

A Short History of Narcotic Drug Addiction in the Philippines, 1521-1959

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To grasp fully the retrospect of a highly specialized type of a culture complex like narcotic drug addiction, a present cross section of Philippine society's culture is required. An overall view indicating the various strata of influences, similar to a geologist's study of the earth's chronological composition, may prove useful to this account. To show at what layers or periods the practice of narcotic drug addiction has entered Philippine society is the main concern of this paper.

Filipino culture today is a stratified three-major-layer influence of (1) the pre-Spanish period, (2) Spanish rule and occupation from 1565 to 1898, and (3) the American period from about 1901 to 1946.

Sociologically significant are the effects of these three layers on the social classes and present regional groups. Pre-Spanish culture still prevails in isolated and rural regions, especially in the southern parts of the Philippines where the Arabic-Moslem effect resisted change and assimilation into other cultures. However, the upper socio-economic classes reflect the Hispano-American layers which are ecologically situated in the thickly settled urban areas. Assimilation of Chinese culture as well as intermarriages are noted, but the Chinese cultures as a nationality group have remained ethnically distinct. This is due to their skills in retail trade which have led to their economic dominance. The Chinese have been persecuted and discriminated against ever since

Spanish rule, although their influence has remained minor in contrast to the three basic layers. This is because the Chinese in the Philippines have only been dominant within the field of retail, wholesale, and import and export activities, but with regard to political power and governmental control, they remain weak.

At this point, the three major cultural influences will be presented, covering the period from slightly before 1521 up to 1959.

Pre-Spanish period: before 1521

Pre-Christian culture in the Philippine Archipelago seemed free from the utilization of the three principal narcotic drug-producing vegetables: the opium poppy, marijuana, and the coca plant.

Previous to 1521, which marked the entry of the Spaniards into the Philippines, "intoxicants were made from rice, sugar cane, and from nipa and coconut palms" (Fox 1958). These beverages were alcoholic ferments brewed from local flora. Other masticatory preparations from local materials were composed of betel pepper leaves, and the areca nut and lime common to the peoples of many southwest Pacific and south Asian cultures. The inclusion of tobacco in this masticatory practice was probably brought into the Archi-

pelago from the Moluccas soon after the Portuguese had introduced it there and before the arrival of the Spaniards in 1521 (Beyer cited in Conklin 1958:16).

Betel leaf chewing had native terms which are considered today as local, such as *bunga* for the areca nut; *buyo* or *buyu* for the betel leaf; and *hapu*, *apug*, and *hapug* for the slaked lime (Conklin 1958:2-97).¹ *Tabaku* is comparatively a new native term for the tobacco ingredient.

Alcoholic beverages, too, had native terms. Masticatory stimulants and alcoholic intoxicants were used in rituals and social intercourse and were deeply ingrained into the native culture. But their effects were mild contrasted to the habituating nature of the products of the vegetable narcotics mentioned above.

These, therefore, were the closest to narcotic addiction practices which the Filipinos had before Magellan's entry into the Philippines.

Spanish rule and occupation: 1565-1898

Looking into the account written by the chroniclers of the Magellan expedition which described in detail the geography, climate, vegetation, physical types of the inhabitants, and their

customs, beliefs, and traditions, no mention of narcotic drug addiction was found.

The earliest account of opiate narcotics outside but very close to the Philippine Archipelago was made by Argensola in about 1609 (in Blair and Robertson 1909). He narrated the activities of a Dutch general who tried to befriend the King of Ternate, an island group in the Moluccas close to the southern portion of the Philippines, by giving the latter bales of clothing, rose water, gunpowder, and several caskets of *afion* (a name given to opium in the East Indies). The latter was a Dutch compound used for fighting, to take away the senses, or disturb the reason (Argensola 1609 in Blair and Robertson 1909:303, v. XVI). However, the first mention of opium within the Philippines was by De Bobadilla in 1631 (1638 in Blair and Robertson 1909:91, v. XXIX). He stated that the Moros of Mindanao used opium for dulling and intoxicating themselves in the attempt to ambush or assassinate the Spanish captain-general in Moroland at that time. From the first two reports, it may be gathered that opium was used for gathering courage in preparation for a suicidal attack, ambushade, or war.

