

## **Caught between Imperial Medicine and Colonial Medicine: Beriberi in Colonial Taiwan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Taking Taiwanese diaries as a starting point for discussion, this article explores the impact and significance of beriberi problem in Japanese-ruled Taiwan. In the early days of that period, beriberi was first prevalent among the Japanese, but modern institutions later became strongholds to spread beriberi to the Taiwanese. The contradiction lies in the fact that the modern institutions, which acted as civilized facilities in the colony, carried harmful factors of spreading the disease. Although micronutrient vitamins were already discovered in the 1910s, Japanese imperial medicine was not settled on the cause of beriberi, which hindered its sound medical progress. When the international Association of Far Eastern Tropical Medicine discussed prevention and control measures for beriberi in the 1920s, Japan preferred nutrition education, rather than actively resorting to legislation to control the rice and nutrition as the Western colonial countries did. In this regard, the history of beriberi in colonial Taiwan is highly different from that in the Western colonies. Furthermore, considering the subjective experience of the Taiwanese, the beriberi problem experienced by Taiwanese patients and physicians was their own unique historical experience. This article analyzes the medical status of three patients at different times, in which it reflects not only the authority of imperial medicine and the progress of Japanese beriberi policy interlinked by the colonial medicine, but also the educational and generational differences of the patients. This paper also points out that there were three Taiwanese physicians engaged in research dialogues in the interstices between imperial medicine and colonial medicine, and relatively highlighted the subjective position of their researches.

**Keywords:** Beriberi, Imperial Medicine, Colonial Medicine, The Association of Far Eastern Tropical Medicine, Postcolonial Research Taiwanese, In Colonial Taiwan