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EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

The Fujitsuru Mystery: Translocal Xiamen, Japanese Expansionism, and the Asian Cocaine Trade, 1900–1937

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Abstract

This article examines the Asian cocaine trade of the early twentieth century. It argues that the distribution of cocaine into Asian colonial ports was controlled by people from southeastern China who took advantage of a convergence of factors: consumer markets in India and Southeast Asia, shifting political winds surrounding drug use, the rise of Japan, and the translocal nature of southern Fujianese society. Xiamen was not only a port but also the hub of a society that was omnipresent in the maritime world of early twentieth-century Asia: natives of southern Fujian resided in Calcutta, Singapore, Rangoon, Manila, and Kobe, constituting a huge percentage of the crew and passengers of the steamships that connected those places. The implications of this story are relevant to two important themes of this special issue: the history of control and evasion in maritime Asia, and, relatedly, the ways in which states sought to extend their jurisdiction over the seas. Fujianese cocaine smugglers saw an opportunity when colonial governments banned cocaine imports, and took advantage of their place within the Japanese imperial sphere to acquire drugs and penetrate colonial markets. The evidence presented here thus highlights the place of opportunism and entrepreneurialism within the wider history of state efforts to control trade.

Keywords: cocaine, drugs, smuggling, China, Fujian, Xiamen, Singapore, India, Japan, maritime history, East Asia, Southeast Asia

In September 1928, at a railway station in Rangoon, British colonial police officers seized ten bottles of cocaine from two laborers (“Traffic” 1930). A month later, also in Rangoon, customs officers seized a much larger consignment of drugs on a steamship from China: 32 ounces of morphine, 500 ounces of cocaine, and 28 pounds of opium. British authorities, in consultation with the League of Nations, ascertained from the German government that the seized cocaine from these two cases had originally formed part of a legal consignment exported from Germany under license to a Chinese doctor in Xiamen named E. S. Cheong (章永順). “These two cases,” the *Singapore Times* reported, “appear to indicate that Amoy [Xiamen] is a centre from which drugs are smuggled into India and elsewhere” (“Traffic” 1930). In both cases, the authentic

German cocaine was packed together with other drugs, which were stamped with two untraceable labels: those of “the Fujitsuru brand” and “C. P. Boehringer & Soehne, Mannheun [sic].”¹ British authorities quickly determined that the misspelling of “Sohn” and “Mannheim” indicated that the supplementary German label was a forgery. But where was the cocaine from? The name “Fujitsuru” is unmistakably of Japanese origin, but the company itself was a mystery.

Three years later, in 1931, Special Officer James Slattery of the Central Board of Revenue in Calcutta set off on a maritime odyssey to try and track down the murky origins of the Fujitsuru brand of cocaine (Slattery 1932). As historian James H. Mills (2007) has shown, India was second only to the United States in cocaine consumption during the early twentieth century. In particular, brands like Fujitsuru, Elephant, and Buddha—untraceable labels connected to no legally registered company—had inundated the brothels and gambling dens of British colonial ports across South and Southeast Asia, vexing authorities from Singapore to Bombay. Slattery followed the drug’s trail through Burma, Malaysia, and Singapore, then up the China coast from Hong Kong to Shanghai, and finally visited Japan and Taiwan before returning to India. Using Slattery’s report—alongside documentation from the League of Nations archive, the British National Archives, as well as the Fujian provincial archive and local Chinese newspapers—this article reconstructs the Fujitsuru cocaine network.

The maritime Asian cocaine trade of the early twentieth century offers a perspective on the relationship between commercial networks, imperial expansion, and patterns of control and evasion that is different from that of the more widely studied opium trade. The history of the Fujitsuru brand runs counter to both popular perception and the vast majority of scholarship about drugs in Asia: here we find the British, Dutch, and American colonial governments pointing fingers and wringing hands about drugs entering their jurisdictions, while the Chinese and Japanese governments turn a blind eye to their constituents’ drug running. The flow of the commodity was directly opposite to the long-term channeling of opium from South Asia into China: cocaine, manufactured in Japan and Taiwan, was packaged and shipped from the South China coast, through Singapore, and finally into Burma and India. While the history of opium remains essential for understanding the colonial governments of the British Straits Settlements and the Netherlands Indies (e.g., Trocki 1990, 1999; Tagliacozzo 2005), cocaine allows us to better understand how the rise of Japan and the breakdown of government in China also structured the efforts of imperial states to—in the words of the guest editors of this special

issue—“extend jurisdiction over the seas for taxation, security, and sovereignty.” The successful evasion tactics of the Fujitsuru network are also instructive, as they offer a unique perspective on the limits of surveillance and control. Despite the clout of the British Empire and the League of Nations, Slattery and his allies were unable to stop the flow of cocaine or adequately identify who was ultimately responsible for the illegal trade.



Figure 1. Map showing the Fujitsuru cocaine network. *Source:* Slattery (1932).

The evidence presented here indicates that the southern Fujianese port of Xiamen was the central processing and packaging depot for the Fujitsuru brand, and that the monopoly of Fujianese maritime entrepreneurs on this trade was achieved through their ability to take advantage of consumer markets and imperial networks. As illustrated in figure 1, Xiamen served to connect Asian cocaine producers in Japan and Taiwan to consumers in ports across South and

Southeast Asia. In the beginning, the Asian cocaine trade was forged by Chinese pharmacists who took advantage of certain contingencies—namely, new restrictions in India and Europe that made the drug increasingly profitable and a preexisting network of Fujianese on steamships and abroad who made importing and exporting cocaine a logistical possibility. As the tectonic plates of global imperialism shifted in the years following World War I, the cocaine smugglers of Xiamen maintained their position without disruption. The rise of Japanese power in South China altered the patterns of drug dealing in Fujian by creating incentives for people to swap their Chinese citizenship for Japanese protection. Meanwhile, the investment of Japanese drug companies in cocaine production created an alternative source of product at precisely the moment at which the League of Nations was cutting off traditional European sources. From beginning to end, there was no Asian cocaine trade without the special ability of Fujianese natives to adapt to these changes while continuing to import the drug into China, repackage and label it, and then export and distribute the drug throughout maritime Asia. The Fujianese monopoly over the Asian cocaine trade was thus the result of the historical convergence of a translocal society with the rise of the Japanese Empire in South China.

