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TAIWAN UNDER JAPANESE
RULE (1895–1945)

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Introduction

Taiwan was ruled by Japan as a colony from 1895 to 1945. On October 25, 1945, it was formally taken over and administered by the Republic of China (ROC) under the control of the Nationalist Party (Kuo-min-tang, better known as the KMT). But barely over a year and four months later, on February 28, 1947, the citizens of Taipei rose to protest against the unjust treatment of a woman tobacco vendor by government officers on the previous night. The shared anger against the provisional government of Taiwan Province and its officials caused island-wide turmoil simultaneously. They resented the officials’ multiple wrongdoings, corruption, nepotism, economic monopoly policies benefiting only the officials and merchants, and cultural discrimination against the islanders. The central government sent troops to the island and carried out bloody suppression until mid-May. The entire process, including the March Massacre, is known as the February 28 Incident.

Martial Law was declared in May 1949 and toward the end of that year the central government of the ROC retreated to Taiwan as the result of the defeat by the forces of the Communist Party, which established the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and has continued to control the mainland to this day. From 1950 onward, the exiled KMT government, which claimed to represent the entirety of China, exerted tight control over Taiwan, and thus in 1950 Taiwan entered what would be called retrospectively “the White Terror era” that lasted from 1950 to 1987.

During the White Terror era, the history of Taiwan, especially the period of Japanese rule, became a taboo. The KMT regime started a dual process of “de-Japanization” and “re-Sinicization.” History of Taiwan was not taught in school and things related to Japan (language, books, movies, and so on) were either banned or restricted. Research on Taiwanese history was not banned, but was discouraged. Studying the Ch’ing period was acceptable, but the Japanese period was to be avoided except for subjects such as the anti-Japanese armed struggle and non-violent anti-colonial movements. As a result, there were very few scholarly works dealing with the history of colonial Taiwan. For scholarly works before the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 one has to look outside the island.

This chapter will first give a literature review and then examine the colonial history of Taiwan under Japanese rule. The literature review deals with works outside and inside the island before the 1990s, and the boom in the studies of “Taiwanese history” on the island after
the 1990s. Following that, the author will discuss the 50 years of Japanese rule in six themes, which cover: the cession of Taiwan to Japan and people’s resistance; colonial governance and anti-colonial activities; the policy concerning aboriginals and the Wu-she Incident; colonization and modernization; the colonial education and modern arts; and the Kōminka movement and wartime mobilization.

The history of colonial Taiwan: from political taboo to a hot field of studies

During at least the first three decades in postwar Taiwan (1945–1975), the colonial history of the island was largely avoided. For instance, in May 1895 the Republic of Formosa was set up by gentry members and merchants of Taiwan in order to block Japan’s taking over of Taiwan. Despite the fact that the Republic of Formosa was of an anti-Japanese nature, few Taiwanese knew of it. By declaring the establishment of a democratic state in Taiwan, its founders hoped to gain the support of the Western powers against Japan’s takeover. It was to no avail and lasted for only 13 days. Harry J. Lamley’s “The 1895 Taiwan Republic: A Significant Episode in Modern Chinese History” (Lamley 1968: 739–62) was the first article on this subject matter. We had to wait more than a decade for a young Taiwanese scholar Wu Mi-ch’ǎ to write on the same topic and have it published in an academic journal (Wu 1981: 83–108).

Two books in English are particularly noteworthy. George H. Kerr was famous among Taiwanese abroad before the lifting of Martial Law in Taiwan, for his book on the February 28 Incident *Formosa Betrayed* (Kerr 1965), but few people knew that he also wrote a book on the colonial era: *Formosa: Licensed Revolution and the Home Rule Movement, 1895–1945* (Kerr 1974). Kerr paid special attention in the latter book to the era under Governor-General Akashi Motojirō and his capable Chief Administrator Gotō Shimpei, and also to the anti-Japanese movement, led by Taiwanese gentry and intellectuals, which aimed to achieve self-rule for the colony. It goes without saying that his *Formosa Betrayed* was banned in Taiwan, but his second book was also not available in libraries in Taiwan until the 1980s.

Another work is E. Patricia Tsurumi’s *Japanese Colonial Education in Taiwan, 1895–1945* (Tsurumi 1977). It was the first comprehensive research on the dual educational system in Taiwan that separated Japanese children and Taiwanese children both in terms of school system and textbooks. Tsurumi’s book was translated into Chinese and published in Taiwan (Tsurumi, trans. by Lin 1999).