The use of opium in Manila at about this time was very probable. An Augustinian friar, Casimiro Diaz, recounted for the first time in

around 1641 in his work, *Augustinians in the Philippines 1641-70* (1718 in Blair and Robertson 1909:183, v. XXXVII), an incident wherein a person was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured to reveal information but totally refused, not due to his courageous nature but

...because he had taken some confection of opium...which had so narcotic a virtue that it renders those who drink insensible to pain.

From the manner in which these early accounts described opium, the author seemed to have very little information about its uses, character, and exact origin. Widespread use of opiates during this period was not likely even among the local Chinese communities. The rare use of opium in Manila from 1641-70 may have been for medical purposes; its origin, however, could not be ascertained. Tracing its origin by citing historical events previous to 1641, in 1601, the British East India Company was established. Opium from India was taken in small amounts into China. In 1602, the Dutch East India Company was likewise established and it competed for a trade market. Opium and other articles of trade were taken into the East Indies. Much of these articles entered the southern Philippine Islands. Argensola's *Conquista de las Islas Malucas* (1609 in Blair and

Robertson 1909) confirmed Dutch participation as traffickers. Therefore, the opium reaching Manila may have originated from two sources: from the British into China and from there into Manila through Chinese merchants who frequented its ports; and from the Dutch through southern Philippine waters.

Suggesting reforms in the Philippines, Manuel Pizarro Bernaldez's *Reforms in Filipinas* (1827 in Blair and Robertson 1909: 251-52, v. II) advanced the idea of cultivating the poppy locally to supply the Chinese users. Bernaldez expressed the opinion that the Spanish governor general's fear of the natives becoming habituated to opium was remote.

In his [Bernaldez's] experience of seventeen years in various judicial positions in Filipinas he had never seen a scandalous case of opium inebriacy among the Chinese of Luzon nor any Indian [native Filipino] brought into court for using the drug; and the 'Indians without exception regard the use of opium with utmost indifference and contempt.' He thinks that it should not be prohibited in Filipinas since its use appears not to injure the Chinese there.

Contrary to Bernaldez's recommendations in 1813, Jose de Gardoqui, the Spanish governor general in the Philippines, prohibited the use of opium in the Islands. An edict of December 1, 1814 prohibited the introduction of opium into Filipinas, imposing on those who should violate this law 6 years of imprisonment in "presidio" and the confiscation of the opium; and those found smoking the drug were liable to a fortnight's imprisonment for the first offense, 30 days for the second, and 4 years in "presidio" for the third (Montero y Vidal in Blair and Robertson 1909:36, v. II). Several years later, a twist in events followed. On April 6, 1828, a Spanish royal decree gave permission to any person to cultivate the opium poppy in Filipinas and export its product therefrom (Montero y Vidal in Blair and Robertson 1909:53-54, v. II). But as to whether any interested party took advantage of this opportunity for opium production could not yet be ascertained as of this writing. It can be inferred from the decree, however, that previous to 1828, the cultivation of the opium poppy was prohibited and that the produce of such an enterprise was designed for export, not for the consumption of the natives.

An American naval officer, Com. Charles Wilkes, in his *Narrative of*

the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842 (1856), gave ample proof that opium had already spread among some of the natives not as a means of gathering courage for fighting but as drug addiction. Wilkes' "Sooloo, 1841" (1856:336-337, v. V) recounted his visit with Sultan Mohamed Damaliel Kisand of Sooloo [Sulu]

...whose eyes were bloodshot and seemed to consume large quantities of opium...his son Datu Mohamed Polalu, constantly under the effect of opium.

Com. Wilkes was one of the earliest Americans to have entered the vicinity of Jolo. His five-volume work not only described addiction in the Philippines but also opium even in Singapore whose practices resembled those of the Chinese in the Philippines.

