

# **Tropical Environment, Immigrant Population, and Sensitive Bodies: Research on Allergy and Treatment in Taiwan before 1980**

Hung-bin Hsu

## **ABSTRACT**

The article analyzes the development of research on allergy and treatment in Taiwan, focusing on the introduction and evolution of concepts, the production and circulation of knowledge on allergy, the recruitment and cultivation of specialists, and the practices and transformation of its treatments. It aims to decipher the multiple actors and unique historical contexts that facilitated the rapid development of allergy research in Taiwan. Unlike studies on allergy in Western societies that highlight the importance of class, urbanization and modernization, research on allergy in Taiwan was closely related to its colonial past and the immigrants from Japan and China.

Exploration reveals that research on allergy in Taiwan began with the bacteriology and tropical medicine during Japanese colonization. On the one hand, during the colonial era, allergy was identified as a long-term and systematic immune response to infectious diseases, rather than an abnormality. On the other hand, allergy was also considered a nervous system disorder, one of the many symptoms of tropical neurasthenia. The discourse of allergy as a neurological disorder gradually lost its popularity after WWII while that of allergy as a malfunction of immune system became increasingly dominant. In terms of its treatment, multiple strategies had been applied since the colonial era, including surgeries, medications and desensitization therapies. At the same time, there had been growing attention paid to the relationship between immigrants, environment and allergic diseases. It was not until the 1970s that allergy was seen as a common disease among the general population on the island, and specialists with training of immunology and immunotherapy gradually became available. US aid solicited by civilian allergy sufferers that contributed to fund research and training as well as the establishment of the Taiwan Allergy Center in the 1970s were crucial for the promotion of allergy research in

that period.

**Keywords:** Allergy, Immunology, Nerve, Colonial Medicine, Tropical Medicine