

FEATURES

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Too good for his own good

Pottery stores along Yingge Old Street (鶯歌老街) no longer sell teapots made by Tseng Tsai-wan (曾財萬) these days.

"They're too expensive. A single teapot fetches up to NT\$70,000 these days," he says, gesticulating with his hands and sending one of the teapots crashing to the ground.

Momentarily distracted, Tseng, also known as Master Wan (阿萬師), waves a hand, and his son comes forward to sweep up the pieces.

Tseng is still making teapots at 84. Born into poverty, and missing out on a proper education during the instability in the immediate aftermath of the war, he started working in ceramics in his early teens, but only found success when he started making fake Chinese antiques. It was only when collectors became wary of buying antique teapots due to the great number of fakes that he started developing his own.

Today, he is known for his *zhuni* (cinnabar clay) pear skin teapots (朱泥梨皮壺), using a special clay blend that produces the pear skin effect — white grain specks on the surface — during the firing process.

These pear skin teapots are prized for the extra sweetness they give to the tea brewed in them. Over the years, the tea will gradually stain the white grains yellow. Collectors call these *huangjinzi* (golden grains).

Tseng had a hard upbringing. Born in Yingge during the Japanese colonial era, his family was so poor that he didn't attend school from age eight to 10. He remembers the Japanese cops extorting money from his father, and beating him when he couldn't pay. The family eventually fled to Taichung, living in pig pens or cow sheds.

His sister died aged two.
"She died because my father only looked after the boys," Tseng said.

STORAGE JARS TO TEAPOTS

Tseng started studying how to make ceramics, to bring in some money. He made braziers, medicine storage jars and large water pots, and much later, he turned his hands to teapots after the plastics industry decimated demand for pottery storage jars.



Left: Yingge potter Tseng Tsai-wan brews tea in one of his teapots in his home and studio in Yingge Town, New Taipei City.

PHOTO: PAUL COOPER, TAIPEI TIMES

fake antique teapots, Tseng decided it was time to sell under his own name. He started getting a reputation for making high quality teapots.

In the 1990s, a descendant of Banciao's wealthy Lin (林) family offered NT\$5 million for all the teapots he could make. He turned him down.

"His idea was that I hadn't been making teapots all that long, and after I passed away he would make a lot of money selling them to collectors," Tseng said.

All his work now is commissioned. He has more orders than he can cope with, and is not taking any more this year.

He says that money isn't all that important to him, and that now he can do what he pleases. "Had I been chained to making pots for that one guy, I wouldn't have that freedom. And without that freedom, I wouldn't be happy."

Next month, Yingge Artisan looks at painter Chang Sung-shan (張松山).

"I was the first person to make teapots by hand. I was also the first person in Taiwan to make the pear skin teapots," he says

An unknown, he discovered he couldn't cover his costs selling these under his own name. He decided the only way to make fakes of antique Chinese Shantou pots (汕頭壺).

Tseng says making fakes during the 1980s was very lucrative, and he could get NT\$5,000 or NT\$6,000 for a single fake antique teapot, NT\$8,000 for a larger one.

He became so good at making fakes indistinguishable from the authentic antiques that collectors became wary of buying antiques after he exhibited three of his teapots at an exhibition at the Yingge Ceramics Museum. After that, he had to sell his teapots to dealers in Kaohsiung and Pingtung.

Kujiang District () near the Port of Kaohsiung was known for selling antiques — and smuggled goods.

"They would sell anything. So, I took my stuff there."

After a dealer reneged on a big order for

Tseng Tsai-wan lifts the clay body of a teapot he has just thrown from a wheel in his studio in Yingge Town, New Taipei City.

PHOTO: PAUL COOPER, TAIPEI TIMES

Born into poverty, Master Wan talks about his relationship with the old pottery town of Yingge and how he has established himself as a potter making quality "pear skin" teapots

BY PAUL COOPER
STAFF REPORTER



YINGGE TOWN Artisan

Yingge Town Artisan is a monthly photographic and historical exploration of the artists and potters linked to New Taipei City's Yingge Town.

A lifelong desire to learn

Tsai A-hsin, Taiwan's first female doctor, opened her own clinic in Taichung 90 years ago this month

BY HAN CHEUNG
STAFF REPORTER

For much of the latter half of 2005, many people in Taiwan waited eagerly in front of their television sets on weekday evenings as *A Cinematic Journey* (浪淘沙) came on, watching the dramatic life of Taiwan's first female doctor unfold.