The translocal nature of southern Fujianese society was the engine of the Asian cocaine trade. Following the conceptualization of “Translocal China” developed by cultural geographer Tim Oakes and anthropologist Louisa Schein, which emphasizes “the relationship between mobility and place” (2006, xii), the argument being made here is premised on the idea that the port of Xiamen was not just a city, but a network of people, goods, and institutions that was based in this particular place yet had nodes across China and maritime Asia. The people of southern Fujian, like the natives of neighboring Chaozhou studied by historian Melissa Macauley, “tended to travel to the same places, live in close proximity to one another, and establish institutions that reinforced the cultural bond within expatriate communities and with their home villages” (2016, 757). The translocal dynamic of Fujianese society has persisted into the twenty-first century, as recent scholarship demonstrates (see, for example, Pieke et al. 2004). Further, as historian Madeline Hsu’s work makes evident, transnational approaches to the history of South China are indispensable, since migration has long been an integral part of southern Chinese society and migrants from this part of China have tended to maintain strong connections with their native place (2000). As such, this article views twentieth-century Xiamen as the swirling hub of a mobile society that extended across maritime Asia, thriving on the transgression,

evasion, and manipulation of borders, taxes, and jurisdictions. The creation and maintenance of Xiamen as a cocaine distribution center was possible because translocal Xiamen had long since extended itself into Kobe, Taipei, Singapore, Batavia, Manila, Rangoon, and Calcutta; the city existed, too, among the crews, compradors, and passengers aboard the shipping lines that connected maritime Asia.

This article therefore illustrates the perspective on control and evasion in maritime Asia that can be gained by focusing on the people who purchased, repackaged, and carried cocaine from manufacturer to end user. In *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China*, historians Frank Dikötter, Lars Laamann, and Zhou Xun (2004) argue that the drug trade in China is best explained as a product of consumer demand, downplaying the relationship between opium, imperialism, and warlord politics. Similarly, James Mills argues that the story of the Indian cocaine trade is one of a consumer-driven market: it was a trade operated by “a motley gaggle of small-time and uncoordinated entrepreneurs” rather than driven forward by a powerful, well-organized body such as the British East India Company (Mills 2007, 359). The research presented here makes clear that the people bringing cocaine to South and Southeast Asia may have been a “motley gaggle,” but they were hardly small-time or uncoordinated. As Slattery noted about the ports in India and Southeast Asia, “the import traffic in cocaine is almost entirely a Chinese monopoly.”² Consumer demand is insufficient to explain such a monopoly, and the question remains why other participants never achieved the status of Fujian’s middlemen, who controlled the cocaine trade in European cocaine prior to World War I *and* the trade in Japanese cocaine in the 1920s and 1930s.

The cozy relationship that developed between maritime Fujianese entrepreneurs and the Japanese Empire developed out of Xiamen’s identity as a translocal hub, and the Japanese-Fujianese relationship contributed significantly to the enduring dominance of the Fujianese over the Asian cocaine trade. Cocaine is therefore an entry point into the understudied world of Japanese imperialism in South China and Southeast Asia. Historian Miriam Kingsberg’s recent book examines how the Japanese government sought to monopolize the drug trade and control drug use within their territorial possession of Manchukuo in North China (2014). Coastal southern Fujian offers a compelling comparison with Kingsberg’s analysis of Manchukuo, as Xiamen was a key site for Japanese informal empire in China but remained firmly under Chinese control until 1937. Under the formal control of a succession of local warlords, Xiamen was the

center of the Japanese sphere of influence in South China, where the Japanese government never had to worry about drug use because it was not their jurisdiction.

From the Japanese perspective, Xiamen was attractive as the gateway from China to Southeast Asia, and the most important port of call for ships from Japan's new colony in Taiwan. By the second decade of the twentieth century, Xiamen was flooded with Taiwanese citizens (who were Japanese imperial citizens), and even more so with local people claiming Japanese-Taiwanese citizenship. These were people who were ethnically, culturally, and linguistically Chinese, but registered as Japanese: the so-called "registered people" (Ch. *jimin* 籍民; J. *sekimin*). The Japanese consuls in Xiamen were engaged in a citizenship-based imperialism, peculiar to South China, wherein the Japanese government actively granted passports to tens of thousands of local Fujianese people (see, for example, Brooks 2000; Thilly 2015; Wang 2007). One of the stated goals of this practice was for the Japanese foreign ministry to extend jurisdiction over the business networks connecting China and Southeast Asia (Inoue 1993, 12–13). The Japanese consuls in Fujian clearly understood the potential of harnessing the entrepreneurial genius of translocal Xiamen.

A principal consequence of Japan's policy of granting passports to Fujianese was the rapid domination of the drug trade by people with Taiwanese citizenship. The extraterritorial protection granted to *jimin* by Japanese consuls and their independent police forces provided almost perfect insulation from local Chinese municipal and warlord governments (Esselstrom 2009, 43–44; Thai 2016, 91; see also Tseng 2014 on *jimin*-owned businesses in the port of Shantou). Thus, an expanding drug trade seems foreseeable in hindsight; but, beyond the reluctance of Japanese consuls to reign in drug dealers, there is little evidence that a robust drug trade was the deliberate aim of Japan's southern strategy. There is, however, ample evidence that people in Fujian flocked in large numbers to take up Japanese citizenship in order to better profit from the drug trade (Thilly 2015; Wang 2007).