In describing the intoxicants and stimulants used by the Moros, Wilkes mentioned "cigars, drinking wines, liquors, tea, coffee, chocolate and their favorite pipe of opium" (1856:344).

By 1841, the opium taken into the southern Philippines must have come from two sources: the Chinese settlements within the vicinity of Manila and Borneo, Sumatra, and New Guinea which, although geographically outside of Philippine

territorial limits, had peoples who shared many common cultural traditions with the Moros of the Philippines. Referred to as the Indian Archipelago, its inhabitants indulged in opium smuggling. Crawford (1820), in *History of the Indian Archipelago*, believed this to have been acquired from Arabic culture origins, "but the extensive and pernicious uses point to European and Chinese influences." Commenting on the poppy plant, Crawford emphasized its foreign origin and believed it was not native to the Indian Archipelago; had it been so, then its use would be so extensive as betel and areca nut chewing (*Ibid.*:105, v. I).

On January 1, 1844, an opium monopoly was established in Filipinas. Opium addiction was at its height. Blair and Robertson (1909: 344, v: LII) mentioned several opium joints.

There were 478 public opium joints which were actual hotbeds of immorality and were always full of Chinese. The use of opium in the Islands was intended for the Chinese residing there (being forbidden to Indians and mestizos)...

This opium monopoly was enforced only within Luzon and some Visayan Islands, where the Spanish colonial government had full control. In the southern Islands,

such as Jolo, Sulu, and Mindanao where the Filipino Moslems or Moros continued their armed defiance of Spanish control, the use of opium prevailed and was not confined to the Chinese settlements there.

At this point, a change of historical locale is necessary to indicate the drug addiction situation in China, since the Philippine Chinese resident's supply of opium came from the treaty ports located along the eastern coast of China. This addiction among the Chinese aided in spreading the habit among some Filipinos in whose midst they settled. The British East India Company (John Company) took opium into China where opium had been previously sold in small quantities. Objecting to this trade, principally for economic reasons and secondarily for moral and health reasons, a Chinese official, by command of the emperor, destroyed over 20,000 chests of opium (worth \$12,000,000) in Canton. This touched off latent friction between Chinese and British economic groups and led to the "Opium War" (1840-42). The Chinese lost, resulting in a treaty of peace compelling the Chinese to open five ports to British trade and residence. The Chinese ceded the island of Hong Kong to Great Britain, and in that place the opium trade centered. In 1845, the British authorities licensed 20 shops to sell opium at retail (Blair and Robertson

1909:157-159, v. LI).² This was the height of the opium trade and addiction in China after the first Opium War.

More opium entered the Philippines, especially in Manila, for Chinese use. During the 19th century, the Chinese communities in Manila alone had about 8,000 to 15,000 inhabitants. Although authorities differed on the exact figure, the size mentioned was the range of many estimates.

Revolt, war, and unrest: changes in government, 1896-1901

The year 1896 marked the Filipino revolution against Spain. Colonial Spain had two foes: the native insurgents and, later, the attacking American naval fleet in Manila Bay.

On August 13, 1898, Manila fell under American military control, and on February 4, 1899, the outbreak of the Filipino-American war marked the beginning of the end of the short-lived Philippine Republic. On July 4, 1901, the start of the American civil government was marked by the inauguration of Civil Governor William Howard Taft.

During these periods of unrest, drug addiction was forgotten by historians because of the change of emphasis to political and military events.

American era: 1901-1946

Dr. Victor Heiser, once director of the Bureau of Health in the Philippines during the American civil rule, wrote a very interesting account of narcotic drug addiction which was confined only to opium then. Treating the subject on various aspects, such as opium ban, treatment of addicts, Chinese participation, smuggling methods, and opium joints in Manila, Heiser (1936:167) wrote:

At the time the civil regime was instituted in Manila, there were two hundred or more places where the Chinese could buy a pipe and table space for twenty cents. Their contention was that opium, as they used it, was no more detrimental to their health as whisky and soda to a foreigner. But while they were satisfied with drowsiness and visions they obtained from the tiny pipes, the Americans and Europeans, when they took the drug, wanted the full effect. In fear that the Filipinos might become addicts to the opium habit unless some means could be found of preventing its spread, a commission was appointed. After studying the opium question throughout the East, it recommended that the drug

be excluded from the Islands two years from that date.

