

Adaptation and Consumption of Western Cuisine in Taiwan under Japanese Colonization

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the emergence and development of venues serving western cuisine in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial era (1895-1945), this article explores the conditions under which the western cuisine business developed, and how the Taiwanese perceived western cuisine in their dining consumption practices.

Western cuisine was introduced by the Japanese in the early colonial period, but the number of western restaurants grew slowly, far from serving as important public venues, with the exception of “Railway Hotel,” which was a representative site where formal western cuisine was served. Until the 1930s, café and tea house offering western snacks, drinks and light meals burgeoned and became popular settings where western and Japanese ambience were blended. With the proliferation of café, the association of western chefs was also established in 1932. However, western restaurants in Taiwan were less viewed as formal dining venues and had weak connection with the idea of modernization and civilization. Instead, they were regarded as casual eating places where consumers could have food and fun at a lower price compared with local traditional dining establishments. Western restaurants and “western cuisine” in colonial Taiwan was largely a Japanese adaptation under the social conditions of a colony. This article suggests that the linkage between western civilization and modernization is not self-evident but influenced by the structure and power relations in a society.

Keywords: Western Cuisine, Consumption Practice, Cultural Practice, Café, Culinary History