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The De-Spirited Drink: Exploring the Capitalization Process of Indigenous Societies in Taiwan

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Many health improvement projects have been implemented in indigenous communities, mostly with the focus on dealing with alcoholism and related problems. “Alcoholism” has become one of the primary frames of meaning for outsiders to understand indigenous people, as well as for indigenous people to construct their own identities. Historically, alcoholic drink was the crucial medium in the life worlds of indigenous peoples to communicate with the spirits and to strengthen the solidarity within and between the communities. However, from the Japanese colonization to the KMT rule, the indigenous societies had been forced to transform their mode of production. In addition, the system of wine monopoly was implemented. Consequently, alcoholic drink had been transformed from the public sphere to the private sphere, that is, from being the medium of communication in rituals and communities to being the commodity that could be bought easily. By analyzing the changing meanings of “drink” in indigenous societies, this papers aims at exploring the capitalization process in indigenous societies and the crucial roles the state has played in such process.