

Reconfiguring Colonial Urban Boundaries: Formation of Sozan Villa District in Japanese Colonial Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the transformation of the Sozan area in Taipei from mountainous forestland into a suburban villa district during the Japanese colonial period. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that integrates urban and environmental history, it analyzes how the Government-General of Taiwan systematically reconfigured the area's spatial functions and social stratification through institutional consolidation, spatial planning, and capital mobilization.

The transformation rested on three interrelated pillars. First, the consolidation of land rights provided the essential foundation. Following the opening of the Sozan Public Bathhouse in 1913, land ownership gradually shifted from local lineages to Japanese residents and the Taiwan Land and Building Co., Ltd., thereby establishing the institutional and financial basis for subsequent development. Second, colonial governance strategies centered on park development and urban planning. From Umetani Mitsusada's 1920 proposal to Honda Seiroku's 1928 plan, Sozan was envisioned as a "grand park" for Taipei. The 1935 Sozan Urban Plan formally designated the area as an urban facility, while the establishment of Daiton National Park in 1937 further incorporated it into a broader metropolitan framework. Third, the villa district's spatial character was shaped by Japanese summer retreat culture and Kuroya Ryotaro's "Forest City" ideals. The 1941 *Taipei Urban Planning Zoning Specification* classified Sozan as a "high-end residential area," explicitly aligning its development with the lifestyle aspirations of the urban upper-middle class in colonial Taiwan.

Sozan's evolution exemplifies a paradigm shift in colonial urban boundaries from "geographical continuity" to "functional connectivity." Through transportation linkages and functional complementarity, the area became an integral part of Taipei's urban system despite its physical distance from the city center. This study challenges the binary oppositions of "urban-rural" and "development-conservation," offering key insights into colonial urbanization in East Asia.

Keywords: Sozan (Yangmingshan), History of Hot Springs, Urban Planning, Suburb, Colonial Urbanization, Spatial Stratification