In addition to literature in English, works in Japanese on Taiwan would have come naturally as Japan was the former “mother country” of the colony of Taiwan and more advanced in scholarship. However, the society of postwar Japan seemed to be eager to forget its expansionist past, and therefore not much attention was given to Taiwan in academia. It also comes as no surprise that some Taiwanese students studying in Japan would choose to do research on the history of Taiwan – a subject not allowed in their homeland. Kō Shō-dō (Ng Chiautong; Huang Chao-t’ang in Mandarin) submitted his doctoral thesis on the Republic of Formosa to Tokyo University in 1969 and it was published in book form a year later (Kō 1970). He would publish another book on the Government-General of Taiwan entitled *Taiwan Sōtokufu* (Kō 1981). His Taiwan Sōtokufu book and the one on the Republic of Formosa were translated into Chinese for a Taiwanese readership in 1989 and 1993 respectively. Kō Shō-dō (1932–2011) devoted his entire adult life to the independence movement of Taiwan. It is clear that his drive in studying Taiwanese history came from his political belief, but his books stand alone as scholarly works.

In 1981, a book of 600 pages on the Musha Jiken (Wushe Incident) compiled by Tai Kuo Hui appeared in Japan (Tai 1981). Like Kō Shō-dō, Tai was a Taiwanese student at Tokyo University. This book comprised two parts, research articles and source materials, and remains a must-read
for the studies of the Wushe Incident. It was translated into Chinese in two volumes (Tai, trans. by Wei, 2002).

There were also works by young Japanese scholars about colonial Taiwan. The voluminous book written by Wakabayashi Masahiro on the Taiwanese anti-Japanese movement perhaps has received the greatest attention (Wakabayashi 2001/1983). Its revised edition came out in 2001 and a Chinese translation appeared in 2007. One may say that Wakabayashi adopted left-leaning theoretical analyses in his studies of a colony of Japanese imperialism, which rightly reflected the intellectual atmosphere of the time when he was a student.

On the island, Taiwanese studies were reduced to or confined within the concept of “local history.” Local gazetteers were where essays of Taiwan’s history appeared. A privately-funded monthly journal, The Taiwan Folkways (Taiwan feng-wu), is worth mentioning. This journal appeared in December 1951 and still occupies a special status 65 years later, even in the highly competitive academia of today’s Taiwan. The complete bibliography of its 60 volumes, commemorating its 60th anniversary, bears witness well to the changes in subjects, methods, authors, and academic trends in Taiwan historical studies (Chang and Wen 2010).

In comparison to publications in English and Japanese concerning the history of colonial Taiwan, the output from the island was rather meager. In 1971, a book on the anti-colonial movement came out entitled T’ai-wan min-tsu yün-tung shih, meaning History of the Nationalist Movement of Taiwan (Ts’ai, et al. 1971). It is a lengthy book and four out of its five co-authors participated in the Parliament Petition Movement and other anti-colonial actions. The authors are Ts’ai P’ei-huo, Ch’en Feng-yüan, Wu San-lien, Lin Po-shou, and Yeh Jung-chung; Yeh was posthumously revealed to be the one who did the actual writing. The book certainly included their own experiences, but a great part of its sources are from a series of internal publications by the Police Bureau of the Government-General of Taiwan. The general title of these internal publications is Taiwan keisatsu enkaku shi (The History of Police in Taiwan), which were “secret documents” in the Japanese era and remained rather “secret” and “dangerous” in postwar Taiwan (Kang 2013: 78–79). The reports and documents concern anti-colonial movements across the political spectrum. Many activists who were recorded in the books would be surprised, even shocked, to know how they were “watched” so closely by the authorities. T’ai-wan min-tsu yün-tung shih was a book in a league of its own at that time, but it omitted left-wing activities. This is perhaps what one could expect from a book on the anti-colonial movement written in the 1970s in Taiwan.

The KMT’s cultural policy of de-Japanization actually hindered historical research to a great degree. For example, Hung Min-lin, who worked for the Taiwan Provincial Council of Archives, once spent half a year translating a set of precious original documents concerning the Wushe Incident. His manuscript of 150,000 words was not allowed for publication by his superior, and he himself was reported as one with “impure thought” (Hung 2010: 124–125).

In the 1980s, as the Party-external movement was gathering momentum and gaining popular support, political taboos faced a challenge. Unwritten rules and restrictions on historical research also began to be relaxed bit by bit. A new era for the study of Taiwanese history seemed to be coming.

