

Nation, Class and Cultural Presentation: “Taiwanese Cuisine” During Japanese Colonial Era and Early Post-war Taiwan

Yu-jen Chen

ABSTRACT

Focusing on the changing notions of “Taiwanese cuisine” under different political regimes, the article traces the origins of “Taiwanese cuisine” to the Japanese colonial era, and analyzes how its meaning changes from “a delicate culinary culture” into “a marginalized Chinese local cuisine” after the imposition of authoritarian rule. While “Taiwanese cuisine” was shaped during the Japanese colonial era, it was referred to a repertoire consisting of Chinese haute cuisines, formal dining manners and specific table setting, and being enjoyed exclusively by elites with power of cultural presentation. Through culinary narratives, exhibitions and repeated dining practice, such as the banquets for Japanese royal family, the “Taiwanese cuisine” was distinguished from Chinese cuisine and embedded with symbolic meanings of social status, cultural capital and Taiwanese-ness. However, such “Taiwanese-ness” is given new interpretations with the changing of political regime and new class in power. With the end of Japanese colonization and new regulations imposed by the KMT government on restaurants since 1945, the culinary map was redrawn and the haute “Taiwanese cuisine” sank into oblivion.

Keywords: Taiwanese cuisine, national cuisine, cultural presentation, colonial culture