



Figure 1. Advertisement from 1938 for Formosa Oolong and Black tea featuring a photograph of a woman wearing a qipao, holding a gaiwan, a Chinese tea vessel.
Source: National Museum of Taiwan History, Commissioned Cataloging-Taiwan Historical Society 06, (Jan 1938).

PRODUCER AND PRODUCT:

IMPERIAL MARKETIZATION, INDUSTRIALIZATION, AND FORMATION OF THE MODERN TAIWANESE WOMAN

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Written for Modern Girl and Asia in the World

HIST 384

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The Oriental Beauty

Oolong tea firms across the island retell a particular story from the infancy of the Taiwanese tea trade. The story goes that Queen Victoria gave oriental beauty tea (東方美人茶) its name because the steeped tea leaves in the teapot reminded her of a dancing young woman.¹ The figure evoked by this name is elegant, exotic, and physiological. Meanwhile, laboring women bent over tea trees across the Datun mountains in Taiwan, shouldering Taiwan's tea export industry on their broad backs.² Although entirely unfounded, the fictional etymology and global fantasy of oriental beauty tea shows how the figure of the Taiwanese woman entered (and was created by) the global market: as both the producer and personification of a colonial product.

In this paper, I examine how imperialist infrastructures of labor reconstruct the

1. Yi Jün Ling. "「茶金」是怎麼鍊成的? 東方美人茶王傳秘訣: 顧好環境讓小綠葉蟬咬越兇越好 | 上下游." 上下游News & Market. 上下游 News & Market, December 6, 2021. <https://www.newsmarket.com.tw/blog/162120>.

2. George Uvedale Price. *Reminiscences of North Formosa*. Yokohama [Japan]: Kelly & Walsh, 1895. Katherine Golden Biting Collection on Gastronomy (Library of Congress).

gender and ethnic containers of colonized societies. I consider this question through the figure of the Taiwanese woman and the colonial tea industry, which started in 1865 and continued through the end of the colonial era in 1945. What does it mean to be a Taiwanese woman? How does the answer to this question change between 1865 and 1945?

Women in Taiwan had always performed labor, but in this era, their labor contributed to imperial economies, global industries, and cultural exchange with the cosmopolitan world. The image of the Taiwanese woman also emerged at this time as a product created by and marketed to both domestic and overseas consumers as a component and a result of imperial industries. Her cultural ethnic identity consolidated disparate native racial groups through socioeconomic interactions with ethnically differentiated imperialist bodies. In this analysis, I argue that the imperial projects of marketization and industrialization formed piecemeal versions of a producing and produced woman that constitute the modern Taiwanese woman.

Qing-Era Marketization and the Commerce of Global Imperialism (1683 - 1895)

While limited information is available for all of the many discrete ethnic groups existing in Taiwan before the mid-nineteenth century, the evidence suggests that for many of these people, agriculture was traditionally women's work.³ Qing observations of both plains and mountain indigenous tribes described practices like female social or religious leadership, uxori-local marriage, and matrilineal inheritance of land and social spheres.⁴ It is important to note that later interviews of indigenous women found that the degree and type of influence they wielded varied widely between communities.⁵ It is also important to note that these observations were likely made relative to patriarchal Confucian conceptions of gender, and they may also have been exaggerated to emphasize the "savagery" of the indigenous people.⁶

Regardless of the true extent of matrifocal power in indigenous populations, by the time the tea trade was established in 1865, agricultural systems implementing European and Qing colonization had already begun to alter the systems of agricultural labor that had existed in Taiwan. The colonial history of Taiwan is summarized in Table 1.

3. Melissa J. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?: The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities*. (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2004): 38.

4. Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 173. See also John Robert Shepherd, *Marriage and Mandatory Abortion among the 17th Century Siraya*. (Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Assoc., 1995), 1 – 20.

5. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, 73.

6. Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography*, 173.