Under the KMT’s one-party rule, the history of Taiwan was not taught in school for several decades. In elementary education, the subject “History” comprised Chinese history only. In high school education, world history was added to curricula in addition to Chinese history, in 1952 for senior high school and in 1968 for junior high school. Before the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, in junior high school, the ratio of teaching time for Chinese history and for world history was 2:1; in senior high the ratio varied from 1:1 to 2:1, and then to 5:3. At university level, there were only two courses on Taiwan history ever offered on the entire island in the
1960s: one at National Cheng Kung University, and the other at National Taiwan University. The course offered at National Cheng Kung University was called “Gazetteers of Taiwan Province” (T’ai–wan sheng-chih), not even daring to call itself “the History of Taiwan” (Wang 2009: 39). Even after the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, it took years for Taiwanese history to be included in school curricula. In junior high a subject called “Understand Taiwan” (Jen-shih Taiwan) appeared in 1997. In 2006 Taiwanese history was included in the History subject in senior high for the first time, to be taught for one semester out of four. Such an arrangement has suffered severe setbacks ever since President Ma Ying-jeou took office in 2008. It is still an ongoing issue.

Parallel to the situation in school education, the history of Taiwan had no formal role in the academic world of Taiwan. When it came to “history,” the term first and foremost referred to Chinese history, and second, Western history. There was no such field known as “the history of Taiwan” or “Taiwanese history.” The Academia Sinica, directly belonging to the Office of the President, is a research institution of the highest status in Taiwan. It had institutes for the studies of Chinese history (pre-modern and modern) and Euro–American history, but, not surprisingly, none for Taiwanese history. Nonetheless, in the summer of 1993 the Preparatory Office of the Institute of Taiwan History (PITH) was set up in Academia Sinica. It has been regarded as a landmark development, indicating the acceptance of Taiwan’s history into academia in Taiwan and thus making it a legitimate field in the discipline of history. The journal of this new-born institute was *Taiwan Historical Research*, which first appeared in June 1994 and continues today. Having an independent institute in Academia Sinica and a journal of its own, the study of Taiwanese history unmistakably became an academic field on the island.

The “high tide” of research on Taiwan’s history began around the mid-1980s and continues to this day. Its rich outcome made the following discussions of the Japanese period of Taiwan possible and furnished them with scholarly depth.

### The cession of Taiwan to Japan, people’s resistance and collaboration

In 1895 the Ch’ing court ceded Taiwan to Japan in accord with the Shimonoseki Treaty. To the islanders of Taiwan, it was a fate delivered out of the blue. But, looked at with a larger and broader perspective, it was not so strange. Japan had set its eyes on the island of Taiwan in 1874 when it sent troops to its southern tip to “punish” the aboriginals who killed 54 Okinawans three years earlier; the military expedition is known as the Mutan-she Incident. Then, in 1894 Japan defeated the Ch’ing in the First Sino-Japanese War. During the peace negotiations that followed, Japan requested the Liaodong Peninsula and the island of Taiwan be ceded to Japan. Later, under pressure from Germany, France and Russia, Japan gave up the Liaodong Peninsula, leaving Taiwan as the only territorial trophy. Taiwan became a colony of the emerging Japanese empire and was under Japanese rule until August 1945 when Japan surrendered to the Allies at the end of World War II.

In 1895, “legally” the Japanese could just come and rule Taiwan, but they encountered strong resistance from the gentry and common people on the island. It would take Japan at least four months to be able to claim that the island was under control. Taiwanese people’s resistance went through two stages: first, resistance in the name of the Republic of Formosa, and then armed struggles from common people.

The Republic was founded on May 25, 1895, with T’ang Ching-sung, the Governor of Taiwan Province, as its president. T’ang reluctantly assumed the position and soon abandoned his army and returned to the mainland on June 6, marking the collapse of the Republic. Some other high-ranking officials of the Republic followed suit in later days. The short-lived Republic
was the first republic in Asia, but in the final analysis it was only an expedient plan, as its found-
ners made it clear that once Japan gave up Taiwan, “it will continue to honor the reign of China”
and “be no different from the territory of China” (Kō 1970).

The Japanese army entered into the city of Taipei on June 7 and the Governor-general
Kabayama Sukenori conducted a ceremony “inaugurating the new government” on June
17, marking the beginning of Japanese colonial rule of Taiwan. Nonetheless, conducting the
ceremony was one thing; to really control the island was another. In attempting to phys-
ically occupy Taiwan, the Japanese army met with fierce resistance from the Taiwanese people.
Research reveals that the people who joined the armed struggle against the Japanese army
were from all divisions of ethnicity, class, and gender. They comprised peasants, laborers, land-
lords, tenants, mafia bosses, ruffians, women, and so on (Weng 1986). The result was countless
dead and injured. The three Hakka leaders of the volunteer army, Wu T’ang-hsing, Hsü Hsiang,
and Chiang Shao-tsu, were all sacrificed. On October 21 the Japanese army completed its
occupation of the entire island. More than four months had passed since the inauguration of
the new rule.