In this sense, Japanese consuls and pharmaceutical companies worked together with Chinese drug traders to form an alternative model of Sino-Japanese cooperation in the 1920s and 1930s. In some cases, the relationships created through the drug trade furthered the cause of Japanese expansion into the Chinese mainland—in particular, the history of Taiwanese-owned opium dens and the rise of the Xiamen Japanese police force to protect them from Chinese

interference (Thilly 2015; Wang 2007). But in other cases—like the cocaine trade examined in this article—the end result was unpredictable, and less obviously advantageous to Japan. As historian Steven Karch writes, cocaine was never a “vital product line” for the Japanese drug companies involved in production, and “the cocaine trade was just not that important” (1999, 158). The cocaine trade is thus an example of an unforeseen consequence of Japanese policy in South China and maritime Asia, as the only clear beneficiaries were Chinese smugglers and, to a lesser degree, the Japanese pharmaceutical companies who supplied them.

Pharmacists, Steamships, and the European Origins of the Fujianese Cocaine Trade

Cocaine first became an important commodity in the Xiamen drug market during the height of the late Qing opium prohibition movement (1906–1911). During these early years, Xiamen was responsible for nearly all of the cocaine imported into China from Europe, and local Xiamen entrepreneurs were clandestinely re-exporting the drug from Xiamen to South and Southeast Asia. The networks responsible for bringing cocaine into Xiamen were coalitions of local merchants (often doctors and pharmacists) and professional European smugglers. While Japan was not yet producing cocaine at this point, it did have a role in the trade: in many cases, the local Fujianese merchants involved in cocaine smuggling possessed Taiwanese citizenship.

Cocaine initially became a staple of the Xiamen drug market when it was a legal item of trade. The stimulant was first entered into customs records in 1908, when local Fujianese pharmacists and hospitals imported 1,970 ounces. Imports rose to 11,727 ounces in 1909 and rocketed to a stunning 27,578 ounces in the first six months of 1910, after which time the drug became a controlled substance and was removed from the list of legal imports.³ Xiamen was head and shoulders the most important port in the Chinese cocaine trade, as indicated in British memoranda from the International Opium Convention of 1911–1912. While eight customs districts in China reported a total of 36,533 ounces of cocaine imported during 1910, almost all of it—98.8 percent, or 36,102 ounces—was brought in through Xiamen.⁴

The elevated stature of Xiamen within the Chinese cocaine trade was due not to local consumption, but to the ability of locals to effectively and clandestinely serve consumers across maritime Asia. As it turns out, cocaine was not an especially popular drug among the Fujianese. One British customs official interpreted the rise in cocaine imports in Xiamen as evidence that “subcutaneous injection is undoubtedly on the increase,” and the American consul to Xiamen in

1911 suggested that cocaine and morphine had been used in the past to help people quit the opium habit but that “the practice has long since been discontinued.”⁵ But beyond these two references there is scant evidence for cocaine use in Xiamen during these years, while opium and morphine use in the region is well documented. Meanwhile, there does exist significant evidence that the vast majority of cocaine imported into Xiamen was re-exported to the Straits Settlements and Burma, places with long histories of Fujianese migration. The smuggling was possible, argued one British investigator, because authorities in those places were only on the lookout for drugs coming directly from Europe, and “it is supposed that steamers from Amoy trading to those places will not be suspected of carrying such articles” (IOC 1909, 2:68–69).

There was an established market for cocaine in the South and Southeast Asian colonial ports. Interviews conducted by U.S. investigators in Burma during 1906 describe cocaine being used “a great deal,” “to an amazing extent,” and “in large quantities” (United States Philippine Commission Opium Investigation Committee 1905, esp. interviews on 112–118). A 1908 article in the *Singapore Free Press* similarly describes Delhi as “the great centre of cocaine smuggling,” and goes on to suggest that the drug was being imported from Germany through the post (“Illicit Sale” 1908). As Mills (2007) has documented, the cocaine habit spread quickly in South Asia in the first two decades of the twentieth century, as the drug was used as an additive to betel nut paste and was consumed across class lines. By 1910, authorities in Burma and the Straits Settlements were sending the British consul in Xiamen “constant complaints” of cocaine smuggling “by the native crews of the steamers which carry on the coolie emigration trade between Amoy and the places named [i.e., the Straits Settlements and Burma].”⁶ Exporting cocaine from China was made possible by passenger steamship lines that connected Xiamen directly to the high-consumption regions of the Straits Settlements, Burma, and India. These steamers not only brought waves of Fujianese migrants to and from China, but were also often crewed by natives of southern Fujian and eastern Guangdong.

Originally, European pharmaceutical companies and smuggling networks were the primary importers of cocaine into Asia. German scientists in the 1850s were the first to isolate the cocaine alkaloid from coca leaves grown in South America, and the drug was popularized in Europe during the 1880s by ophthalmologists and dentists who used it as a topical anesthetic. Cocaine’s use as an anesthetic spread widely; for example, a Singapore newspaper from 1901 reported that “injection of cocaine into the spine is taking the place of general anesthesia... it is

considered safer” (“Untitled” 1901). Then, during the first decade of the twentieth century, as people across the world began to use the drug in contexts other than general anesthesia, prohibitionists managed to include cocaine on the list of controlled substances in the International Opium Convention signed at the Hague in 1912. This step made it significantly more difficult for European pharmaceutical companies to sell to end users in European colonial territories.

China presented a solution. The Xinhai Revolution and devolution of central control in China after 1911 made local officials less capable than their European counterparts of monitoring how pharmacists who legally imported cocaine were distributing the drug. E. S. Cheong was the best-known Xiamen pharmacist who dealt cocaine, but before he appeared on the scene, another alleged pharmacist-cum-cocaine peddler was the “loud-mouthed patriot” Huang Tingyuan (黃廷元), who earned his dental degree in Japanese-occupied Taiwan and took advantage of his medical degree and the weak local government to smuggle cocaine.⁷ Once users in India and Burma could no longer rely on direct shipments from Europe, men like Huang and Cheong were able to assume a critical role in connecting manufacturer to end user.

