

The Ecology of Development: A History of 'Bad' Coffee

Stuart McCook
University of Guelph

Current models of export-led development often focus on the luxury segments of consuming markets. At least, these development models are the ones that have received the most press in the global 'north.' 'Ethical' coffees -- such as fair trade and certified organic, have received considerable press in northern media and study by northern academics. And for some growers, the production of such luxury coffees has indeed helped them weather the coffee crisis.

The story of these coffees is highly appealing, at least in part because it is a story about the kinds of coffee that many people like to consume. But coffee growers in other parts of the world have also pursued alternative models of development, in part because the disease regime(s) made it impossible for them to grow coffees of sufficient quality for the luxury market.

This paper will explore some of the history of the development of these mediocre and poor-quality coffees -- especially the role of scientists and states in promoting their cultivation -- and their significance as a vehicle of economic development. The talk will pay particular attention to the spectacular growth of Robusta coffee in the twentieth century.