In contrast to the armed struggle against Japan’s takeover, there were Taiwanese who
collaborated with the Japanese. It was recorded that some even hung banners with the
slogan “Japan’s Meiji Emperor is sovereign.” Because the Treaty of Shimonoseki allowed
Taiwanese to choose their nationality within two years after the treaty came into effect,
many Taiwanese left for the mainland. It is estimated about 50,000 Taiwanese did so, and the
majority were gentry members of the higher strata, landlords, and wealthy merchants. About
30,000 would finally return to Taiwan for various reasons. In order to win the support of the
Taiwanese social elite, the colonial government carried out various programs and activities,
and many Taiwanese from high strata responded passively and adjusted themselves toward
the new world (Wu, 1992).

Colonial governance, clandestine armed struggle and the intelligentsia’s
anti-colonial movements

To rule Taiwan was not easy. The island comprised Han people and aboriginals. The two popu-
lations were ruled separately in the Ch’ing period, and Japanese colonial government basically
followed suit and adopted separate policies toward the two groups of people. The colonial
policies toward the Han population can be divided into four stages: the military suppression
period (1895–1902); the respecting old customs period (1903–1917); the assimilation period
(1918–1936); and the kōminka period (1937–1945).

The anti-colonial actions on the part of Han Taiwanese can be classified into two types: the
clandestine armed struggle and the intelligentsia’s non-violent anti-colonial movements. The
first type ran from 1896 to 1915, while the second type lasted from 1920 to 1934, and is best
represented by the Movement Petitioning for the Establishment of a Taiwanese Parliament
(1921–1934, hereafter abbreviated as the Parliament Petition Movement), whose highest goal
was to achieve home rule for the colony. There were also clandestine anti-colonial campaigns
by activists on the left and members of the Communist Party of Taiwan.

The Han people’s armed struggle against Japan’s takeover ended in October 1895, but the
resistance against colonial authorities continued, taking the form of “secret plots.” These activ-
ities lasted until 1915 when a plot for a large-scale rebellion was discovered and the participants
suffered bloody repression, which is known as the Ta-pa-ni (Chiao-pa-nien) Incident. The lead-
ers of this abortive rebellion were Yü Ch’ing-fang, Lo Chūn, and Chiang Ting; their followers
mostly came from the lower strata of rural Taiwan. Yü and his men fought a fierce battle with
the Japanese police in Ta-pa-ni, resulting in more than 300 deaths and an unknown number of captives.

After the Incident, the Tainan Provisional Court pronounced the death penalty for 866 defendants, prison sentences for 453, and other lesser sentences. It was record-breaking for one single case to have 866 death sentences, which shocked the Japanese public and the Diet. Later the death sentences were reduced to life imprisonment, but 95 of the prisoners had already been executed, including the two leaders Yü Ch’ing-fang and Lo Chün. The third leader, Chiang Ting, was finally arrested and executed. Aside from their grievance against the colonial authorities, economic and social factors may have contributed to the Incident. The latest studies use oral sources and demographic statistics to shed new light on the Ta-pa-ni Incident, which took place more than one hundred years ago (Katz 2005; Katz (Kang) 2006).

The Ta-pa-ni Incident marked the end of the Han Taiwanese’s population armed struggle against colonial rule. There were no more “secret plots” by Han Taiwanese to be found after 1915. From 1920 onward, a new generation of Taiwanese intellectuals rose to play the major role in anti-colonial movements. Most of these activists were born around the cession of Taiwan to Japan in 1895 and had a modern Japanese education, offered in the colony since 1898. In 1920 Taiwanese students in Tokyo organized the New People’s Society and published a magazine to advocate their ideas. The society eventually developed into a movement aiming at establishing a parliament in Taiwan via the method of petition, a constitutional right granted to citizens of Japan. Their ultimate goal was along the lines of self-rule or self-determination of a colony. The Parliament Petition Movement, coupled with the vitality of the Taiwan Culture Association, was the largest-scale anti-colonial movement in the Japanese period and enjoyed the most popular support. Fifteen petitions were submitted to the Diet during the period of 1921–1934, but all failed and the movement ended in September 1934 (Ts’ai, et al. 1971; Chou 1989; Lin 1993; Chen 2008).

On the left side of the spectrum of political ideologies among Taiwan’s intelligentsia, there were the Taiwan League of Black Youth (1926–1927), the left wing of the Taiwan Culture Association (1927–1931), the Taiwan Farmer’s Union (1926–1929), and the Taiwanese Communist Party (1928–1931). All these organizations suffered severe persecution by the colonial authorities. In 1927, more than 40 persons related to the Taiwan League of Black Youth were arrested, but the majority were released because of a lack of hard evidence. In 1929 and 1931 there were two big arrests of the leftists and Communists, which delivered deadly blows to the other three left-wing organizations. The 2/12 Incident, a large-scale arrest, taking place on February 12, 1929, decisively crushed leftist power. In April 1931, members of the Taiwanese Communist Party (abbreviated as Taikyō in Japanese) were arrested one after another, known as the Taikyō Incident. The famous female leader Hsieh Hsüeh-hung was sentenced to thirteen years in prison; she was released on bail in 1939 due to serious illness. By then the leftist power was non-existent (Lu 1989; Chen 2009; Lin 2010; Tsai 2012).