Outside of pharmacists who could import the drug under legal cover, cocaine smuggling from Europe into China depended on highly secretive networks of professional European smugglers and Fujianese buyers. In 1916, the Chinese Maritime Customs circulated a letter intercepted by the British government from a German by the name of Gustav Hoffman, written to a potential business partner, about his methods of smuggling narcotics from Europe into Xiamen.⁸ Hoffman traded in cocaine from the German firm Merck, as well as morphine from Merck, Winks, and Smiths (the latter two are British firms). In a letter he never imagined would become part of a multinational criminal investigation, Hoffman gave clear instructions about how European drug manufacturers could arrange consignments of illicit cargo with their Asian customers. He boasted of bringing regular shipments of cocaine into Xiamen without incident for several years running. He described concealing the drugs in tins of castor oil, margarine, or Vaseline; in drums of calcium carbide, caustic soda, and caustic potash; or in casks of analin salt, naphthalin, Epsom salt, and soda ash. He suggested using the telegraph to send coded messages and reduce the potential for detection and seizure when passing customs: “When cabling kindly mention your telegraphic address and note the code words—*Cheese* for *Cocaine* and *Margarine*

for *Morphia*.”⁹ The details within Hoffman’s letter offer a remarkable window into the standard practices and vernacular of smuggling, and showcase the continued stature of Xiamen in the Asian cocaine trade after the Hague Convention of 1912.

While Hoffman’s letter does not touch on the identity of his Chinese counterparts, two other cases indicate that the buyers were often Japanese imperial citizens of Fujianese ancestry. In one such case, a Taiwanese merchant was captured in Hong Kong with a large cargo of drugs brought in the Japanese-owned SS *Mishima Maru*. Tieu Yui Kim, the man in question, was captured in possession of 2,500 ounces of cocaine and 2,400 ounces of morphine (approximately 4,375,000 and 2,100,000 doses, respectively), which were packed into the upholstery of four cases of furniture. When the Hong Kong police searched the man’s lodgings, they uncovered letters and telegrams containing a trove of information, some of which eventually led to the arrest in London of a British merchant named Howard Montague Fogden Humphrey.¹⁰ Humphrey, it was discovered, had signed a contract with a Taiwanese-owned firm in Xiamen called the Tong Say Brothers (東西) in 1922 for exclusive supply of no less than 1,000 pounds of the narcotics annually.¹¹ According to letters between Humphrey and a man named Loo Ben Tan—a representative of Tong Say based in Osaka—the drugs were to be sent by Humphrey from Switzerland to Hong Kong, and then brought up to Xiamen by sail.¹²

A 1926 case offers further insight into the mechanics of these networks, and the place of Xiamen’s Taiwanese firms within them. In this case, police in the Netherlands Indies discovered a shipment of vests in which smugglers had hidden a total of 62 kilograms of morphine and another 27 kilograms of cocaine.¹³ The drugs had originally been ordered by a fictional firm in Havana through a French intermediary firm called Follet & André from the German manufacturer Roessler. The consigner of both shipments was a person named Paul Dubois, who also proved to be fictional, and it was the fictional Dubois who supposedly informed Follet & André to redirect the shipment to Batavia. The League of Nations never determined who initially placed the order and subsequently redirected it to Batavia, but the most telling clue about who was behind this shipment is that the drugs were ultimately confiscated on two Dutch steamers while being loaded for transport from the Netherlands Indies to Xiamen under consignment of a Taiwanese firm called Lian Bo, whose intermediary in securing the shipment was a Japanese firm in Batavia called Kubo & Company. In other words, a Taiwanese firm in Xiamen was

bringing cocaine into China from Europe via the Netherlands Indies, in order to repackage the drug for re-export back to Southeast Asia and India. The case is illustrative not only of the centrality of Xiamen's Japanese-protected firms to the Asian cocaine trade, but also of the increasing complexity of procuring cocaine from European manufacturers and transporting it to Asia after World War I.

By the mid-1920s, Xiamen's Taiwanese cocaine smugglers were enmeshed in complex transnational networks, protected through multiple layers of subterfuge: shell companies, mysterious redirection of shipments, and fictional intermediaries. Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, Xiamen's cocaine entrepreneurs had taken advantage of the translocal dimensions of Fujianese society and contingent developments in Europe and South Asia to establish themselves as middlemen for the delivery of manufactured European narcotics to the lucrative markets of maritime Asia. By the 1920s, it had become standard practice for Xiamen's cocaine smugglers to insulate themselves from Chinese government and police intervention by working within firms headquartered in Taiwan or Japan and taking on Japanese imperial citizenship. Within a few years, the cocaine would be coming from Japan as well.

The Fujitsuru Brand(s) and the Rise of Japanese-Made Drugs in Asia

The introduction to this article cited two seizures in Rangoon wherein the Fujitsuru brand and other drugs belonging to no registered company had been packaged together with a portion of genuine brand-name European drugs that had been legally imported into China. The pharmacist who imported those drugs into Xiamen under license from the Maritime Customs, Dr. E. S. Cheong, was a man with powerful connections. He was an intimate of the father-in-law of Garfield Huang (黃嘉慧), president and founder of the National Anti-Opium Association, and a close friend of Wu Liande (伍連德), director of the National Quarantine Service.¹⁴ According to a British investigation, Cheong was also on friendly terms with the superintendent of trade in Xiamen, the officer in charge of issuing import licenses for controlled substances, including cocaine (Slattery 1932). As one well-positioned informant put it, Cheong was at this point “the only trafficker” left in Xiamen who still procured any of his drugs from Europe (Slattery 1932). By the late 1920s, it was much cheaper and easier to import drugs from Japan, as even Cheong and his business partners were doing. Cheong's brand-name European drugs were packed

together with the mysterious (but clearly Asian) Fujitsuru brand of cocaine, which was being transshipped in Xiamen for the colonies of South and Southeast Asia.



