

Drugs and Crime: The Uses and Risks of Anesthetics in Criminal Cases of the Qing Dynasty

Wu, Chin-fang

Department of History, Tunghai University

Abstract

Drugs are a double-edged sword. They can play a positive role in the alleviation of pain with correct usage, but if abused, they can have a negative impact on human health and even lead to death. The same is true of anesthetics, which, when applied correctly, can relieve pain and give the surgeon adequate time to perform a procedure. However, according to the miscellaneous notes, novels and archives, anesthetics to ease patients' pain or even cause them to lose consciousness were often used as a criminal tool to commit theft, abduction and other illegal acts. How did medical knowledge related to anesthetics spread among the people? And how did the person who committed a crime by using anesthetic drugs obtain the substance? How did officials respond to such drug crimes? In this regard, this paper, by focusing on the vicious use of anesthetics and through an analysis of cases of theft and abduction, aims to probe into the linkage between drugs and crime during the Qing dynasty. As such, it reflects on the negative impact of the improper use of drugs on people's lives accompanying the popularization of medical knowledge during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Keywords: Qing dynasty, anesthetics, *Rhododendron molle* (Chinese azalea), abduction, theft