

Emergence and Legal Treatment of “Flatland Aborigines” under Japanese Rule (1895-1937)

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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the special mode adopted by the Japanese colonial administration for governing “flatland aborigines”. During early Japanese rule, the colonial government included only the Pingpu tribe in its administration. Neither were other indigenous people recognized as imperial subjects; nor were their territories incorporated into the General Administrative Region on the plains. These aborigines were ruled separately by the “aboriginal administration”.

To the Taiwan Governor-General’s Office, the ideal was to assimilate the “wild aborigines” (*shengfan*) as “tamed aborigines” (*shufan*) and include them as subjects of the General Administrative Region to be governed by the same principles as the “Islanders” (Han-Chinese and Pingpu tribes). However, the Ami and Piyuma tribes who lived on the plains in eastern Taiwan sharing territories with Han-Chinese did not become civilized as desired by the Taiwan Governor-General’s Office, and were hence called “flatland aborigines” in contrast to “tamed aborigines”. Although “flatland aborigines” resided within the General Administrative Region, not all the general administration rules were applicable to them. Through analyzing household data, land ownership, tax and judiciary procedure, this study explored the governance and legal treatment of “flatland aborigines”. It was found that in the early Japanese colonial era, the administration as well as civil rights and obligations of “flatland aborigines” had gradually become similar to those of “Islanders”, and they were also granted the right to criminal trial after 1920.

Keywords: Flatland Aborigines, General Administrative Region, Aboriginal Administration, General Administration, Mixing of Aborigines and Han-Chinese