Figure 2. Nazir Ahmat, arrested for possession of Fujitsuru cocaine in Singapore, 1928. *Source:* FO 262/1704, No. 249, Mounsey to Dormer, May 24, 1928.

By the late 1920s, Fujitsuru was the most prevalent brand of cocaine in the colonial ports of Manila, Rangoon, Singapore, Calcutta, and Bombay. Between 1924 and 1929, officials across maritime Asia reported to the League of Nations the seizure of 11,670 ounces of Fujitsuru cocaine in Calcutta, Rangoon, Singapore, Hong Kong, Bengal, Bombay, Hathras, and Penang.¹⁵ In one such seizure, a northern Indian sailor named Nazir Ahmat (figure 2) was arrested in

Singapore with 50 grams of cocaine while disembarking from the SS *Takliwa*, a ship calling in Yokohama, Kobe, Amoy (Xiamen), Hong Kong, Singapore, Penang, and Calcutta.¹⁶ According to Slattery's 1932 report, a whopping 9,000 ounces of mostly Fujitsuru brand cocaine was seized by customs and police officers in Calcutta and Rangoon in 1929 alone (Slattery 1932). If these seizures represented roughly 5 percent of the total trade, as Slattery believed, the total imports into the various colonial ports of South and Southeast Asia would have been around 180,000 ounces—equal to 11,250 pounds, or around 315,000,000 doses—each year.

The Fujitsuru brand of cocaine was exclusively found in locations connected directly to Xiamen by passenger steamship. The drug was carried on steamers of the British India Company's Far East service, on those of the Indo-China Line and the Chinese-owned Hong Line, and on an independent Chinese-owned steamer called the *Seeang Bee*, which ran between Rangoon and Xiamen (Slattery 1932). The Indo-China Line ran a route from Kobe and Osaka to Calcutta, calling at Xiamen, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Penang, and the British India and Hong Line steamers operated on a similar route but also called at Rangoon. Xiamen was also connected to Manila by direct steam lines operated by Butterfield and Swire. When these ships arrived in Manila, American customs officials regularly confiscated Fujitsuru cocaine packaged together with opium and morphine smuggled into the U.S. colony from Xiamen.¹⁷ It was never found in North China, or on any Japanese-owned shipping line.

Slattery believed that the drug was Japanese in origin because of the heavy investment in cocaine production by Japanese pharmaceutical companies. "Japan is the only country in the East which manufactures the drug, and cocaine has been discovered in India bearing the labels of recognized Japanese factories," he wrote, "but Japan has always maintained that the Fujitsuru, Elephant and Buddha brands are not of Japanese origin" (Slattery 1932). This was suspicious to Slattery not only because the name Fujitsuru sounds Japanese, but because Japan was home to several companies that produced cocaine: the Hoshi Pharmaceutical Company, as well as Koto Seiyaku and Sankyo. The Hoshi Company had originally purchased land for the cultivation of coca leaves in Peru in 1917, a year after the Ensuiko Sugar Company first initiated experimental coca production in Taiwan (Karch 1999, 151). In the 1920s, in order to save money on importing coca leaf from South America, Japan's pharmaceutical companies determined to set up coca plantations in Taiwan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, and also purchased from Dutch growers in Java, who had been cultivating coca there since the 1850s (Karch 1999, 147, 156). The Hoshi

Company and Taiwan Shoyaku companies, on a combined 694 acres of land in the Taiwanese interior, produced a total of 700,814 kilograms of coca leaf between 1927 and 1931, about one-fifth of which was transferred to Japan for processing; the rest was processed into crude cocaine by those companies' factories in Taiwan.¹⁸ Karch calculates the total production of coca leaf in Taiwan during these years at around 150,000 tons per year, which, once processed into cocaine, would have yielded around seven tons per year (1999, 155–156).

While Slattery and the League of Nations investigators never found conclusive evidence that Fujitsuru cocaine was produced with Japanese official knowledge, they had good reason to suspect that Japan's annual reports on cocaine production were a tissue of lies. Both Slattery and independent League of Nations investigators argued that the figures submitted by Japan to the League showed evidence that raw and partially processed cocaine was disappearing into the system.¹⁹ In Taiwan, where the estimated legal medical consumption of cocaine was 38 kilograms per year, the amount of cocaine that Japanese companies produced jumped from 291 kilograms in 1927 to 819 kilograms in 1928, and hovered around 800 kilograms per year for several years thereafter.²⁰ Similarly, as one British Home Office official complained, there was also a great deal more cocaine being produced in Japan than seemed medically necessary: "The total quantity of cocaine admitted by the Japanese Government to have been manufactured appears to be greatly in excess of the medical requirements of the population of Japan."²¹ Slattery himself asked the Japanese Home Department to account for the missing cocaine: "Why was there excess manufacture of 337 kilogrammes during [1929], an excess of some 700 kilogrammes in 1928 and of some 850 kilogrammes in 1927; and what has happened to these enormous surplus stocks? Presumably this expensive drug is not manufactured irrespective of demand and allowed to decay on the factory shelves" (Slattery 1932). No satisfactory answer was ever produced.

The most plausible explanation is that the missing Japanese cocaine was being clandestinely exported from Japan and Taiwan to Xiamen, where it was cut with novocaine and re-exported with various counterfeit labels to Singapore, Rangoon, and beyond. The Fujitsuru cocaine had to be coming from somewhere, yet—as Slattery noted—the Fujitsuru, Elephant, and Buddha brands of cocaine "have never been found on a Japanese ship, or in the possession of a Japanese" (Slattery 1932). Moreover, the geographic range of Fujitsuru was confined to southern China and the ports of South and Southeast Asia. "It is a matter of common knowledge," wrote

one officer investigating the traffic, “that there is extensive smuggling from Japan into North China, through Shanghai and Tientsin, yet these ‘mystery’ brands are entirely unknown there” (Slattery 1932). If Fujitsuru cocaine was being sold out of Japan, it almost certainly would have made its way to North China and Korea, where there was an established market for cocaine. The fact that Fujitsuru cocaine was a southern affair—surfacing in Xiamen, Hong Kong, Batavia, Singapore, Rangoon, Calcutta, Bombay, and occasionally in Manila, but never in Shanghai, Dalian, or Tianjin—gives credibility to the notion that it was a Taiwanese-Fujianese operation and not one based in Japan proper.

