Han Pastry, Taiwanese Snacks, and Bread:
Formation of Bakery Industry and Transformation of Consumption Culture in Japanese Colonial Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

From rice cakes and Han pastry to modern bread and Western snacks, the shift of baked goods consumed not only reveals the transformation of consumption culture, but also shows the development of bakery industry and the evolution of what bakery products mean in social life. All these changes signify an overwhelming revolution from the industry chain to the symbolic meaning of consumer goods.

This article traces the emergence of bakery industry in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial era, including the promotion of wheat planting, establishment of milling industry, and social significance of Han pastry as "Taiwanese snacks/Taiwanese cakes" distinctive from that of bread and other Japanese/Western snacks. To the Hans in Taiwan, Han pastry comprises mainly festival foods enjoyed at Mid-Autumn and New Year, weddings and religious occasions. Made possible by industrialization under colonial rule, enhanced production of sugar spurred the making and eating of Japanese snacks, Western cookies and bread among urban population and the upper classes. Unlike "Taiwanese pastry," which was complicated to make and bore ritual significance, these new snacks were non-ritualistic and endowed with symbolic meanings of modernity.

By examining the emergence and transformation of the bakery industry during the Japanese colonial era, this article argues that the bakery industry had burgeoned even before wheat was brought into post-war Taiwan under American aid. In the first half of the 20th century, Taiwanese had started to consume bread and Japanese snacks, and the bakery industry chain was formed at the same time. New baking technology and changes in social significance of bakery products are all important factors influencing the transformation of bakery consumption culture.