The first day of March 1908 was 'Black Sunday' for opium habitues. The truth and seriousness of the situation finally dawned on those who had sinned away their years of grace between the passage of law and its going into effect. The behavior of the victims in the face of the government's determination to save them by legal force would truly characterize them as fiends. The term fiend is used liberally by the laity but becomes appropriate when the victim is deprived of drugs.

In sheer desperation, the sufferers sought the hospital treatment provided by the government. The rush was so great and the task so hard that the San Juan de Dios Hospital, which previously cared for drug addicts, asked to be released on the ground that it lacked proper facilities for the accommodation and restraint of so large a number of frenzied patients. Accordingly, to meet the emergency, the government made ready several wards of the new insane department of the San Lazaro Hospital. There the addicts fought and

screamed, threatened, and sulked until they realized the government meant business, when they quietly submitted.

Experience illustrated that the opium habit was not particularly difficult to treat, especially among the smokers. Those who took the drug by mouth experienced more inconvenience and those who were in the habit of taking it hypodermically suffered considerably. We used the Towne treatment as recommended by Dr. Alexander Lambert. Severe as it was, it was justified by the results. As soon as the craving for opium was gone, we proceeded to build up the patients. How many relapsed after being discharged from the hospital was, of course, unknown but many habitues professed profound relief at being cured. Alcoholism could also be similarly treated. It gave me satisfaction to pick up beachcombers and by the same method turn them once more into self-respecting citizens.

Upon the inclusion of opium and closure of the public resorts, the price of opium promptly went up which made it prohibitive for Filipinos, once they had to

depend on illegal sources for their own supplies.

The Chinese are without doubt the most adept smugglers, and they soon devised ways and means of satisfying their simple needs. We are always finding opium in the most unheard-of places. One day in my routine examination of imported foods, I made an unannounced inspection at the Customs House. A huge shipment of jam had just arrived. I had no reason for being suspicious but my eye traveled over the stacked cases. I said to one of the inspectors without knowing exactly why, 'I'd like to see one of those tins.' I took it in my hands, looked it over, and saw it was correctly labeled strawberry jam. Nothing apparently was wrong. Nevertheless, 'bring me a plate, please,' I asked the inspector. When I emptied out the contents of the tin, it seemed an unusually small amount compared to the size of the container. Examining it more carefully, I found it had a false bottom. Every one of the forty-eight tins in the crate was then opened, but only for contained opium. An examination of several thousand crates in the shipment showed that the

Chinese computed mathematically the probabilities of detection, had filled just four cans each out of forty-eight in every case.

Other smuggling devices were even harder to cope up with. Although the Filipino backyards were overrun with chickens and roosters, eggs were comparatively scarce. Consequently, huge quantities were shipped from China. A favorite ruse of the smugglers was to insert a hypodermic needle into the egg, withdraw carefully all the album and refill the cavity with opium. When the hole was expertly sealed the illicit contents could only be discovered by breaking the eggs. Thousands were shipped by each Tuesday's steamer from Hong Kong, and for a time the customs inspectors broke every single egg that came in.

Opium was the only narcotic drug threatening Philippine society then, and except for the ban on its use on March 1, 1908, there were no other specific statutes on narcotics covering the Philippine drug addiction problem. In the absence of other laws, the Harrison Narcotic Act of the United States was enforced in the Philippines. An American federal narcotic agent in the

United States, William Spillard (in Spillard and James 1945:10), described the law and threatened the subject in a very popular style:

This law which makes it illegal to transport or sell narcotics without a license was the first law with teeth in it to be passed in this country [USA] to stop the traffic in dope [narcotics]. Prior to 1915, any citizen so minded could walk into any drugstore and buy any quantity of any kind of dope his body desired. All he needed was 25 or 50 cents. This would entitle him to enough morphine or cocaine to satisfy his craving for a two- or three-day period.

