

Taiwan's *Rinya* Management During the Early Stage of Colonial Rule

— A Case Study of *Ta-k'a -k'an* (*Ta-hsi, T'ao-yüan*) in Northern Taiwan

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Abstract

In order to exercise an effective control on the use of *rinya* (forests and fields which was unregistered, whether under reclamation or un-reclaimed), in the early phase of Japanese colonial rule, the Government-General of Taiwan implemented its *rinya* management policies in two steps. Because the land records had been damaged during wartime, the Government-General encouraged Taiwanese occupants to provide original documents proving their possession of *rinya* during the Ch'ing period and then apply for an extension of these rights from the new government. In doing so, the government succeeded in establishing an accurate cadastral record on *rinya*. In addition, a legal act issued in 1895 granted the Government-General the ownership of unclaimed *rinya*. This law provided the Government-General with the legal basis to prohibit illegal reclamation as well as the right to redistribute unclaimed *rinya*. In the subsequent step in the following year, the Government-General issued, in a more complete form, a variety of laws regulating *rinya* transfer, which greatly facilitated its management of *rinya*.

The case of *Ta-k'o-k'an* analyzed in this paper reveals that local rights on *rinya* were recognized by the colonial government in various stages of *rinya* management. Meanwhile, the law did not deprive natives of the right to reclaim *rinya*. In the period of reconstructing cadastral records, the native reclaimers obtained an extension of their rights. Rather than possessing ownership rights, the reclaimers acquired the right to re-

claim the field. The reclaimer was allowed to transform his reclamation rights into full ownership rights under the condition that the reclamation would be completed in due time. Applicants were required to open the land for cultivation in a shorter period of time compared to the previous reclamation patents granted by the Ching government. This measure ensured a more efficient regulation of *rinya*. *Rinya* owners who failed to provide valid land title documents were also allowed to legalize ownership after a symbolic payment to the government.

Taiwan was in a state of chaos when Japanese colonizers landed. The colonial administration was greatly disturbed by this social disorder. Moreover, colonial rule induced alarming financial pressures on the central government in Tokyo. In order to stabilize local society quickly, expand tax incomes, and pacify mountain aborigines, the colonial government adopted a preservation policy toward native *rinya* rights. The government tended to satisfy the interests of all parties, and in the *Ta- k'o-k'an* case was, in fact, impartial, with no evidence of special favors given to its compatriot Japanese capitalists.