The policy of “blockading and subjugating” the aboriginals and the Wu-she Incident

As mentioned previously, Japan adopted separate policies toward the Han Taiwanese and the aboriginals. The aboriginals were not a homogeneous whole, and their attitudes toward the new colonizer differed. The colonial authorities classified the aboriginals into “Southern Barbarians” (Paiwan, Rukai, Puyuma, and Amis) and “Northern Barbarians” (Atayal, Saisiyat, Bunun, and Tsou). We will use this classification, but substitute Barbarians with Aboriginals. In general, the Southern Aboriginals accepted Japanese rule without much resistance, while the Northern
Aboriginals did not yield easily. The Atayal were considered to be the most fearless and the Bunun would prove to be even more strenuous in their resistance.

To bring into submission the Northern Aboriginals, especially the Atayal, the colonial government adopted a policy of “blockading and subjugating.” In practice, barbed wire fences would be built around the targeted aboriginal tribes, which were called Barrier Defense Lines, blocking their way to get out for livelihood goods (salt, iron tools, and so on) and weapons (rifles and bullets). Along the Barrier Defense Lines were the Guard Stations where policemen and post-guards would be posted at intervals of a certain distance. In places regarded as particularly dangerous, the barbed wire fences were electrified with a voltage strong enough to kill human beings and animals if they touched the wire (Fujii 1989; Lin and Wang 2007).

This policy was effective. Among those subjugated, the three groups of the Sediq (classified under Atayal) all surrendered: Tgdaya in 1906, and Toda and Truku in 1909. In 1910 the Governor-General Sakuma Samata pronounced the “Five-year Settling the Barbarians Plan,” which received a large budget and resorted to armed conquest if particular tribes refused to accept Japanese rule. One of the infamous results was the bloody suppression of the Truku people in today’s Hualien area in 1914. (There were Truku who lived both to the east and west of the Central Mountain Range.) This war is known as the Battle of the Truku. The Japanese army was overwhelmingly larger than the Truku fighters, of whom unknown numbers died and the rest had no choice but to surrender.

As mentioned earlier, all three groups of the Sediq surrendered by 1909, and were regarded as “Model Barbarians.” Yet, to the great surprise and shock of the colonial government and Japanese central government, on October 27, 1930, Sediq men from six Tgdaya villages in the Wu-she region rose to kill all the Japanese they encountered in this region. It was the largest and best-known rebellion, known as the Musha Jiken in Japanese and the Wu-she Incident in Chinese. In the Incident, 139 Japanese were killed, about half of whom were children and teenagers. The following 40 days or so would see the Japanese army’s ruthless military campaign against the Tgdaya rebels. At the closing of the campaign, more than half of the 1,236 population of the six villages lost their lives and the rest were placed in two concentration camps (Chou 2010).

Still more disheartening was the so-called “Second Musha Jiken” in which the surviving population was reduced to 298. It took place in the middle of the night of April 24, 1931 when the Toda (aided by some Truku), who had collaborated with the Japanese army in its military campaign during the Wu-she Incident (Musha Jiken), raided the two concentration camps and attacked the Tgdaya in custody. Why did the Toda want to kill the Tgdaya survivors? There are two possible reasons: first, they wanted to take revenge for the death of their chief, who was killed by a Tgdaya fighter; second, they were afraid of future revenge by the survivors and decided to weaken them before it was too late. Evidence indicates that this onslaught was suggested or tacitly approved by Japanese policemen beforehand (Kuo 2011, 2012).

According to the analyses by the Japanese locus quo, there were three major factors contributing to the Musha Jiken. First, the forced labor was excessive and ridden with abuses. Second, the intermarriage between aboriginal women and policemen often brought unhappy outcomes and caused grievances against the Japanese. Third, Mona Rudo, the leader of Mehebu, had grievances over several things, including his sister being deserted by a Japanese policeman. Mona Rudo would become the major leader of the Musha Jiken (Tai 1981; Tai, trans. by Wei, 2002). Nonetheless, from 2000 onward, the concept of Gaya has been brought into the analysis of the Musha Jiken. Gaya is a Sediq term, which means the norm, the law, the customary way, or the dictate of the ancestors. To live by Gaya and die for Gaya was imperative for a Sediq bale (a real Sediq). The Japanese rule ruined Gaya and it was to protect Gaya that the Tgdaya rose to fight
against the Japanese even with the knowledge that this could bring about the destruction of the entire tribe (Siyac Nabu 2001; Takun Walis 2012).

