing.

The play depicts Zheng's mother as a foreigner who embraces Chinese culture. She is portrayed as revering Chinese culture, acting like a Chinese woman, and even feeling loyal to the Chinese. This demonstrates the sheer power of the Chinese nationalist culture; even people from other countries would revere it. When Zhilong tries to convince Tagawa to join him in surrendering to the Qing, she flatly refuses and harshly berates Zhilong: "These Manchus are inferior beings, always cruel and full of hatred…A real man would swear never to be associated with them for three eternities…You bring me shame and disappointment!" Tagawa's references to "our nation" and condemnation of Manchu show her admiration of the Chinese nation (rather than the Ming) and her hatred for the Manchus. Moreover, if even a foreigner can feel so strongly about Chinese superiority over Manchus, nationalists could only find the "responsibility" to be even more patriotic.

The contrast between the selfish Zheng Zhilong and the loyal Zheng Chenggong emphasizes the younger Zheng's heroism and loyalty, with the younger Zheng preparing to sacrifice even his family for the nation and the people's greater good. When Tagawa criticizes Zheng Zhilong for having "no moral principles" and only caring about "power, fame, and money," one instantly feels seething hatred towards the self-centered character. But what truly reveals Zheng's selfishness is that even after Tagawa's speech, Zheng Zhilong still speaks of the "power base" he will have after surrendering. In comparison, during a conversation between Zheng and Emperor Shaozong, Zheng swears "his body to the nation." Shaozong tells Zheng that "throughout history, not many people have been able to be both loyal to the nation and filial to their parents." Zheng, without hesitation, pledges his allegiance "to the people." Zheng's loyalty and devotion to China is in stark contrast with Zheng Zhilong's materialism and selfishness, just as Kanki and his warriors were used to contrast with Koxinga's altruistic mother in *The Battles of Koxinga*.

5.3. Inspirations and Implications

In the play, through character personality changes, Zheng's status as a Ming loyalist is ingeniously replaced with that of an ideal twentieth-century Chinese patriot throughout the play. Yu Risheng evokes pride and patriotism in the audience by elevating the prestige of Nationalist philosophy, calling them to action and for each and every one of them to become a second Zheng Chenggong. During the revolution, such literature was critical to the spread of a Chinese proto-national identity.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/82/2025.MU20501

However, Zheng Chenggong still remains an important figure in the hearts of all the Han Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. In fact, numerous Zheng-themed movies, comics, and even plays may still be found in theaters and bookstores today. He remains a symbol of nationalism, though no longer one of Han Chinese national consciousness. Instead, he is one of the many symbols of Chinese national identity and patriotism. Since the Qing rule denied many Chinese their national identity, Zheng's resistance against the Qing was (and still is) viewed as a fight for the existence of China as a nation. To that end, it is clear that Zheng is more than a Ming loyalist; his biracial upbringing and one-of-a-kind commercial empire also contribute to his national and international literary presence.

6. Conclusion

This paper has compared depictions of Zheng Chenggong in Dutch, Japanese, and Chinese popular literature, i.e. plays and opera. Zheng's multifaceted identity has made his history interpretable, and these interpretations have become a means for writers to explore their proto-national identity. The playwrights of all three countries carefully selected moments of Zheng's life and incorporated them into their proto-nationalistic narratives.

The various interpretations of Zheng in plays have left behind an equally multicultural legacy. The Dutch suffered significant military defeats during their encounters with Zheng and presented him as a barbaric pagan, utilizing his lack of religion to demonstrate the Netherlands' religious superiority in the late eighteenth century. Japanese literature highlighted Zheng's Japanese ancestry and constructed Zheng as a loyal, powerful warrior in accordance with Japanese bushidō popular in eighteenth-century Japan. Similarly, in the early twentieth century, Han Chinese revolutionaries in Japan depicted Zheng as an anti-Qing leader in order to elicit Han Chinese patriotic emotions.

The richness of Zheng's character made these interpretations feasible. His life was full of tensions: he was loyal to the Ming, yet almost reached a peace deal with the Qing. He made an aggressive invasion into Dutch Taiwan, yet he stuck to his terms of capitulation (no harming of the Dutch) even when it expired. He was a wise general, yet he would indiscriminately kill his own soldiers at times. The complexity of Zheng made him more susceptible to literary re-interpretation: altering a few perspectives and choosing the right events could turn him into either an evil demon or a brave hero.

As a result, in all these literary depictions, authors in different countries cherry-picked elements from Zheng Chenggong to fit into their own proto-national identity, resulting in completely different images of Zheng. Instead of accurately documenting history, they creatively interpreted and reconstructed the history. The distance between Zheng as a historical figure and his literary representations enables us to see how authors manipulated the image of Zheng to advance their own political (Han Chinese revolution), cultural (Japanese cultural supremacy), or religious agendas (Dutch Christianity).

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