When the Harrison law made it illegal for these drugs to be dispensed without a prescription, the addicts naturally had to turn to physicians for their supply.

The Harrison Narcotic Act became inoperative with Philippine independence in 1946.³

Hereon, the Philippines under American rule passed more laws increasing the authority of government agents to control narcotics. In 1930, the Philippine Constabulary chief, *ex officio*, became the opium custodian for all narcotics seized

and, with a committee, had the power to destroy by burning or export for refining the drugs seized. By January 1, 1932, the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines under Title V contained five articles (Articles 190-194) relative to opium and opiates and the penalties for possession, use, importation, and others. The Bureau of Internal Revenue also had the sole power to import, sell, distribute, and license the production of narcotics.⁴

Japanese occupation: 1942-1945

Within this three-year period, trade with other countries abruptly stopped and all narcotics flowing into the Islands were solely for the use of the Japanese military forces. In a short time, the hoarded drugs ran low and in all likelihood, many addicts were "cured." During this period, the Japanese Imperial Army's Intelligence groups arrested and forcibly addicted some Filipino resistance leaders, thereby utilizing narcotics as a military instrument.

Liberation and Independence: 1945-1946

The liberating American forces in 1945 took with them large amounts of narcotics ready for injection. Tiny tubes of morphine tartrate with a hypodermic needle attached were carried in first aid kits, survival equipment, and pre-

fabricated hospitals by medics in the front lines. Many of these morphine syrettes were found in drug dens afterward. Other narcotics in powder and soluble tablets of American origin intended for legitimate uses were likewise found being used by local addicts.

Philippine Republic: July 4, 1946 to early 1959

Narcotic drug addiction by this era had already taken various types and methods. Opium smoking and the use of opium alkaloids, such as morphine, cocaine, and heroin, had gained popularity. Synthetic drugs, such as demerol and methadone, also found slaves, many of whom were members of the medical profession and patients whose careless treatment resulted in addiction. The "Opium Law" of the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines (Articles 190-194) was proving to be inadequate since it took into account only opium and its products and excluded marijuana or Indian hemp and the synthetic drugs mentioned.

The coca plant entered the Philippines for cultivation sometime before 1941 or immediately after 1945, but there seemed to be no addicted persons caught for its leaf chewing type of addiction. Marijuana, scientifically known as *Cannabis sativa*, entered the Philippines illegally in

1954 or 1955. Brought in for cultivation for mercenary reasons, the seeds were given by American merchant marine sailors to some Afro-American residents and Filipinos in Pasay City and Makati, Rizal. Grown in flower pots, its flowering tops and leaves were cut, dried, mixed with tobacco, then rolled into cigarettes. Marijuana was thus sold to Manila's addicts and transients. American underworld participation was confirmed when arrested growers were questioned by Philippine Constabulary raiders on January 8, 1959.⁵

In Manila alone during a four-year period, 1950 to 1954, the historical background of this report was still reflected; 229 persons were arrested for using and trafficking prohibited drugs. (Note the very small number of arrests.) The Manila police records showed that 94 percent of these were Chinese, and the rest, Filipinos. The mode of consumption leaned heavily on morphine injections rather than smoking. The probable reason for the change of use may be the fact that smoking opium was difficult to be efficiently performed clandestinely due to its strong characteristic odor leading to easy apprehension, whereas injections could be performed almost anywhere with more privacy (Zarco 1959:36).

Farmers of Masbate, Cebu, and Negros Oriental were found

growing marijuana which was outlawed only recently by Republic Act 2060, which went in effect on June 3, 1958. From 1959, where this account ends, the future would be of great interest, especially to the writer whose attempt to write a narrowed history on narcotic drug addiction in the Philippines may prove informative to the succeeding generations of interested readers.

Summary

Opium was the narcotic drug that first enslaved a few inhabitants and Chinese migrants in the Philippines. Previous to 1521, its use in the Archipelago must have been absent. The native practices which were closest to addiction were betel chewing and the use of alcoholic intoxicants. The earliest mention of opium in the Philippines' southern islands was made in about 1609. The traffickers were the Dutch and the origin was most probably the east coast of India.

