

Decolonization vs. Recolonization: The Debate over “T’ai-jen nu-hua” of 1946 in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Before the 228 Uprising, there were many fierce debates among officials and Taiwanese people in newspapers and journals throughout the year of 1946. The authority censured that Taiwanese had been “enslaved” from fifty years of colonization by Japanese, and they further insisted that Taiwanese should not be treated equally before being “Chinesized”. Taiwanese intellectuals strongly counterattacked and deemed that the officials were making an excuse for their maladministration. At the same time, the intellectuals reevaluated the legacy of Japanese rule over the island.

This article examines the process of the debate over “T’ai-jen nu-hua” and argues that, first, Chen Yi’s postwar governing policies implicated huge discrimination. The “Chinesization” policy was just another appearance as the same thinking mode as the old colonizer. To Taiwanese, all this meant that “restore to the mother country” was nothing but being “recolonized by a compatriot”. Second, the censure of “T’ai-jen nu-hua” seriously hurt Taiwanese people’s dignity. Humiliated Taiwanese elites intended to therefore acknowledge the difference between “us” and “them” from the colonized past. Namely, the discourse of “modernization through Japanese ruling” became a counter-argument to the condemnation of “T’ai-jen nu-hua”.

This article also points out Taiwanese intellectuals’ assertion about the subjectivity of Taiwanese culture. In despair of mainland Chinese governing and thus the enhancement of a self-governing consciousness, the island’s Chinese identity withered away before the 228 Uprising.

Keywords: decolonization, recolonization, assimilation, the debate over “T’ai-jen nu-hua”, national identity