After the Second Musha Jiken, the 298 survivors were relocated to an artificially created village called Kawanaka-jima, 50 km away from the Wushe region and at a much lower altitude. The relocation of the Tgdaya might seem unusual, but in fact, collective relocation of aboriginals had been a policy carried out by the colonial government on a regular basis and on a large scale. For instance, the Bunun people in the region called Nitaka Gun in Japanese, which is approximately the area of today’s Hsin-yi Township, Nantou, had been relocated during 1923–1941 and the social networks of their villages had been upset to an unknown extent (Yap 2013).

In recent years, we have come to hear not only the voice of the descendants of the survivors of the Musha Jiken, but also that of the descendants of the Toda, who collaborated with the Japanese army in pacifying the Tgdaya rebels. Women’s viewpoints are also recorded according to oral transmission (Kumu Tapas 2004, 2014). It helps us to look at the Wushe Incident from more diverse perspectives and to listen to multi-layered voices from different groups of aboriginal people. They enhance our understanding of the Musha Jiken, an incident that, nevertheless, remains rather unfathomable.

The dual process of colonization and modernization

When Japan took over Taiwan as its colony, it was itself on the way to becoming a “modern state” after the Meiji Restoration. On one hand, the colonial government, under the leadership of the Governors-general of Taiwan, was ruthless in suppressing the resistant forces, but on the other hand it also brought modernizing forces to the colony. In carrying out modernization projects, the colonial authorities encouraged the Han Taiwanese to discard what it regarded as “three big bad old habits” – opium smoking, wearing a queue for men, and foot-binding for women. Among its newly established institutions were the railway, postal services, hospitals, banks, and school systems of modern education. A significant portion of these modern constructions is still physically visible in today’s Taiwan. Recent studies have touched on the deeper layers of colonial modernization.

Knowledge of the people and the place was believed to be the key for successfully governing a colony, as clearly pronounced by the capable Gotō Shimpei, the Chief Administrator of the Government-General of Taiwan (1898–1906). Accordingly, the colonial government carried out large-scale surveys and investigation of land, forestry, and traditional customs of the Han Taiwanese and the indigenous peoples. Related materials and archives have largely been made available in the past two decades, and they are stunningly voluminous. There are studies on the organization that carried out the investigation projects, and on the investigation itself (Cheng 2005). The voluminous data on the aboriginals produced by the investigation project resulted in a series of publications in book form at that time, most of which have been translated into Chinese by the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica and are available to the general public.¹

The grand project of the investigation of traditional customs of Han Taiwanese by the Government-General of Taiwan had far-reaching influences on the legal system and practices in the colonial period. The colonial government adopted a principle known as “amelioration of the old customs,” which meant that due respect was to be paid to the customary practices of traditional Taiwanese society, but it was up to the colonial legal system to decide which old customs were to be respected, and which were to be discarded, and there were some new “customary laws” recognized (actually created) by the court. On the other hand, the legal system of colonial Taiwan, especially the traditional Han people’s legal concepts and practices, were
incorporated into or replaced, if not suppressed, by new laws introduced from Japan proper. The ultimate goal was to make the old customs conform to the demands of modern law (Wang 1997, 1999).

The colonizer also introduced to the island new academic disciplines such as anthropology, medicine, and sciences. Western arts such as oil painting and musical instrument performances were taught to students in school lessons, which will be discussed in the following section. In the new disciplines, Inō Kanori (1867–1925) is the famous anthropologist who endeavored to study the Han and aboriginals of Taiwan and played an important role in various investigation projects. He was also a pioneer in the development of the historical ethnography of Taiwan (Chen 2014).

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The modern concept of “time” and to work and live in accord with the “time” on a clock was a new way of life brought to and taking root in colonial Taiwan (Lu 1998). Hygiene and health were also improved greatly island-wide. From the viewpoint of the colonial government, Taiwan made tremendous progress under its administration and became a showcase colony. In 1935, a large-scale exhibition was held on the island by the Government-General of Taiwan to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Japan’s governing Taiwan. The exposition was well received by islanders and visitors from within and outside the Japanese empire. In fact, there were various exhibitions of different kinds held in Taiwan, Japan, Europe, and America. Taiwan had been presented as an exemplary colony in a number of expositions within and outside Taiwan, and within and outside the Japanese empire. How Taiwan was exhibited involved power, space, image, and the representation of Japanese colonial rule (Lu 2005).

