

Transformation of Taiwanese Cuisine and Cross-border Exchange of East Asian Food Culture in Japanese Colonial Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Through analyzing the contents and characteristics of representative menus and cookbooks of Taiwanese cuisine published between 1900 and 1937, this article aims to explore the transformation of Taiwanese cuisine in the early 20th century, examine the cross-border exchange of food culture among East Asian countries, and explain its impact on the foodscape of Taiwan.

The analysis showed that under the influence of popular ‘Chinese cuisines’ prevalent in East Asian cosmopolitan cities such as Shanghai and Tokyo in the early 20th century, the flavor and cooking techniques of ‘Taiwanese cuisine’ had gradually digressed from its origin: Fujian cuisine. Cross-border exchange and communication of food culture among East Asian countries had emerged in the late 19th century as the result of war, colonization, trade, travel, and the growth of middle class. Though under the colonial rule of Japan, the owners of restaurants in Taiwan actively introduced authentic cuisines of China to Taiwan to satisfy the new taste of local Taiwanese as well as Japanese officers, tourists and residents in Taiwan. Consequently, the foodscape of Taiwan was not only shaped by the Japanese as the colonizer, but also influenced by the food culture circulating in other East Asian countries. Of note is that the cuisines and food culture of other East Asian countries were not merely transplanted into Taiwan. Instead, these Chinese cuisines were adapted and adjusted to meet the local taste. Interestingly, many of these ‘adapted Chinese cuisines’ were nowadays viewed as ‘traditional Taiwanese cuisine’. Examining menus written by restaurant owners and cookbooks revealed how the new discourses of Taiwanese cuisine were formed, and how some Chinese cuisines were embedded into the foodscape of Taiwan and became representative ‘Taiwanese cuisine.’

Keywords: Menus, Cookbooks, Foodscape, East Asian Food Culture, Cross-border, Taiwanese Cuisine