Evidence from the receiving end of the trade in India and Southeast Asia also showcases the dominance of Chinese traffickers over the Fujitsuru cocaine trade, even to the exclusion of would-be Japanese participants. A professional smuggler surnamed Gibson who attempted to lighten his sentence by divulging information about the trade told Slattery that, in Calcutta, the import of cocaine was controlled exclusively by a Chinese woman who had previously resided in Bombay, and who had monopolized access to the Peshawari wholesale distributors responsible for selling off the drug within Calcutta.²² A similar system existed in Bombay, where Chinese middlemen controlled the receipt of cocaine from sailors on incoming steamers and then sold it off to the Rampuri distributors. As Slattery noted, when Japanese sailors attempted to smuggle known Japanese cocaine brands into Calcutta, they also had to sell their drug to the Chinese traffickers who controlled the import trade (1932).

Evidence from Xiamen also points to the numerous ways that cocaine products were brought into Fujian from Japan and Taiwan for re-export. In many cases, German and Japanese brand-name cocaine imported by people like E. S. Cheong was doctored locally with inferior Taiwanese product (as well as novocaine, milk powder, and other powdery white substances) and repackaged for the Southeast Asian and South Asian markets. The American journalist Haldore Hanson reported in 1936 that around 300 tins of “genuine medicinal cocaine” and 1,000 tins of “cheap unrefined cocaine” were smuggled into Xiamen from Taiwan *monthly*, mostly for refining, packaging, branding, and then, finally, reshipping to the “South Seas and Malaysia” (Hanson 1936a). A retired smuggler interviewed by Slattery in Japan stated that large quantities of cocaine were smuggled from Japan to Xiamen using two methods: in secret consignments on steamers from the coal ports of Japan, and by steamer or fishing boat down to Keelung in Taiwan and then on small fishing or motorboats across to Xiamen from the southern end of the island

(Hanson 1936a). Indeed, the 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of diesel-engine motorboats plying between Taiwan and the mainland in a matter of hours, making smuggling exponentially more difficult to police. Speaking from a personal history of smuggling cocaine into Xiamen, one professional smuggler stated that “the place is full of junks and sampans, and it is a matter of ease to evade the maritime customs people.”²³



Figure 3. Fujitsuru and (false) Boehringer cocaine labels. *Source:* CO 129-498-14 Illicit traffic in opium and drugs. 04 December 1925–30 November 1926, No. 2, Governor Clementi of Hong Kong to Lieutenant Colonel Amery, MP, August 20, 1926.

The key to the trade, and what made it so difficult to trace, was that there was no single Fujitsuru brand. More accurately, there were so many knock-offs and production was so decentralized that identification of the “original” Fujitsuru was irrelevant to the task of prohibition. The original Fujitsuru brand seems to have been launched by a group of Cantonese residents in Kobe, but it subsequently inspired more successful copycat operations in Fujian. In one such example, a Fujianese resident of Kobe named Wai Kee opened a grocery shop in Xiamen and started importing Japanese cocaine to a Taiwanese pharmacy; he cut the cocaine with 30 percent novocaine and packaged it into tins for re-export under the Fujitsuru label. The Wai Kee ring was broken up in 1929 and 1930, but the Fujitsuru cocaine trade remained robust into the mid-1930s. In fact, Japanese production of coca leaf in Taiwan didn’t begin in earnest until the late 1920s, which in turn made it even easier for Xiamen’s entrepreneurs to get their hands on raw materials. The names of Kwong Yee Sang and Lee Chick Hong, two other Fujianese who had also spent time in Kobe, were found in documents seized in a 1931 cocaine bust in Rangoon that detailed over fifty remittances from South and Southeast Asia between 1929 and 1931.²⁴

The labels attached to Fujitsuru and other mystery cocaine brands (figure 3) also provide clues that point to Xiamen. As the Japanese government consistently told Slattery and League of Nations investigators, the Fujitsuru brand cocaine labels “could not be Japanese because the printing was inferior to that of modern Japanese work” (Slattery 1932). In the Wai Kee case, a Xiamen-area printer named Lee Lang Kun was engaged in printing false Koto Seiyaku, Boehringer, and Fujitsuru labels for seven dollars per sheet (Slattery 1932). Fujian was a notorious and well-established center for the market in counterfeit labels.²⁵ In 1922, the British consul in Xiamen lodged complaints about counterfeit soap, water bottle, candle, and pharmaceutical labels. Several of the accused counterfeiters had Taiwanese citizenship; many were located in outlying districts beyond Xiamen.²⁶ Using his trusty Hanovia analysis lamp, Slattery was able to identify a multiplicity of “Fujitsuru” labels: some with more or less detail on the plumage of the storks, some with more or less clear outlines of the back of the bird, and each hosting an array of different stamped monograms (Slattery 1932). In a place like Xiamen, the printing of false Fujitsuru, Boehringer, Elephant, and Buddha labels would have been easy to arrange, and such counterfeits inspired counterfeits of their own.