Modernization is one face of a coin and the other face is social discrimination and economic exploitation. The best-known form of discrimination was wage differences for the same job, especially in the public sector. Japanese civil servants’ salaries were 50–60 percent higher than the salaries of their Taiwanese counterparts. In the past two-and-a-half decades, many noteworthy works have been produced on economic history, medical history, architectural history, music history, and history of science. Some of the works may be more technical or theory-ridden than historical, and some enjoy wider readership than others. Due to limitations of space, we cannot list them here. Several of these works touch upon the issue of colonial-modernity.

Colonial education, arts, and art history

Colonial education shaped the mentality of Taiwanese who went to school under Japanese rule and left a far-reaching impact on the postwar Taiwanese society. The colonial government brought a modern elementary school system to Taiwan in 1898, but it was a two-track system: the Japanese went to “primary” school (shō gakkō) and the Taiwanese went to “common school” (kō gakkō). In 1922 “mixed-race education” (kyōgaku) was implemented in schools higher than elementary ones, and admission to “primary school” came to be based on the ability to speak Japanese, with a set quota of Taiwanese children (Tsurumi 1977). Recent studies offer analyses of the contents of textbooks and their long-term impact on the Taiwanese who had an elementary education; the latter was based on oral materials and surveys conducted among elderly people. Among other things the studies reveal that the colonial education offered solid empirical knowledge, rich heimat materials, and good moral teachings, but there was almost no history of Taiwan. The Taiwanese children learned the Japanese language and Japanese culture and history in school. The national identity they were taught to adopt was a Japanese national identity, although at the same time their love of the island was cultivated (Chou 2003, 2012). Some research pays more attention to the aspects of modern schools as institutions and the “modern” nature of modern education (Hsü, 2005).
Accompanying the school system, many modern or western matters were introduced to Taiwan, including western fine arts, such as painting and musical instrument performance. Painting was mainly watercolor and oil. There were no art schools or colleges on the island, but Taiwanese children were exposed to the very basic ideas and techniques of western arts via music and drawing lessons in elementary schools. For those who had the chance to go to high schools, they would have had more solid training in music and painting. Some would be inspired by their painter-cum-teachers, and decide to pursue further training in an art school or college in Japan proper or elsewhere abroad. Tokyo, Paris, and Beijing were the three cities where Taiwanese talents pursued further artistic training. For those who had talent in music, Japan proper was the most popular choice. Many of these young Taiwanese would become painters, sculptors, singers, music performers, or composers. Their works or performances were of high quality, but almost all of them disappeared from the public eye and became unknown to people who grew up in postwar Taiwan. Their names and works would have to wait for half a century to be called upon again by islanders of about the age of their grandchildren. It is something like the Sleeping Beauty (i.e. Taiwan’s fine arts) being woken up by her grandchildren.

In the era under Martial Law, the first person who started writing extensively on Taiwanese artists of the Japanese period was Hsieh Li-fa, himself an artist, whose essays were turned into a book (Hsieh 1981). It was perhaps because of Hsieh’s writings that educated Taiwanese of the younger generation were able to know those once-famous names of long-forgotten artists of colonial Taiwan (Hsieh 1992, 1997). Li Hsien-wen, the publisher of the art magazine Lionart (Hsiung-shih mei-shu), also played an essential role in “digging out” artists of the Japanese era by contributing special issues on artists of former renown in the magazine in 1979–1980 (Li 2013: 62–64).

The fact that the art history of colonial Taiwan became academic research subject matter is mainly due to Yen Chuan-ying, a well-trained scholar in the art history of Buddhism. Yen carried out research on Japanese period artists and their works, publishing books on the artists Ch’en Ch’eng-po, Liu Ch’i-hsiang, and the great mentor of many Taiwanese painters Ishikawa Kinichirō (Yen 1992, 1993, 2005). She also compiled a chronology of Taiwan’s art history, and a two-volume book presenting a wellspring of original material in Japanese, with their Chinese translation, and related articles in Chinese (Yen 1998, 2001; Yen and Tsuruta 2001).

The Kōminka movement, wartime mobilization, and the end of colonial rule

In 1935, the Government-General of Taiwan held a fabulous exhibition on the island to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Japan’s governing Taiwan. This year may have been the climax of Japanese colonial rule in terms of economic development and political stability, but it was also when the so-called gunkoku shugi (the doctrine of the military state or Japanese militarism) was on the rise and colonial rule became increasingly repressive. The leaders of the home-rule movement were forced to dissolve their organizations in 1934 and there was virtually no space left for political activities any more. In effect, the repression of leftist activists began even earlier in 1929 and 1931. In 1936, Lin Hsien-t’ang, the famous leader of the home-rule movement, was punched by a Japanese rightist thug during a holiday festival in a park. This incident epitomized the blunt might of militarism.

