

Implementation of Venereal Disease Prevention Policies in Japanese Colonial Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the features and implementation of policies for preventing venereal diseases in Taiwan under Japanese colonial rule from the legal perspective. With the adoption of the prevalent view in Japan that prostitution led to spread of sexually transmitted diseases, related policies thus introduced in colonial Taiwan since 1896 aimed at both venereal disease prevention and prostitution control.

The colonial authorities established a compulsory venereal disease control system as a means to monitor the health conditions of licensed and unlicensed prostitutes. However, such health-check scheme for unlicensed prostitutes was aborted in less than a year after its initiation. As a result, only licensed prostitutes were included in the policies for prevention against sexually transmitted diseases during the first 25 years of Japanese colonial rule. The discrepancy in colonial health control policy for licensed and unlicensed prostitutes was attributed not to their legal status but racism. The majority of licensed prostitutes at that time were Japanese. Providing strict health control for these women would mean protection of the Japanese in colonial Taiwan against sexually transmitted diseases. On the contrary, most unlicensed prostitutes were local Taiwanese who were excluded from the venereal disease control scheme but were subjected to criminal penalties for being sex workers. It was only till the introduction of the Administrative Enforcement Law in 1923 that unlicensed prostitutes were once again included into the compulsory venereal disease control scheme. Since then, the authorities began to enforce prohibitive measures against Taiwanese sex workers. However, the real motive behind such prohibition was to safeguard the interests of the colonizers and the priority focused on protecting the Japanese against infection of venereal diseases transmitted by Taiwanese prostitutes.

With the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the colonial authorities followed Imperial Japan in implementing legislations for prevention against sexually transmitted diseases, thus extending the health control scheme to all civilians. Nevertheless, these venereal disease prevention policies introduced towards the end of Japanese colonial rule were more for ensuring war provisions and human resources as well as enhancing the health quality of the general population, rather than striving toward gender and racial equality.

Keywords: Venereal Disease, Institution of Licensed Prostitutes, Prohibition of Unlicensed Prostitutes, System of General Mobilization, Colonial Health Control