

“Building a New Taiwan”: Huang Weiyan and Takeover of Forestry in Postwar Taiwan

Kuan-chi Hung and Jia-lun Chang

ABSTRACT

Forest is the most significant landscape of Taiwan, and forestry is surely an important component of Taiwanese history. However, researchers have so far concentrated on the forestry regime in Taiwan under the Japanese colonial rule, and little attention has been paid to unveil how the Forestry Bureau of Taiwan Province took over and reorganized the colonial forestry regime in postwar Taiwan, let alone analyze this episode with concepts in recent scholarship of environmental history, such as governance, assemblage, and the circulation of knowledge. To bridge this gap, this essay focuses on the life and career of the first director of the Forestry Bureau, Huang Weiyan (1904-1988), who received his PhD in forestry from the University of Munich and upon graduation was appointed as Professor in forestry at the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. In the 1930s, when Huang studied in Germany, he became familiar with the *Naturschutz* (natural protection) ideology promoted by the Nazi Party and embraced by German foresters. After returning to China, he proposed the framework of “defense forestry,” which integrated German forestry, Sun Yat-sen’s forestry thought, his experience in the experimental forests of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the urgent needs for the reconstruction and revival of postwar China. Huang believed that an ideal forestry regime should be monolithic and centralized. Central forestry institution should serve as the “general headquarters” as in the military system, while lower level forestry institutions were akin to “outposts” on the front. However, in December 1945, when Huang took the responsibility of reorganizing Taiwan’s colonial forestry to set up a new regime under the supervision of the Forestry Bureau, he realized that his “defense forestry” and the “southern forestry” that buttressed Taiwan’s colonial forestry were on the opposite ends of the spectrum. Unlike Huang, colonial foresters in the 1930s had realized that, due to the unique compositions and complexities of Taiwan’s forests, it was impossible and impractical to import the

“northern forestry,” which concentrated on temperate forests with relatively simple structures, and relied it as a guiding principle. Thus, they shifted the focus away from German forestry and created a company-oriented, horizontal, and decentralized “southern forestry,” which highlighted the “liquidation” concept of American forestry and the wartime needs of Japan. To reconcile the incommensurability between the two types of forestry, Huang conducted a series of bold experiments, in the hope of grafting his defense forestry upon southern forestry. Even so, in October 1946, when garrison commander Chen Yi approved the institutional structure of the Forestry Bureau, as well as the Bureau’s monopoly of Taiwan’s forest resources, the Bureau remained a cumbersome assemblage difficult to maintain. Those who were unsatisfied with the Bureau’s policies, for example, local governments and Taiwanese forestry managers, were aware of the Bureau’s maintenance problem. They exploited the opportunity, thus foreshadowing the chaos of Taiwanese forestry after the February 28th incident in 1947.

Keywords: Huang Weiyan, Environmental History, Forestry, Forestry Bureau, Takeover