Conclusion

Haldore Hanson believed that Fujian was the site of a unique version of Sino-Japanese cooperation, a view he presented in a 1936 article in the *North China Herald*:

There is a degree of cooperation between the Japanese and the Chinese in Fukien, which includes some concessions on both sides, though more by the Chinese, to be sure. It might almost be ventured that Fukien today, with the exception of its opium traffic, represents the type of Sino-Japanese co-operation for which Dr. Hu Shih and other Chinese were looking when they maintained their pacifism throughout the 1931–33 military penetration. It is a commercial penetration initiated by individual businessmen, moderated by the Japanese consul, and tolerated by the Fukien public. That is the extent of Japanese designs on Fukien to-day [*sic*]. (Hanson 1936b)

Hanson was proven wrong on his last point after Japan's military invasion of Fujian two years later. But he was probably correct to identify a “degree of cooperation” in Fujian that was qualitatively different from the relationships between Japanese and Chinese people in other parts of the mainland. The notion might be discomfiting for those used to stark categories of resistance and collaboration, but Fujian has been the site of a complex relationship between profit-seeking and defiance of central authority going back at least as far as the sixteenth century.

As I argue elsewhere (Thilly 2015, 2017), the terms *yanhai jianmin* (treacherous coastal people) and *hanjian* (traitorous Han) became affixed to coastal drug traders in Fujian during the late 1830s and early 1840s. This discourse grew out of a strained relationship between Fujian's maritime lineages and the Qing state that dated back to the conquest of Fujian in the seventeenth century, to the war between Zheng Chenggong's forces and the conquering Manchu state. Resentments surrounding the coastal evacuation scorched earth policy lasted well into the Qing period, bubbling up between the people living on the Fujian coast and the central administrators dispatched to govern them. These tensions were further exacerbated by the war on drugs of the late 1830s (Thilly 2017). The legacy of this strained relationship was still evident in Fujian during the early twentieth century, after the collapse of the Qing and the rise of Japanese power in Taiwan and across China. It was never a given that the loyalty of Fujian's maritime lineages would automatically gravitate to whichever power might claim the mantle of the Chinese state. Where people from other parts of China saw the use of Japanese protection by Fujian's coastal population as treasonous, most Fujianese probably saw themselves as nothing but loyal. They

were loyal to the most important power sources they had ever recognized: the lineage, the village, and profit. And, as ever, the Fujianese method of accumulating profit and strengthening the lineage was inherently translocal, with nephews, sons, and other relations dispatched from the locality to other parts of China, to maritime Asia and beyond, each constituent member submitting to or defying authorities as was expedient.

Within this context, Hanson was wrong to call the drug trade an “exception.” The drug trade was the ultimate product of Sino-Japanese cooperation, though obviously a different sort of cooperation from that envisioned by Hu Shih. But drugs were the rule, rather than an exception; they were the precise reason why Japanese consuls were able to recruit so many Fujianese to take up Taiwanese citizenship. Drugs were the staple of the Japanese-protected economy in southern Fujian, and the drug trade in Fujian could not have thrived in the way it did without both Chinese and Japanese involvement. This holds true for the Japanese-registered opium dens owned by Taiwanese gangsters, for the morphine importation schemes operated by Chinese middlemen out of firms in Kobe and Osaka, and for the mysterious Fujitsuru cocaine operation that relied on Taiwanese coca and Fujianese shipping crews and counterfeit specialists.

In the spirit of this special issue, cocaine is useful for understanding how the Japanese and British Empires competed for dominance over the seas of maritime Asia, and the ways in which ordinary people responded to and shaped these efforts. As the British Empire grew increasingly concerned about cocaine use in its colonial possessions, the British government signed on to international conventions and spearheaded multinational efforts to suppress the drug. Meanwhile, Japanese consuls in South China were busy granting colonial citizenship to tens of thousands of Fujianese in what seems to have been an effort to gain a firmer grasp over the maritime connections between China and Southeast Asia, a sort of territorialization through citizenship. Japan’s imperial project may have benefitted from this—see historian Man-Houng Lin’s (2001) work on the Taiwanese tea trade in Indonesia—but the principal effects were felt in Fujian, where the exploding number of *jimin* took over the drug trade and wreaked havoc on a local state that was powerless to arrest foreign citizens. Cocaine traders thrived in the chaotic atmosphere of Republican-era Fujian, and their chosen enterprise was one that extended a Japanese product (or at least one made with Japanese raw materials) into the South and Southeast Asian colonies of European powers. This branch of the cocaine trade was also one that the Japanese state had deemed illegal, and the Japanese government had explicitly disavowed

association with the Fujitsuru brand. The Asian cocaine trade was thus built on the opportunities engendered by British prohibition efforts, but it fits uneasily into an analysis of Japanese empire building during this period. It was a trade that was impossible without the Japanese Empire, but the primary beneficiaries were Chinese.

The way in which the Fujianese operated the pan-Asian cocaine trade during the 1930s highlights the place of opportunism and entrepreneurialism within this special issue's larger discussion of control and evasion in maritime Asia. As conceptualized by the guest editors, "evasion" is about people who "organize *against* the boundary setting and rationalization projects of state-builders" (emphasis mine). I think it is possible to read this interpretation into the actions of Fujian's cocaine smugglers, but I think it is also important to recognize the ways in which they organized in response to, or indeed along the lines set by, state builders. Smuggling is not merely trade that the state has made illegal; it also comes into being as a type of trade that the state has made more lucrative by deeming it illegal. The Fujianese do not seem to have been terribly interested in consuming cocaine. Thus, the cocaine trade is not a story of a preexisting trade that the state made illegal. Rather, because of state initiatives to control the cocaine trade—initiatives that originated in Europe and constrained European drug traders' abilities to supply recreational users in European colonies—cocaine smugglers found an opportunity to use or subvert those same state initiatives for great profit.

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Notes

- 1 Records Created and Inherited by the Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 129/498/14, No. 268, Clementi to Amery, October 27, 1926.
- 2 CO 129/498/14, No. 268, Clementi to Amery, October 27, 1926.
- 3 "IMC Decennial Report for Amoy, 1902–11. Vol. II, Southern and Frontier Ports" (Shanghai: Inspector General of Customs, 1912), 102.
- 4 Records Created and Inherited by the Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 881/10017X, CHINA: International Opium Conference Proces-Verbaux, 1911–1912.
- 5 "IMC Decennial Report for Amoy, 1902–11. Vol. II, Southern and Frontier Ports," 102; United States Department of State Archives (hereafter USDS) (1910–1929), 893.114/28, Reel 113, Xiamen to Secy. of State, July 20, 1911.