When the British took opium into China for large-scale trade where it spread rapidly, the Chinese immigrants to the Philippines likewise continued this practice locally and simultaneously with their compatriots in their homeland. Addiction reached its height during the latter portion of the 18th century. All those years that Chinese participation was dominant, the native groups may have been slightly affected, too, but the

protective governmental policies of Spain outlawed its use among natives and mestizos and therefore curbed its widespread use.

The American era, fearing the spread of the habit among the Filipinos, banned the use of opium altogether except for medical purposes. Opium alkaloids gained popularity in spite of government restrictions by displacing and substituting opium smoking.

Coca leaves and the plant itself entered the Philippines a few years before 1941 or slightly after 1945. The exact date could not be ascertained. Its leaf chewing form of addiction was practically unknown. Marijuana or Indian hemp was noticed to have been cultivated for drug addiction purposes in January 1959, and its entry was

estimated to be in about 1954 or 1955.

Laws today against drug addiction have shown a slow but adaptive evolution, starting chronologically with the outlawing of the opium, the poppy, its alkaloids and derivatives, marijuana or Indian hemp, and synthetic drugs and coca leaf.

Significant to this summary is the discovery of the lack of native terms regarding opium and addiction and its absence in folklore and customs, thus strengthening the argument that addiction to narcotics is of recent origin and not a Filipino-Spanish culture complex.⁶

This article is taken from Professor Ricardo M. Zarco's M.A. thesis submitted to the Graduate School, University of the Philippines.

Endnotes

¹Conklin (1958) provided a very detailed description and analysis of betel chewing. He likewise mentioned and profusely illustrated the ingredients for the activity.

²A more elaborate discussion of the Opium War is presented by John King Fairbank (1953:75-76).

³The enforcement of the Harrison Narcotic Act in the

Philippines and the conditions when this law became inoperative are discussed by Paulino M. Taningco (1958:56).

⁴There were no entities producing narcotic drugs during this era, but an attempt to request for a permit for cultivation of the opium was mentioned by Mrs. Salud D. Campomanes, Chief of the

Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) Narcotics Section, in an interview last March 3, 1959. Keeping records of the incident which she saved from destruction, Mrs. Campomanes opened a brittle sheaf of papers yellowed with age. She recounted an incident way back in May 1939 when a prominent Visayan family, whose name she refused to reveal, applied for a permit from the BIR to cultivate opium poppies for consequent opium production, there being no specific law prohibiting the cultivation. The place where cultivation was planned was in Bukidnon, Mindanao, under the supervision of an Italian expert. The BIR assented, subject to the approval of higher authorities since there were no precedents. The Commonwealth president's secretary, Jorge Vargas, received the communication (i.e., the application) from the BIR and referred it to the American resident High Commissioner, who further referred the matter to the State and Treasury Department of the United States Government. The reply from Washington was a classic cablegram in diplomatic indignation:

Please inform appropriate Filipino authorities that the Government of the United States of America will not authorize cultivation...

Numerous reasons were stated. So on August 2, 1939, the application was revoked. Mrs. Campomanes emphasized that there was no actual cultivation and that good faith prevailed from all participants involved in this incident.

⁵This was gathered from *The Manila Chronicle*, January 9, 10, 11, 12, and 17, 1959; *The Manila Times*, February 6, 9, 12, and 14, 1959; Parungao, Miguel, "Marijuana," *This Week Magazine* (Manila), February 1, 1959.

⁶The writer had looked into the artifacts of the Institute of Science and the University of the Philippines museum in Manila for narcotic paraphernalia, consulted local Tagalog scholars about native words pertaining to narcotic culture traits, delved into native folk tales where the use of narcotics may be mentioned, and finally consulted the University of the Philippines' Department of Anthropology to see if the use of opiates was practiced by any primitive subethnic groups. The results were uniformly negative. Even the terms used by the local underworld regarding narcotic use, addiction, and paraphernalia were foreign.

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