There is an 1899 photograph of the Japanese Governor General of Taiwan, Kodama Gentarō, playing croquet on his mansion’s back lawn. That photograph, which arrests the eye in its
spontaneity, was the beginning of my exploration of the conditions of portrait photography in Taiwan during Japanese colonization. In this lecture, I consider the Japanese colonial photographic industry and its products (portraits) in three contexts: the state of photographic technology in the world at that time, the ideological machinery of colonization in Taiwan, and the wider phenomenon of colonial mimicry. Here I focus on colonial-period photo albums and commercial directories that present portraits of politically and economically influential men, both Japanese and Taiwanese. Bringing these considerations together suggests an aspect of the colonial ideological machinery that has been understated in other studies: the colonial portrait as a mask in several forms.

This year’s Chuan Lyu Lecturer

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