

A Promising Medicinal Material: Coca Industry in Taiwan under Japanese Colonial Rule

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ABSTRACT

Taiwan used to be one of the largest exporters of coca leaves in East Asia before 1945. This fluctuant history manifests the resonance with undulant global drugs market and the emergence of an international control system on narcotic drugs. To cast off the strap from the global market, Japan designated Taiwan in substitution for Java as source of coca leaves. With the second-mover advantage, the colonial agro-specialists select proper species and quickly produce sizable coca leaves within a decade. The international control system encouraged and legitimized the monopolized production system. Hoshi Pharmaceuticals Company and Taiwan Crude Drugs Company became the only two enterprises held the chartered right to cultivate coca trees and produce cocaine in Taiwan. On the other hand, this control system, from another aspect, conceals every process from production, distribution to consumption, which had been uncovered and presented in this article as the following main arguments and findings: 1) Vicissitude of the coca industry in Taiwan were associated with the emergence of an international drug control system. 2) Most of the illegal cocaine consumer was smuggler, but the socio-cultural traits of end consumer could not be identified. The majority of legal consumer was patient of ophthalmology, but users could be found among patients of gynecology, otolaryngology, and internal medicine as well. There were several side-effect records, but level of addiction could not be identified. 3) The tacit knowledge of the tea industry developed in Taiwan over the nineteenth century, which involved technological affinity with the coca industry, became the vital local factor for Taiwan to become the key coca producer in the Japanese Empire. However, this vital local factor was eradicated and gradually faded away from our memory due to another regulatory thinking and policy of the nationalist government in the post war period.

Keywords: Coca Industry, Coca Leaves, Cocaine, Narcotic Drug, Japanese Colonial History