

The beginnings of the Japanese colonial media system, 1898-1912

TANIGAWA Shun

How did Japan adapt and apply Western media systems domestically and in its early colonies? Focusing on Taiwan, this paper discusses the beginnings of the Japanese colonial media system.

In Taiwan, the newspapers were first published by Europeans at the end of the Qing Dynasty. When Taiwan came under Japanese rule, newspapers published by Japanese adhered to mainland Japanese press laws, controlling the public sphere in Japanese- Chinese- and English-language media there. However, when Gotō Shinpei (1857-1929) became the head of civilian affairs in the Japanese government of Taiwan in 1898, the media system changed.

Once in office in Taiwan, Gotō presented the mainland Japanese government with an evolving model of colonial media control. As Taiwan's civilian governor Gotō, who had an acute appreciation of the power of the mass media in Japan and had witnessed Western civil society through his studies in Germany, organized collaborators from among prosperous, educated Japanese and Han Chinese, introducing a policy of controlled modernization, a variation on Habermas's 'Bourgeois Public Sphere' that could be described as a 'Gentlemanly Colonial Public Sphere'.

In order to tackle the publications of the British people in Taiwan protected by extraterritoriality under the unequal treaties, Goto introduced new colonial press laws. In Taiwan, Gotō engaged Han Chinese intellectuals to challenge Manchurian rule in mainland China. In 1906, as the first director of the South Manchuria Railway Company in Manchuria, Gotō succeeded in establishing another 'Gentlemanly Colonial Public Sphere' by the tactics he had applied to Taiwan.

To facilitate colonial management in the midst of competing imperialisms in Northeast Asia, and in order to protect Japanese interests, Gotō Shinpei introduced a "Public Sphere" from above. His 'colonial gentlemen' coopted local people whose support for modernization formed an important part of his plans for the model of Japanese media control that he brought to the earliest colonies in the Japanese Empire.