Based on the life of Tsai A-hsin (蔡阿信), the series was an adaptation of Tung-fang Pai's (東方白) 1990 novel of the same name. It won a Golden Bell for Best Television Series that year, and re-introduced Tsai to the public imagination half a century after she left Taiwan for Canada.

Tsai A-hsin also held the title of many other firsts in Taiwan. Chu Chen-yi (朱貞一), an expert on Taiwanese medical history, writes in his biography of Tsai that she was also the first Taiwanese doctor to receive professional anesthesia training, participate in a medical residency and open a clinic in North America.

There are very few primary sources on Tsai. She wrote a biography in English but it was never published. Tungfang interviewed Tsai and obtained a copy for his novel, but Chu writes that he worked off an "incomplete" version. Chu also references the novel, while consulting with Tung-



fang which events were fiction and which were fact.

Chu noted that Tsai's name was even missing from a list of Taiwanese who had studied abroad in Europe or America.

"If it weren't for Tungfang Pai's novel, [Tsai's] legendary life would surely have been completely forgotten," Chu writes. "One of the reasons is that she moved to Canada early, but the main reason is probably because of discrimination against women in Taiwanese society."

MANY FIRSTS

Indeed, very few girls attended school during the time Tsai was born, either in 1896 or 1899.

In 1884, Canadian missionary George Leslie Mackay established

the Tamsui Girls' School (淡水女學堂), the first of its kind in Taiwan. Though tuition and housing were free, the school saw few students because of societal reservations, the majority of them Kavalan Aborigine converts.

Under Japanese rule, Tamsui Girls' School became a six-year program for girls over the age of 12. Because the school still had trouble recruiting students, Tsai was admitted before she turned 12 as its youngest student.

Tsai's maternal grandfather's family was among the first Han Chinese to be baptized by Mackay, which probably contributed to their more liberal views on female education. Her mother also received some professional training as a midwife.



Far left: Tsai A-hsin's alma mater, Tamsui Girls' School, was the first of its kind in Taiwan. It is occupied by Chunde Elementary School today.

PHOTOS: HUANG CH-HAO, TAIPEI TIMES

Left: Tsai A-hsin, Taiwan's first female doctor, graduated from medical school in 1921.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

in Japan — a dentist who graduated in 1926, five years after Tsai. When Tsai took a semester off and returned to Taiwan to nurse her asthma, she achieved another "first" as, after many attempts, she persuaded the principal of an all-male medical school in Taiwan to let her sit in on classes, becoming the country's first co-ed student at the higher education level.

She graduated in 1921 and returned to Taiwan and worked first as an ophthalmologist at a Taipei hospital and later as gynecologist. In 1924, she married Peng Hua-ying (彭華英), a notable political and social activist.

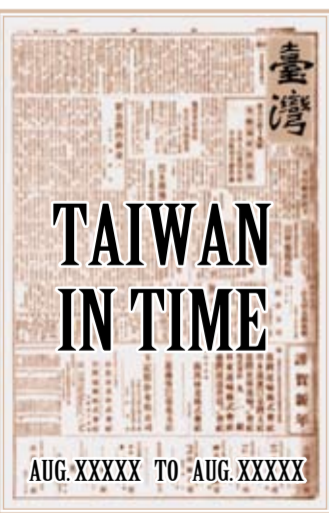
The family was frequently harassed by the authorities because of Peng's activities, and even Tsai was suspected of being a Western spy due to her English proficiency and closeness with the church. Nevertheless, Tsai opened her own Ching Hsin Clinic (清信醫院) in Taichung in June 1926 as well as the Ching Hsin Midwife School (清信產婆學校), training about 60 students per year.

LIFE IN THE WEST

As Japan entered its military aggression period in the 1930s, the number of students dropped as people were afraid that their daughters would be sent to the battlefield because of their medical knowledge. Tsai closed her clinic and school and headed to North America in 1940, spending time at Harvard Medical School and later enrolling at the University of Toronto.

Tsai became stranded abroad due to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. During this time, she received more medical training, including anesthesia, and worked at various hospitals as well as a Japanese POW camp. Here, she also ran into problems with authorities due to her Japanese citizenship, and even spent time in jail after being wrongly accused of operating without a license.

Finally, she returned in 1946 to a very different homeland. After the 228 Incident, her desire to leave Taiwan was solidified. In 1953, she left with her new husband, a pastor surnamed Gibson, and settled in Canada. Her desire to learn never ceased — even at almost 60 years old, she headed south to study at Columbia University's School of Public Health.



BY HAN CHEUNG
STAFF REPORTER

Taiwan in Time, a column about Taiwan's history that is published every Sunday, spotlights important or interesting events around the nation that have anniversaries this week.