

Another Overseas Chinese: Taiwanese Merchants Supporting Japan in the Great East Asia, 1941-45

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In the 1930s and 1940s, there is discussion about the definition of the overseas Chinese among the Chinese and Japanese scholars. Go Shukei's definition of overseas Chinese applies to Chinese and their offspring who settled abroad, excluding Chinese officials and students studying in other countries. As Go understood, the strictest definition of overseas Chinese went a step further and limited this status to those who maintained Chinese nationality while settling abroad. For this definition, the 46,000-47,000 overseas Chinese in Taiwan in 1933 was a good example given by Ōkurasyō Kawasekyoku. According to this strict definition, the offspring of overseas Chinese would not be deemed as overseas Chinese if they did not take Chinese nationality, as Go pointed out. However, a broader definition said that no matter what nationality they carry, all Chinese and their offspring who settle abroad or had been abroad are included as overseas Chinese, as Ide Kiwata asserted. For the Taiwanese in Japanese colonial Taiwan, following Ōkurashō kawasekyoku's study, because they had two years after the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed to decide whether or not to accept Japanese nationality by staying in Taiwan or leaving, the Japanese government deemed the Taiwanese who remained in Taiwan as Japanese. But, there was no rule against those Taiwanese to be included as overseas Chinese in China. The 3.4 million Chinese in Taiwan in 1933 could be called overseas Chinese in this broad definition. As a kind of overseas Chinese in this broad sense, the Taiwanese non-soldier emigrants examined in this paper during the "Great East Asia co-prosperity" period moved in the direction opposite that of overseas Chinese in the strictest sense: The Taiwanese expanded overseas, while the Chinese nationals withdrew from overseas. This paper will also show how the Taiwanese merchants increased investment in this area to support Japan, and hence illustrate how "people should fight war for his country" bear different meanings for different overseas Chinese in the Great East Asian War.