

# From “Masters of Taiwan’s Forests” to “Wanderers in Their Own Lands”: The Zoning and Classification Survey of Taiwan’s Forest Management Project (1925-1935) Reconsidered

Kuang-chi Hung, Wen-chun Lo, and Aliman Istanda

## ABSTRACT

How did the past “*banchi*” or “savages’ land” in Taiwan get transformed into today’s national forests and lands reserved for indigenous peoples? In the face of this classical question, scholars of Taiwan history generally agree that the *kubun chōsa* (zoning and classification survey) of the *shinrin keikaku jigyō* (forest management project, 1925-1935) played an important role. However, there is little consensus regarding the origin, process, and results of the *kubun chōsa*. In particular, the definitions for zoning and classifying Taiwan’s forestlands, such as the *huyō sonchi rin’ya* (literally meaning non-reserved forests and lands), the *jun yō sonchi rin’ya* (semi-reserved forests and lands, which would later become lands reserved for indigenous peoples), and the *jun yō sonchi rin’ya* (reserved forests and lands, which would later become national forests) remain ambiguous. The original survey reports and maps of the *kubun chōsa* preserved by the Forestry Bureau, Council of Agriculture has been reproduced by the Center for GIS, RCHSS, Academia Sinica for scholarly research. This essay offers a guidance on how to use these open and yet understudied primary sources, and develops an explanation to the role of the *kubun chōsa* in Taiwan’s transition to capitalism and statemaking.

First, this essay focuses on the respective views proposed by Tadao Yanaihara and Wen-liang Lee in regard to the *kubun chōsa*, and outlines their agreements and disagreements. Second, with the historiographical survey completed, this essay returns to the official reports and primary sources of the *kubun chōsa*, and offers answers to the reason why the *kubun chōsa* designated most of the forestlands under survey as the *yō sonchi rin’ya*, the actual meaning and origin of the *yō sonchi rin’ya*, and whether the colonial government planned to sell the *huyō sonchi rin’ya* to capitalists. Third, this essay outlines the contents

and scopes of the primary sources of the *kubun chōsa*, and uses the *Nanshō chōsaku* as a case, integrating the primary sources known as the *banjin shoyōchi chōsasho* currently housed at the Library of the National Taiwan University and distinguishing three types of spaces, namely space for governmental administration, space for scientific forestry, and living space of indigenous peoples. In conclusion, this essay argues that the primary sources of the *kubun chōsa* not only reveal the theories and practices of the colonial forestry sector in incorporating the savages' land into a scientific forestry regime, but also offer a valuable window through which contemporary scholars could examine issues such as Taiwan's transition to capitalism and statemaking, and the uniqueness of the Japanese empire as an imperial nation-state. Moreover, in light of the rising call for historical and transitional justice of Taiwan's indigenous peoples, the results of the *kubun chōsa* could provide relevant discussions with an empirical basis, upon which scholars and activists could explore how and why Taiwan's indigenous peoples transformed from "masters of Taiwan's forests" to "wanderers in their own lands."

**Keywords:** Taiwan Indigenous Peoples, Scientific Forestry, Survey for Zoning and Dividing, Project for Forest Management, Japanese Empire