

Taiwan in Japan's Empire Building: An Institutional Approach to Colonial Engineering

by Hui-yu Caroline T'sai (蔡慧玉)
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I. Brief Introduction to the Book

This book concerns colonial engineering carried out by Japan in Taiwan during its colonial rule of Taiwan, or stated differently, how Japan's colonial rule reconfigured Taiwan and how it contributed to the formation of forced regulations and social order in the country.¹ The author, Hui-yu Caroline T'sai (蔡慧玉), attempts to determine what mechanisms were used in Japan's rule of Taiwan, what core mechanism mediated between state and society, and what made Taiwan a colony of Japan.

The book is comprised of three parts: Part 1 (concerning law, order, and rule); Part 2 (colonial engineering); and Part 3 (war, mobilization, and the colonial legacy). Looking at the contents in more detail, Part 1

¹ The term "colonial engineering" used here by the author may seem to imply a well-organized and planned mechanism devised by "wise" Japanese having a perfect vision concerning Japan's rule of Taiwan. The author states, though, that Japan's rule of Taiwan was *ad hoc* rather than well-organized and planned.

focuses on the tradition the Japanese administration had adopted since the Meiji Restoration, while paying attention to the process in which Japan's modern administration secured its place in the particular context of Taiwan during the colonial period. The author seeks to explain the process by which Japan attempted to integrate this colonial space into the colonial bureaucratic system based on experiences from building its own country. The core contents of Part 1 are Rule of Law (Chapter 1), Examinations for Hiring Bureaucrats (Chapter 2), and The Police System (Chapter 3). Part 2 deals with Colonial Rule (Chapter 4), Social Engineering (Chapter 5), and The Creation of Local Areas (Chapter 6) in examining the process of colonial engineering in more detail. Finally, Part 3 deals with issues such as war, mobilization, and the historical legacy in Forced Conscription (Chapter 7), Wartime Integrated Policies (Chapter 8), and The Historical Legacy of Colonial Rule (Chapter 9).

One of the most important features of this book is that it maintains a distance from cultural studies research, which has been the main flow in the study of colonial history since the 1990s. This stance is closely associated with the way the book views issues. It has been well noted that until recently studies of colonial history shied away from the dichotomy of ruling and resistance, and attempted a "cultural turn." Discussions about colonial modernity theory were in the center of the cultural turn. Studies that stress colonial modernity theory and try to use it in understanding the history of colonies share the following features. First, they put stress on the continuity between the colonial period and post-colonial period. Second, they have a strong tendency to analyze and criticize people's everyday lives from a perspective of hegemony, governmentality, and gender. Third, they aim to relativize nationalism through such analyses and criticisms. Thus, they attempt to understand the relevance between a colony and the power center as something more complicated by focusing their studies on mediating agents, such as influential local people, or culture (and knowledge production).

However, T'sai also pays sufficient attention to the negative impact

that the cultural turn may cause. That is, she states that cultural studies have fallen into the trap of making light of hard history, although they have urged a more delicate understanding of colonialism, and that they have enhanced the danger of disregarding hard facts about economy and politics, if colonial modernization theory missed something important by disregarding culture. The author says that the cultural turn, which is also a turn in discourse, can be spoken of highly in that it draws attention to the importance of discourses, but notes that the cultural turn has caused an inundation of vague postcolonial metaphors and newly coined words in the course of discourses that contributed to modern criticism, rather than to the construction of useful historical research paradigms.

In addition to taking a critical approach to the cultural turn, the author critically inherits the studies of the history of the Japanese empire, which have become the focus of attention recently. The author says that the concept of “the transfer of ruling styles and the circulation of talented people” proposed by Yamamuro Shinichi (山室信一), one of the leading researchers of colonial history in Japan, is an interesting concept as a way to study the history of the empire, but it reveals problems similar to those of cultural research as it tends to display the characteristics of soft history (that is, intellectual history or cultural history) rather than hard history (such as political history). After presenting a critical review of studies relating to Taiwan during its colonial period, T’sai introduces the issue of colonial engineering (referring to an attempt for infusion of colonial rule with social and political influence), which was started upon Japan’s occupation of Taiwan, thus aiming to go beyond present research.