Table 1. Colonial History of Taiwan

Period	Ruling Power	Colonial Economics and Labor
Pre – 1626	Indigenous	Subsistence hunting and matrifocal agriculture
1626 – 1642	Spanish	Limited trade with indigenous people in deerskin and rice
1624 – 1662	Dutch	Imperial marketization
1662 – 1684	Koxinga	Limited trade mediated through China
1684 - 1895	Qing Chinese	Imperial Marketization
1895 – 1945	Japanese	Imperial Industrialization

Source: Rubinstein, Murray A., and Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang. *Taiwan: A New History*. Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2015.

The Dutch East India Company sponsored sugar plantations managed and operated by settlers from mainland China, promoting the development of a land-oriented agricultural economy.⁷ Following the Qing occupation, this economic model of European investment and Chinese settlement persisted, but with the added dimension of Taiwanese labor driving agricultural production.⁸ The best example of this model is the creation of the tea export industry in Taiwan by Scottish merchant John Dodd around 1865. In a model typical of imperialist marketization,⁹ he lent capital to land-owning Qing farmers for tea cultivation. Eventually, he began importing tea and laborers into Taiwan from Fujian and exporting tea to New York.¹⁰ In 1869, over 5000 piculs, or 330 US tons, of tea were exported from Taiwan.¹¹ Tea soon became one of Qing Taiwan's most significant exports by volume, with over 8600 tons exported to the US and Europe in 1893.¹² The Qing colonial tea trade demonstrates how imperial marketization established two parallel ideas of the physiological Taiwanese woman: the laboring Taiwanese woman and the advertised Taiwanese woman. The producer and the product.

The Modern Taiwanese Woman as a Producer for the Global Export Market

The manual labor of Taiwanese women was critical to the explosive growth of the

7. Tonio Andrade, "The Rise and Fall of Dutch Taiwan, 1624-1662: Cooperative Colonization and the Statist Model of European Expansion," *Journal of World History* 17, no. 4 (December 2006): 429–50. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2006.0052>.

8. Melissa J. Brown, "Taiwan's Intersectional Cosmopolitanism: Local Women in Their Communities," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 9, no. 1 (2020): 107–45.

9. Murray A. Rubinstein and Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, *Taiwan: A New History*. (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2015). See also Tani E. Barlow, *In the Event of Women*. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2021), 29.

10. Gary Marvin Davison, *A Short History of Taiwan: The Case for Independence*. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 29.

11. IMC: Imperial Maritime Customs Statistical Department Report on Trade at the Treaty Ports in China for the years 1871-1872. Shanghai: IMC Press, 18723.

12. Brown, "Taiwan's Intersectional Cosmopolitanism," 107-45.

colonial export economy. Most tea-picking and manufacturing workers in the nineteenth century were women.¹³ Figure 2 shows ten tea-pickers, all women of varying ages, in a tea plantation in 1895. Women also staffed the new manufacturing firms financed by foreign and mainland Chinese banks. One hundred and fifty tea manufacturing firms existed in Taiwan by 1900, each employing up to 400 or 500 women per firm.¹⁴

“We may infer that the demands of colonization and recolonization induce the formation and reformation of new models of femininity for any narrative of the colonized”



Figure 2. Tea-pickers on a tea plantation on Datun Mountain. All ten tea-pickers here are women of varying ages. Note that much of the land visible in the background of this photograph is devoted to tea cultivation, demonstrating the mass deforestation and territorial reduction that resulted from development of the tea industry.

Source: Price, George Uvedale. *Reminiscences of North Formosa*. Yokohama [Japan]: Kelly & Walsh, 1895. Katherine Golden Biting Collection on Gastronomy (Library of Congress).

Some analysts attribute the prominence of women’s labor in the tea industry to pre-existing traditions of female agricultural labor in Taiwan.¹⁵ However, not only did gender norms vary between tribes.¹⁶ It is important to consider the role of forced labor in Qing (and later, Japanese) imperial systems. Between 1731 and 1732, a major intertribal uprising occurred among allied indigenous villages in response to Qing officials forcing indigenous

13. Shepherd, *Marriage and Mandatory Abortion among the 17th Century Siraya*, 173.

14. Shepherd, *Marriage and Mandatory Abortion among the 17th Century Siraya*, 174.

15. Nicole Constable, *Guest People Hakka Identity in China and Abroad*. (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2014), 28.

16. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, 73.

women to participate in heavy labor in the colonial lumber industry.¹⁷ Imperial demands for raw exports pressured many of these women to participate in cultivation of raw exports. It is not clear to what extent these demands may have interacted with pre-existing agricultural gender roles, but I would argue that the shift from indigenous subsistence agriculture to imperial export plantations demanded that the Taiwanese woman be a manual laborer producing for a global market.

The Modern Taiwanese Woman as a Product for the Global Market

Concurrently, a second figure of the Taiwanese woman was emerging outside of Taiwan. Through legends like Oriental Beauty Tea, foreign-backed tea firms created and delivered a version of the physiological Taiwanese woman onto the global stage.¹⁸ The dancing female personification of the slender tea leaf—eroticized, exoticized, herself a colonial product marketed to the masses—is divorced from the physiological realities of the laboring Taiwanese women who produce the tea. They are two parallel narratives, one invisible to and one illustrated for the global consumer market.

The Industrialization of Taiwan during Japanese Occupation (1895 - 1945)

The industrial and cultural projects that fed the imperial sugar and tea industries during Japanese colonization massively overhauled norms defining daily life and gender in both Qing Chinese and indigenous communities. Industrialization at this time took the form of new infrastructure (dams and irrigation systems, industrial mills), production technology (seedlings, fertilizer, crushing machines), and continued mass deforestation across the island.¹⁹

The Feet of the Modern Taiwanese Woman as a Producer

To understand how industrialization and infrastructure affected Taiwanese gender constructs, it is critical to acknowledge the effects of the sugar industry on foot binding. The sugar industry was the most important Taiwanese colonial export beginning from the Dutch era. Like the tea industry, it demanded large amounts of female agricultural labor to meet imperial production demands. For example, according to a caption written in 1939, Figure 3 shows women removing dead leaves from sugar cane stalks.²⁰

17. Shepherd, *Marriage and Mandatory Abortion among the 17th Century Siraya*, 100.

18. Lin, yíjūn. "「茶金」是怎麼鍊成的? 東方美人茶王傳秘訣"

19. Brown, "Taiwan's Intersectional Cosmopolitanism."

20. Found in Cheng, Nora, Elliott Fan, and Tsong-Min Wu. "Sweet Unbinding: Sugarcane Cultivation and the Demise of Foot-Binding." SSRN Electronic Journal, January 2021. Translated from Shigeo Ito, *The History of Taiwan* Seitou K. K. (Tokyo, Japan) (In Japanese).



Figure 3. Women removing dead leaves from harvested sugar cane plants in the fields. Sugar cane is a highly labor-intensive crop, and the large sugar industry in Japan-occupied Taiwan demanded high amounts of manual labor from both men and women.
 Source: Found in Cheng, Nora, Elliott Fan, and Tsong-Min Wu. "Sweet Unbinding: Sugarcane Cultivation and the Demise of Foot-Binding." SSRN Electronic Journal, January 2021. Translated from Shigeo Ito, *The History of Taiwan* Seitou K. K. (Tokyo, Japan) (In Japanese).

Foot binding was introduced to Taiwan through Qing settlers and was most common among Han Chinese women, like the one depicted in Figure 4. While the Japanese government had discouraged foot binding since 1895, foot unbinding did not occur en masse until the sugar boom of 1905 - 1915.²¹ A study of geographic trends in agriculture and foot unbinding in Taiwan found, as shown in Figure 5, that a township's proximity to the sugarcane railroad predicted its foot unbinding rates during this period.²² The study suggests that "a change in gender-specific labor productivity led to change in gender norms."²³ In other words, due to the demand for female labor in colonial industries, the modern Taiwanese woman and producer had unbound feet.



