

## **Lin Chao-tung and Revival of Camphor Industry in Late Nineteenth-century Taiwan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

With Taiwan opening ports to foreign trade in 1858-1860, the export of Formosan camphor increased gradually, peaked in 1870, but declined and sank almost into oblivion by 1885. As a result, Japan surpassed Taiwan in being the chief producer and exporter of camphor. Situation changed when Liu Ming-chuan, the then governor of Taiwan, launched his campaign of “opening up the mountains and pacifying the aborigines” in 1886. Lin Chao-tung not only implemented Liu’s policy but also recommended monopolization of camphor production and marketing. Through his work at the Pacification and Settlement Bureau in central Taiwan, Lin contributed to revive the camphor industry.

Current literature on the relationship between Lin Chao-tung and the camphor industry lacked first-hand accounts and often contained erroneous information borrowed indiscriminately or rumors from unreliable sources. This article, with reference to the recently discovered “Lin’s Archives of Wufeng” and existing documents, attempts to explore and reconstruct the related significant historical facts. The exploration focuses on four main aspects: the background of the joint venture between Lin and Butler & Co., the evolution of their collaboration during the free-trade period, camphor production and marketing under Lin, and Lin’s contribution to the development of camphor industry. The findings are as follows.

Firstly, some previous studies claimed that Lin owned the monopoly of camphor, which was quite misleading and should be corrected. During the Monopoly Period (1886-1890), Lin played a leading role in maintaining the state-monopolized camphor production and marketing in order through his post in the Pacification and Settlement Bureau in central Taiwan and his military force, Tung Army. After the camphor was open

to free trade in 1891, Lin startwrs investing in the industry and collaborated with foreign companies in camphor export.

Secondly, two factors contributed to the joint venture between Lin and Butler & Co. in camphor trade. One was the soar in global demand of Formosan camphor, especially with the rise of chemical industries in Germany. The other was Lin's important role in the campaign of "opening up the mountains and pacifying the aborigines" and his own investment in camphor industry. His support was indispensable to foreign merchants who sought to obtain a substantial and steady supply of camphor.

Thirdly, the joint venture between Lin and Butler & Co. is now confirmed to be of three years lasting from 1891 to 1893. However, whether there was any unauthorized business dealing between them in 1890 or whether some camphor merchants under Lin continued cooperating with Butler & Co. need to be further examined. Contrary to what has been said in present works, the real reason why they terminated their collaboration was the request from Butler & Co. for price reduction.

Fourthly, with Butler & Co. out of the picture, Lin made his own investment in camphor production and marketing. He established Fu-Yu-Yuan Company in 1894 and cooperated with other foreign companies in camphor export.

Finally, prevailing appraisal of Lin's role in camphor industry of Taiwan tended to be negative. While most previous works depicted that Lin monopolized the camphor industry, this article highlights his contributions toward the revival of camphor industry after it hit rock bottom in 1885. On the one hand, Lin's implementation of the "opening up the mountains and pacifying the aborigines" policy was the turning point. On the other hand, the stationing of Tung Army in the mountain areas maintained order and fostered the production of camphor. Eventually, soar in camphor production revived the camphor industry and by 1893 Taiwan regained the status from Japan as the leading global producer and exporter of camphor.

**Keywords:** Lin Chao-tung, Liu Ming-chuan, Mountain-opening and Barbarian-pacification, Camphor Industry, Pacification and Settlement Bureau of Central Taiwan, Tung Army, Ying-Feng Company (Ge Zhu-xuan), Yu-Feng Company (Chen Ru-zhou), Camphor House, Butler & Co., Fu-Yu-Yuan Company