

## **Changes in Facilities, Functions and Activities of Urban Parks during Japanese Colonial Era**

Sheng-kai Hsu

### **ABSTRACT**

This article traces the development of urban parks during the Japanese colonial era with respect to their leisure functions. According to an investigation of parks and park facilities in Taiwan under Japanese rule, the author discusses the expansion patterns, types and locations of these parks as well as changes in their facilities and activities over the years. Examining these changes would shed light on evolution of the leisure function of parks. In Japanese colonial Taiwan, at least 33 urban parks were established, first in highly populated main cities, then in smaller towns; first in the west, then in the east of Taiwan main island, and finally on offshore islands. Nevertheless, prior to the 1910s, these parks served the political education rather than recreation purpose, with mainly edification aids installed on site. Leisure facilities were beginning to be seen around the 1910s; and recreation facilities including sports fields, playgrounds, zoos and swimming pools were widely established after the 1920s. Urban parks were eventually transformed into a gathering space for leisure and pleasure. Under early Japanese rule, activities held in parks were mainly official celebrations, ceremonies and rituals. With increasing leisure facilities installed, recreational activities were frequently organized. In the 1930s, middle- and lower-class Taiwanese people were often seen in parks. During the Second World War, the use and activities of urban parks became war-oriented though they retained their purpose as “public spaces for leisure”. However, their recreation function came to an end after June 1943 when parks were turned into air-raid shelters and given over to food production. Reviewing how urban parks were transformed to serve diverse functions showed how the Japanese colonial rulers made use of such public leisure facilities as media for social and political education.

**Keywords:** Urban Parks, Public Space, Leisure, Political Education, Life Culture and Cultivation