Figure 4. Adult woman wearing three-inch golden lotus shoes. Based on her clothing and bound feet, this woman is likely ethnically Hoklo (Han Chinese from Southern Fujian).
 Source: Cai, Jiachang. "Adult woman wearing three-inch lotus shoes (1931)." National Repository of Cultural Heritage, National Taiwan University, 31 Dec. 2002.

21. Nora Cheng, Elliott Fan, and Tsong-Min Wu. "Sweet Unbinding: Sugarcane Cultivation and the Demise of Foot-Binding." SSRN Electronic Journal, March 1, 2021.

22. Cheng, "Sweet Unbinding."

23. Cheng, "Sweet Unbinding."

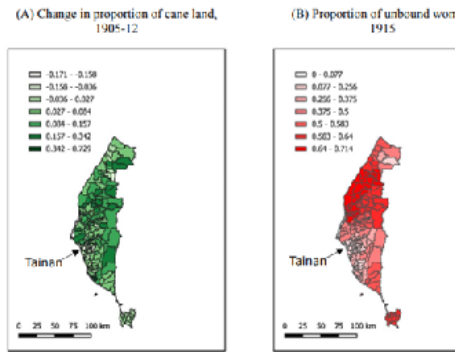


Figure 5. The geographical correlation between cane cultivation and foot unbinding in Taiwan between 1905 - 1915. This study found that a township's proximity to the sugarcane railroad and increased involvement in sugar cultivation predicted the rate at which its women unbound their feet.

Source: Cheng, Nora, Elliott Fan, and Tsong-Min Wu. "Sweet Unbinding: Sugarcane Cultivation and the Demise of Foot-Binding." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, January 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3775981>.

More broadly, this case demonstrates that the demands of colonial labor under a new imperial administration (Japanese sugarcane production) reversed the cultural imports of the previous colonial administration (Qing foot binding customs). We may infer that the demands of colonization and recolonization induce the formation and reformation of new models of femininity for any narrative of the colonized woman.

The Modern Taiwanese Woman as a Product of Industrialization and Urbanization

The effects of Japanese deforestation and manufacturing on high mountain indigenous peoples recast previous ideals of femininity and success. To feed the ravenous demands for tea, sugar, and lumber, Japanese officials relocated the traditionally nomadic Taroko people from their previously remote hunting grounds to the bases of the mountains.²⁴ These resettled communities experienced an influx of external influence: Japanese was integrated into the existing language, Presbyterian churches were established, and previous systems of internal commodity exchange shifted into global cash commerce.²⁵ As some Taroko women lost social power as religious leaders, others gained social power through new global avenues. One Taroko woman, for example, was raised in a Japanese home, studied nursing, and became "one of the main agents of Japanese modernity and

24. Wan-li Ho, *Ecofamiliarism: Women, Religion, and Environmental Protection in Taiwan* (St. Petersburg: Three Pines Press, 2016), 135.

25. Scott Simon, "Formosa's First Nations and the Japanese: from Colonial Rule to Postcolonial Resistance," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 4, no. 1 (January 4, 2006).

a key part of the process of displacing traditional Taroko healers from their position in society.”²⁶

Similarly, facial tattoos like those in Figure 6 were previously part of female beauty standards and necessary for marriage. During the Japanese occupation, girls voluntarily removed their tattoos to attend Japanese-administered schools, “which they and their families wanted because Japanese education held out the promise of a better life.”²⁷ For them, becoming a modern Taiwanese woman meant becoming visually and culturally more cosmopolitan, more educated, and in some respects more Japanese.



Figure 6. Qing era indigenous woman with tattooed face. Tattoodesigns corresponded with the duties and status of women, alluding to the importance of status in indigenous societies.

Steere, J.B. "Formosa." *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 6 (1876): facing p. 307.

