

# Craftsmanship, Technology and Modernity of Taiwan Dongding Oolong Tea Production

Shuenn-Der Yu

*Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*

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Taiwan's tea industry has depicted Formosa tea as a product manufactured with traditional craftsmanship. Taiwan's partly fermented teas, made by delicate control of diverse degrees of fermentation to produce different tastes and teas in small workshops, do mirror this portrayal. However, if we examine the development of Taiwan's tea industry, we may find traces of modernization since the Japanese era; mechanization, adoptions of new tea breeds, modern tea farming technologies, and scientific knowledge all indicate a diverse modernization process of Taiwanese tea farming and production. The interaction between traditional craftsmanship and modernization not only reflects the current condition of Taiwan's tea Industry but also raises a few interesting issues that this article intends to discuss. They include: (1) What is craftsmanship and skill under the influence of modern technologies? (2) Does craftsmanship decline or transform within this modernization process? (3) Does tea, as an object and commodity, influence the interaction between technology and craftsmanship? In other words, how should we examine Taiwan's tea industry from the perspectives of materiality, skill, technology and modernity? Based on my ethnographic research of Dongding's tea farmers, I find that there is a sophisticated relationship between modern technology and traditional craftsmanship. Dongding ethnography demonstrates that when new technologies are being employed, tea farmers also need to develop new sensory abilities and skills to master them. At a time when modern technologies increase their weight in tea production, traditional craftsmanship is not being replaced or lost. Rather farmers "transform" their

body technique to make technologies work for their production scheme. Hence, we need to look into how technology and craftsmanship influence each other within the complex process of production and consumption, rather than stereotypically perceive the process from the perspective of "modernization replaces traditional craftsmanship."

Keywords: craftsmanship, technology, modernity, Dongding tea, partly fermented tea

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