After making detailed (and sometimes uninteresting) statements on Japan’s colonial rule of Taiwan from the perspective of institutional history in association with her research aims, T’sai points out continuities in Taiwanese society before and after 1945, which is another important theme of the book, in connection with the legacy of Japan’s colonial rule. She writes that Japan’s colonial rule of Taiwan, which was performed more efficiently and powerfully than in any other colony of Japan, left a

legacy of discourses about modernity in the process of forcing regulations on Taiwanese society, and this heritage can still be felt in Taiwan. She points out that the system of total mobilization during wartime, which was adopted during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), was inherited by the Nationalist Party of China in the post-1945 period.²

That is to say, the author states that the seven-year-long Sino-Japanese War or the fifteen-year-long war from the Manchurian Incident in 1931 until 1945 caused an irreversible change in the structure of the administration in Taiwan, and that this administration was copied by the Nationalist Government of China when it took over Taiwan in 1945, making (*a largely peaceful*) transition possible in or after 1945 through the structural changes carried out by the wartime Office of the Japanese Government-General of Taiwan. The family registration system, local administration, and the police system remained virtually unchanged, following the basic framework created and reinforced by the Government-General of Taiwan. Between August 1945 (Japan's surrender in the Pacific War) and 1949 (the official founding of the Nationalist Government of China), Taiwanese society maintained order as in the pre-1945 period, although there were some disorderly state and violence. Laws enacted prior to 1945 also remained efficiently in place without being changed.

The *baojia* (保甲) system, which the Government-General adopted for efficient provincial control, came to symbolize the good old days featuring orderliness and a community's identity (despite being a way of rule based on ethnic discrimination and harsh control) and the regulation and order created by the system were reinforced during the period of internal struggle in China and the Cold War period, the author writes. It also appears that the author believes that different appraisals made in the

² The Taiwan historian Cheng Tze has stated that in the post-1945 period the administrative system of the Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office, the highest administrative institution in Taiwan since 1945, is nothing more than a copy of the Government-General of Taiwan.

post-1945 period of Japan's colonial rule of Taiwan and Korea are associated with whether powerful and efficient local administration was adopted or not, although the author does not say so explicitly.

II. Comments

The author earned the Ph.D. degree from Columbia University in 1991 for a dissertation on the *baojia* system in colonial Taiwan. Since then she has worked as a researcher at the Academia Sinica's Institute of Taiwan History and has continued to supplement the dissertation research, resulting in this book. Recently, she has been conducting brisk research in Korea and Japan, focusing on comparisons of the colonial administration in Korea and Taiwan.

This book can be said to be a collection of her studies concerning Taiwan during the colonial period, and of Japan as the ruling country. The book cites virtually all major research related to Taiwan during the colonial period carried out since the 1970s. Thus, no one will dispute that the book is a result of the author's persistent academic research. T'sai's efforts are praiseworthy in meticulously consulting the views of scholars specializing in post-modern/post-colonial discourses, such as Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, and Edward Said, and constructing an alternative discourse.

As the first volume to appear in the Academia Sinica on East Asia series co-published by the Academia Sinica and Routledge, the book seems to be part of an ambitious plan of the Academia Sinica to globalize the country's academic circles, particularly the humanities and the social sciences. The book seems to have been published with the intention of meeting two requirements, carrying out empirical research on local administration in Taiwan during the colonial period and presenting a theoretical challenge taking English-speaking readers into account. The effort made to stress, for example, that Foucault-style approaches do not necessarily raise academic issues such as resistance or subjectification

formed by culture, race, and empire appears to aim at bringing about theoretical revision of post-modern discourses, albeit partially, through the example of colonial Taiwan.

The author's raising of the issue of the dominant trend of "the cultural turn" in colonialism-related studies over the past two or three decades is worthy of attention. She stresses that it is essential to make a political-economic and systematic approach as well as a cultural approach to establish an overall historical image of the colonial period in both Korea and Taiwan.

It is true that in Korea the presentation of colonial modernity theory as an academic alternative to colonial modernization theory and colonial exploitation theory provided fresh stimulus, but the newly presented theory will act only as a half-theory if it cannot embrace the issues of politics and economy that basically defined the lives of Koreans during the colonial period. In this respect, what the author points out concerning problems related to cultural studies will be very useful for Korean academic circles.

Written by an experienced researcher engaging in oral history, the book provides a sense of reality that a simple systematic approach cannot provide as it reconfigures the status of local administration by fully utilizing documents from the Government-General of Taiwan and the testimonies of Taiwanese who experienced colonial rule. The statements on how Taiwanese society understood and coped with the *baojia* system will remind Koreans of the importance of the role of oral history, such as with Korea, Japan's previous colony where documents of the colonial period do not remain in sufficient numbers.

On the downside, general statements are often loose and hard to understand. It appears that an attempt to cover too many previous studies made the author's real intention unclear in many parts and rendered the book difficult to grasp. There are numerous parts where it is not clear how the author's criticisms of previous studies are associated with her overall view.

What makes it even harder to read this book is that empirical studies do not combine ideally with theoretical challenges. I do not think that I am the only one who will feel that the book gives the impression of a historian not well versed in theory trying to communicate with academics elsewhere without sufficient preparation, although the empirical research has been carried out well. To my understanding, a review of this book has not yet appeared in Taiwan and a Chinese-language edition of the book has not been published. I think this is related to what I have pointed out. This book makes one wonder for whom the globalization of academic research should be undertaken and what kind of globalization it should be.