The Modern Taiwanese Woman as a Product of Japanese Media

This Japanized conception of the Taiwanese woman was also perpetuated by Japanese media. Japanese newspapers—the *Taiwan Daily News* in particular—interpellated the Taiwanese woman to fit a container that emulated, but was implicitly inferior to, the Japanese woman. The results of this interpellation are most obvious in Taiwanese women’s fashion (see Figure 7), which took on global objects and styles as mediated by Japanese fashion.

26. Simon, "Formosa's First Nations and the Japanese."

27. Simon, "Formosa's First Nations and the Japanese."



Figure 7. Taiwanese women engaged with global textiles and fashions during the Japanese occupation. Hallmarks of Japanese stylistic influence are present, including clogs visible on the feet of a woman in the left edge of the photo on the left and the bow and hairstyle of the girl in the photo on the right.

Source (left): National Museum of Taiwan History, Commissioned Cataloging-Taiwan Historical Society 09, (1683 - 1895).

Source (right): Cai, Jiachang. "Whole Body Photography of a Girl during Japanese Occupation (1936)." National Repository of Cultural Heritage, National Taiwan University, 31 Dec. 2002, <http://newnrch.digital.ntu.edu.tw/nrch/index.php>.

An article from 1927 titled "Fashion Outlook for Women: Displaying the Modern Girl Look with Ladies Long Pants," for example, encourages Taiwanese women to purchase clothing from Tokyo because of its cosmopolitanism:

Thus, as Tokyo is next to enter the muddle of [the fashion world], which includes, for one, via the Pacific Ocean, Americanized [fashion] traversing the Pacific to our region; and for another, via the Indian Ocean, straight through the Suez Canal, it is imported directly from Paris and London. (TDN 1 Sep. 1927, 8)

Author Dean Brink makes a striking observation about this article. Within this narrative lurks the implied ethnic inferiority of, and thus inherent ethnic difference between, the modern Taiwanese woman compared to the modern Japanese woman. I argue that its implications—that the colonized must become like the colonizer, but can never be the colonizer—may have contributed to the formation and characteristics of the national modern Taiwanese woman.²⁸

28. Zhong, "Explaining National Identity Shift in Taiwan," 4.

In her 1944 memoir *Taiwan no Shojo* (published in Japanese and translated into English by Anne Sokolsky in 2010), Huang Fengzi describes her cultural experiences and self-perceptions as an upper-class Taiwanese girl.²⁹ Fengzi writes that Japanese clothing is the best, but Fengzi expresses embarrassment because she “does not know how to wear them well.”³⁰ The Taiwanese girl’s desire to emulate the Japanese girl, despite her awareness of the gap between them suggests an implicit awareness of a hierarchy separating the colonized woman from the colonizing woman.

However, little is known about how this colonial narrative may have influenced Taiwanese women beyond their changes in appearance.³¹ It is likely that this modern Taiwanese woman consolidates each of Taiwan’s disparate cultural and ethnic groups to varying extents. Culturally, she is Japanese-like but not Japanese, somewhat but not strictly Han Chinese, and often but not always exclusive of indigenous peoples.³² As a result, conceptions of the modern Taiwanese woman in the media frequently tangle with components of each of these cultures.

Ethnic Transmutation of the Modern Taiwanese Woman as a Product

Images circulated overseas reflected these variable ethnic conceptions of the Taiwanese woman. As demonstrated by the international magazine advertisements in Figure 8, the Taiwanese woman was marketed as a colonial, ethnically mercurial product. She was depicted wearing a Japanese *kosode* or a Chinese *qipao*, and she used traditional Japanese or British-influenced Meiji-era tea utensils. These female advertising icons both reflected and perpetuated the competing ethnic identities of the Taiwanese woman: competing identities resulting from Taiwan’s history of colonization and recolonization. Media images of the colonized woman consequently displayed her as a derivative form of the various imperial powers that mediated her cultural-economic exchanges in the global market.

29. Anne Sokolsky, “Yang Qianhe and Huang Fengzi: Two Voices of Colonial Taiwan,” *Journal - Japan Studies Association* 8 (2010): 239–.