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- 6 FO 228/1757 Foreign Office: Consulates and Legation, China: General Correspondence, Series I. To and From Amoy and Canton. Separate. HM Consul Tours in Amoy to HM Minister John Jordan in Peking, March 3, 1910.
- 7 FO 228/1797 Foreign Office: Consulates and Legation, China: General Correspondence, Series I. To and From Amoy and Canton. 01 January 1911–31 December 1911. No. 29, HM Consul Sundius in Amoy to HM Minister Jordan in Peking, November 21, 1911.
- 8 *Haiguan zongshu* (The Maritime Customs Central Office), Fuzhou: Fujian Provincial Archives (hereafter FPA), 69.1.57, No. 11 Circular from IG Aglen, Jan 17, 1914.
- 9 FPA 69.1.57, No. 11 Circular from IG Aglen, Jan 17, 1914.
- 10 The case is detailed in a variety of government and media sources. One of the better reports on the case, which includes copies of the seized correspondence, is available in the British National Archives (MEPO 3/1044, C-1, No. 7, Central Officer's Special Report, Metropolitan Police. Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard. March 26, 1923.). The estimated dosage is based on the British Pharmacopoeia's response to a request from the *Manchester Guardian* (1901–1959), March 16, 1923, 9–10.
- 11 FPA 69.1.57, No. 11, Exhibit 1. Agreement Between Tong Say Bros. Coy and H.M.F. Humphrey Ltd., September 6, 1922.
- 12 FO 262/1585 Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Embassy and Consulates, Japan: General Correspondence. Drugs and Dutch East Indies, 1923. No. 336, Wellerby to Palairret, August 21, 1923.
- 13 League of Nations Archive, Registry Files (hereafter LON) 1928–1932, Box 3172, Doc 36570, Dossier 2491, O.C. 1415, “Part Played in the Illicit Traffic by Forwarding Agents,” April 11, 1932.
- 14 CO 825/10/15, F 4294/22/87, No 40. HM Consul P. Grant Jones to Sir Miles Lampson, Minister in Peking, June 9, 1931.
- 15 LON 1928–1932, Box 3172, Sec 12, Doc 17523, Dossier 2491, O.C. 1128, “Notes on Seizures of Manufactured Drugs,” December 13, 1929.
- 16 FO 262/1704 Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Embassy and Consulates, Japan: General Correspondence. Drugs. 1 vol. 1928. No. 249, Secretary of State Mounsey in Foreign Office to HM Ambassador Dormer in Tokyo, May 24, 1928.
- 17 See, for example, LON 1933–1946. Box 4883. Sec 12, Doc 1389, Dossier 793. General (Illicit Traffic). List of Seizures communicated to the Secretariat, 1933. Dossier 1281/388, No. 958, “Summary of Illicit Transactions and Seizures Reported to the Secretariat of the League of Nations between July 1st and September 30th, 1933,” and List of Seizures Communicated to the Secretariat, 1934. Dossier 1281/388, No. 1444, “Summary of Illicit Transactions and Seizures Reported to the Secretariat of the League of Nations between October 1st and December 31st, 1934.”
- 18 CO 825/13/4 Colonial Office: Eastern Original Correspondence. Opium and dangerous drugs: situation in Japan and Japanese territories. 01 January 1932–31 December 1932. No. 7. Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, October 18, 1932.
- 19 LON 1928–1934, Box R3252, Sec 12A, Doc 17901, Dossier 1122, “Stocks Discrepancy in Japanese Narcotics Declarations, 1932.”

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- 20 CO 825/13/4 Colonial Office: Eastern Original Correspondence. Opium and dangerous drugs: situation in Japan and Japanese territories. 01 January 1932–31 December 1932. No. 5. Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, September 10, 1932.
- 21 FO 262/1725 Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Embassy and Consulates, Japan: General Correspondence. Drugs. 1 vol. 1929. No. 522108-2, Malcome Delevingne at Home Office to Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office, July 16, 1929. Memorandum on Japanese cocaine seized in the Far East.
- 22 CO 323/1091/8 Colonies, General: Original Correspondence. Dangerous drugs: illicit trafficking. 01 January 1930–31 December 1931. Confidential, F 1635/1446/87, Douglas MacKillop, Foreign Office, to T.J. Morris, HM Minister in Havana. April 16, 1930.
- 23 CO 323/1091/8 Colonies, General: Original Correspondence. Dangerous drugs: illicit trafficking. 01 January 1930–31 December 1931. Confidential, F 1635/1446/87, Douglas MacKillop, Foreign Office, to T. J. Morris, HM Minister in Havana. April 16, 1930.
- 24 CO 323/1091/8 Colonies, General: Original Correspondence. Dangerous drugs: illicit trafficking. 01 January 1930–31 December 1931. Confidential, F 1635/1446/87, Douglas MacKillop, Foreign Office, to T. J. Morris, HM Minister in Havana. April 16, 1930.
- 25 See, for example, FO 228/1869, Series I, To and from Amoy–Chefoo, 01 January 1813–31 December 1913, Consul Little to H.M. Minister in Peking, January 21, 1913; FO 228/1903, Series I, To and From Amoy–Changsha, 01 January 1914–31 December 1914. Consul Turner in Amoy to H.M. Minister Jordan in Peking, July 10, 1914.
- 26 FO 228/3281, Dossier 1830 Political and Intelligence Reports–Amoy, 1922 Jan–1927 Apr., Intelligence Report for September Quarter, 1922, Consul Eastes, October 7, 1922.

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Registry Files 1928–1932. Abbreviated as LON 1928–1932.

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