

Smoking for Empire: The Production and Consumption of Tobacco in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945*

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Korean historians have long noted the importance of tobacco in colonial finances and highlighted the economic exploitation of the farmers and laborers involved in the tobacco production system. However, the economic history of tobacco production is far more complex than can be subsumed under the predominant narratives of colonial exploitation. The production of tobacco in colonial Korea has to be understood within the broader context of Japan's imperial expansion and the regional competition for the East Asian tobacco market in the early twentieth century. British and American Tobacco (BAT) was a formidable presence in the region, which forced the Japanese to concentrate on markets within the Japanese empire. A new period of expansion commenced after the Manchurian Incident in 1931, and the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 allowed for the rapid growth of the Japanese tobacco industry in Manchuria and China. As Japanese imperial tobacco production expanded in colonial Korea, the commodity had an immense impact on Korean society and culture. Korean consumers constructed new cultural meanings and identities around tobacco that varied considerably depending on one's social status and position within Korean society. Through a nuanced examination of tobacco's multifaceted interactions within the Japanese empire, we can better understand many important aspects of colonial Korea's economy, society and culture.

Keywords: British American Tobacco (BAT), colonial finance, tobacco, colonial monopoly, global history of commodities

*This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies Grant funded by the Korean Government (MEST) (AKS-2012-DZZ-3103).

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Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 29, no. 2 (December 2016): 305–326.

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