Then there came the kōminka movement in 1937. Kōminka literally means “to make [the colonial people] the subjects of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor.” A plainer expression on the individual level was for one “to become a true Japanese.” This policy was implemented not only in Taiwan but also in Korea and Okinawa. In the case of Taiwan, the kōminka policy differed from the preceding assimilation policy in that the latter aimed to introduce the institutions or
legal regulations of Japan proper to the colony whereas the kōmin'ka policy endeavored to make the colonial people adopt Japanese ways of life, including speaking the national language (i.e. the Japanese language), practicing Shinto rituals, adopting Japanese names, wearing the kimono and living in a place with tatami-rooms, etc. Moreover, because the kōmin'ka policy was closely knitted with militarism, colonial youth were mobilized to join Japan’s military efforts abroad. In the following eight years more than 200,000 Taiwanese were involved in Japan’s wars, first with China and later with the Allies in the Pacific War (Kontō 1996, trans. by Lin 2014; Chou 1996; Isoda 1999; Chou 2003: 33–76; Ching 2001, trans. by Cheng 2006).

Taiwan was a colony of the Japanese empire, and was regarded by the central government as a stepping-stone to Southeast Asia during the wartime period, 1937–1945. It therefore comes naturally to treat Taiwan as part of the empire and look at it from this wide perspective. The role Taiwan played in Japan’s “Southward Advance” (nanshin) was an essential part of the ambitious project of economic and military expansion by the Japanese empire. Taiwan also played an important role in the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, an economic/political project of the Japanese empire, proposed to China and Southeast Asia. At the same time, the Taiwan Development Corporation (Taiwan Tôkushoku Kaisha, abbreviated as Taitaku) was supported and half-financed by the colonial government of Taiwan as a “state-policy company” (kokusaku kai-sha) (Mikage 1993; Schneider 1998). The voluminous archives of Taitaku were almost unavailable to Taiwan’s scholars before the mid-1990s, but a group of scholars were able to utilize the archives and their project resulted in a collection of five articles in Chinese. It reminds us that Taiwan was part of the Japanese Empire and we cannot ignore this aspect of its colonial history (Wang et al. 2008).

History has to do with the memories of people, whether they are written down or not. The memories of the generation of Taiwanese who passed their formative years during the wartime or the kōmin'ka period (1937–1945) had been suppressed in postwar Taiwan until the lifting of Martial Law. The most untold and highly sensitive of these were the experiences of Taiwanese youth who joined Japanese military expeditions abroad. They were virtually silenced, especially after the February 28 Incident in 1947. Most of them did not have the chance to have a Chinese education after the war. The Japanese language they learned to speak and write was rendered useless socially and Mandarin became a must on the ladder of social mobility. As a result, many of this generation became marginalized in the new society. They were muted both in reality and symbolically.

The Taiwanese-native veterans started coming out of the closet of history and began talking about their past in the 1990s. Books of oral history of their experiences came into existence (such as Cheng, ed. 1995; Ts’ai, ed. 1997). Combining traditional sources with oral accounts became a fruitful way to approach the history of this long-neglected period, as shown in an early work on Japan’s war mobilization in Taiwan and the war experiences of Taiwanese-born soldiers abroad (Chou 1995: 85–125). A recent article deals with the issue of how this history of Taiwanese-native Japanese soldiers has been a process of “forgetting and remembering” (Lan 2014: 801–851). Being the contemporaries of Taiwanese-native Japanese soldiers, comfort women also gradually came into the light just before the end of the 1990s; their stories appear mainly in the form of “reports.” Many organizations, both governmental and private, have devoted resources to interview projects with elderly people concerning various aspects of colonial life. It is a phenomenon that requires our serious attention and demands that scholars incorporate oral materials into their research.

The defeat of Japan was unexpected for the majority of Taiwanese. The “return” to China was also beyond their imagination. At that time “China” was not “one,” but plural – at least two. Immediately after World War II ended, the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Communist Party
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broke into civil war. The Republic of China (ROC), controlled by the KMT and supported by the US, represented the Allies when they took over Taiwan, thus ending the 50-year Japanese rule of Taiwan. What awaited the Taiwanese was rather dismal and wildly different from what they could have imagined.

In August 2015, Japanese colonial rule of Taiwan had been over for 70 years, but there are still a lot of gaps in our understanding of those 50 years under Japanese rule. A free society, easily accessible materials, new perspectives, and sharper methods will all be needed for a better grasp of the past of the island called Taiwan.

Note

1. Publications of investigation reports of the aboriginal peoples by the Government-General of Taiwan, translated and edited by Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica: for a complete list, see: www.ioe.sinica.edu.tw/Content/Periodicals/Periodicals_List.aspx?SiteID=5301642063764151&MenuID=530177667121224505&FID=

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