30. Huang, *Taiwan no shojo*, 15 quoted in Sokolsky, “Yang Qianhe and Huang Fengzi,” 263.

31. Yang Zhong, “Explaining National Identity Shift in Taiwan,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 99 (February 21, 2016): 4.

32. Chien-Jung Hsu, *The Construction of National Identity in Taiwan’s Media, 1896-2012* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2014), 45.

“For them, becoming a modern Taiwanese woman meant becoming visually and culturally more cosmopolitan, more educated, and in some respects more Japanese.”

The effects of these inconsistent and referential depictions on foreign and domestic audiences are not explicit in historical records. However, it is possible that they contributed to persisting conflicts in the affiliations assigned to, or claimed by, Taiwanese women today. These ethnic containers and national identities often depend on how selectors understand each woman's cultural-political relationship with her previous colonizers and with mainland China.³³ These referential terms of identification may reflect the interplay between the remnants of pre-colonial and imperial influences during postcolonial ethnic and national identity formation.



Figure 8. International Advertisements for Formosa Oolong Tea during the Japanese occupation period featuring women. The woman on the exposition poster (left: 1905, United States) has Edo-era Japanese clothing and tea accessories. The woman in the center (unknown date) has distinctively Japanese features and clothing but uses a British-influenced Meiji-era tea set: both the teapot and teacup have handles on their sides. The woman on the right (unknown date) uses the same tea set and wears a Han Chinese qipao. However, the feathers in her hair are not a Han Chinese fashion, evoking the impression that she may be an aboriginal—or a more “exotic”—Taiwanese woman.

Source (left): Postcard from the Formosa Oolong Tea Parlors postmarked from Portland Oregon to a Dr. George Bral in Alnwick, Northumberland, England. 1905. Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition.

Source (center): 日本時代海報圖像 Advertisement from the Japanese Occupation Period. nd. National Museum of Taiwan History.

Source (right): 日本時代海報圖像 Advertisement from the Japanese Occupation Period. nd. National Museum of Taiwan History.

33. Cheng-Feng Shih, “Language and Ethnic Politics in Taiwan,” *Internconpational Journal of Peace Studies* 8, no. 2 (2003): 89–102. See also Chang-Yen Tsai, *National Identity, Ethnic Identity, and Party Identity in Taiwan* (Baltimore: University of Maryland School of Law, 2007), 11.

The Colonized Woman as Producer and Product

Throughout this paper, I traced how the forces of foreign marketization and imperial industrialization in the colonial tea trade and its associated industries contributed to two distinct constructions of the modern Taiwanese working woman: one as a producer, and one as a product. Under the demands of a global tea market, imperial Qing and Japanese tea production fueled changes in labor structures and infrastructure in previously remote mountain land. Industrialization accelerated the decay of ethnically variable and often matrifocal traditions while integrating women into cosmopolitan markets and models of femininity. Precolonial, imperial, and cosmopolitan delineations of gender and ethnicity thus entangled into a network of images and practices, shaping conceptions of what it meant to be a modern Taiwanese woman which may be influential to this day.

This case study of colonization and recolonization, in seeking to describe how imperialist infrastructures influence gender constructs in colonized societies, has found that the colonized woman is simultaneously a producer and product of imperialist industries. Her identity and how it is marketed toward herself, her people, and the rest of the world reflect the complex relationships with imperial bodies mediating her role in global exchange.

Lastly, largely missing from this survey of economic trends, print media, and archival photography (and from many studies of marginalized women) is the perspective of the Taiwanese woman herself on her role in the global market as it changed under colonialism. I have attempted to represent her experience through retrospective interviews in secondary sources and documented changes in her self-presentation through practices like tattooing and foot binding. However, I have included little written directly by Taiwanese women, and none from the women that participated in the agricultural labor described here. Unfortunately, few of their early records were preserved and translated. Without their complete first-hand recollections, this analysis cannot truly grasp the diversity, agency, or sheer human sentiment that characterized the Taiwanese woman's experience in this era.

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