

Nationalism and Internationalism in Intellectual Co-operation: Aikitsu Tanakadate and the Romanization of Japanese Language

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The main purpose of this paper is to examine an aspect of intellectual co-operation that the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation (ICIC) of the League of Nations implemented, focusing on Aikitsu Tanakadate and his endeavor to promote the romanization of Japanese language. Tanakadate, while making a significant mark in the development of geophysics and seismology in modern Japan, had been committed to the ICIC as one of its members from 1927 to 1933 and devoted to his lifelong project for romanizing non-Latin script languages. It was Tanakadate's belief that the Latin alphabet, which was widely used in the world, should be adopted into all languages in principle, particularly Japanese, with a view to facilitating international understanding. His enthusiasm for the romanization of languages eventually led to the adoption of so-called 'Tanakadate Proposal' by the ICIC in 1931. Based on this proposal, the ICIC conducted a comparative survey on possibilities of the romanization in non-Latin script languages and published a detailed report about the situations in twenty languages in 1934. In the end, however, the ICIC concluded that any further effective actions could not be taken in light of the national nature of this question.

Given the above, this paper firstly shows the intent and purpose of Tanakadate's project from a point of view of his nationalism and internationalism. As a matter of fact, while emphasizing the significance of international understanding through the unification of various writing systems under Latin characters, he also aimed at spreading the Japanese *Volksgeist* (Minzoku Seishin) across the world. Secondly, this paper demonstrates how Tanakadate's idea was received and understood in the ICIC, with special attention to some members such as Julio Casares, Hendrik Lorentz and Gilbert Murray who particularly favored the romanization of languages. Thirdly, this paper sheds light on repercussions of Tanakadate's project to other countries, particularly China. As the Chinese intellectual Lin Yutang, who attended the meeting of the ICIC in 1931 in place of the Chinese member Wu Zhihui, strongly agreed with Tanakadate, the system for writing Mandarin Chinese in the Latin alphabet (Gwoyeu Romatzyh) was promoted by the Chinese government in the same period. In light of this, this paper makes a comparative review of different romanizations in Japan and China.

Primary Sources

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