

Multiple Imaginings and Transformations of Hanwen in Japanese Colonial Taiwan: Imperial Hanwen, Colonial Hanwen, Chinese Vernacular, and Taiwanese Vernacular

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the historical development of “Han-wu” and discusses the significance or characteristics of the successive language movements in Japanese colonial Taiwan.

The Chinese vernacular movement of Taiwan occurred under Japanese rule not as a result of sudden or external factors. Instead, it was catalyzed by two major forces. First, the magazine Taiwan Education Organization laid the internal foundation of Colonial Han-wu. Second, the visit of Liang Qichao from Mainland China provided further impetus to the movement by linking Chinese vernacular with Colonial Han-wu to form an imagined common literary form.

From the perspective of Han-wu development in East Asia, the imagined literary form was rooted in “Kundoku” (Chinese vocabularies spoken in Japanese) of Imperial Han-wu used in the post-Meiji Reformation era. It also provided the foundation for Colonial Han-wu to mix and merge with Chinese vernacular. To Japan and Taiwan, Imperial Han-wu and Colonial Han-wu were both agencies of the dual-structure languages in which people of different statuses, classes and cultural backgrounds communicated.

Chinese vernacular in Japanese colonial Taiwan emerged as an imagined common literary style. Such cultural phenomenon was only recognized and named in retrospect. Since Chinese vernacular was not meant to be a goal to be achieved or a policy to be implemented, the language that was put into actual practice was the ill-defined Colonial Han-wu, which was developed from a hybrid of complex factors. Consequently, upon realizing that the so-called Chinese vernacular was more imagined than real, unavailable

and unfit for their needs, Taiwanese intelligentsia naturally turned to other languages, which eventually led to the debate of Taiwanese vernacular in the 1930s.

Despite the intricate and complicated development of Han-wu in Japanese colonial Taiwan, it did exist as the common literary form for mutual communication. Yet, the lack of support from the government and education system made it impossible for this literary form to be standardized, normalized or systematized. Such certainty gave rise to its Multiple imaginings and transformations, a feature characteristic of Taiwan as a colony in East Asian region. Furthermore, this literary form formed the kernel of modern Taiwanese language.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Agency, Colony Han-wu, Taiwan Education Organization, Imagined Common Literary Style