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# Domesticating the Foreign: Re-making Coffee in Taiwan

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## Abstract

This article explores how coffee, as a foreign cultural import, is imagined, appreciated and localized in Taiwan. Until recently, coffee had been exotic to the Taiwanese consumers. The drink was brought to Taiwan by its former Japanese colonizer as a symbol of Western modernization. In the post-War Taiwan, coffee was considered a luxurious import and discouraged by the authority. It was Taiwan's close political and economic relations with the US during and 1950s – 70s that attributed coffee's common association with the 'American dream'. Since the 1990s, chained coffee shops started to provide coffee at reasonable prices and turned coffee houses into popular meeting places in the cities. The changing meanings of coffee should be understood in the context of Taiwan's political, economic and cultural transformation.

The worldwide circulation of Western, especially American, goods is often criticised on the grounds that they may eventually decrease the heterogeneity of other cultures. For example, Billig (1995) believes that globalization is actually 'Americanization'. Ritzer (1993, 1998) uses the term 'McDonaldization' to describe the global penetration of western value of standardization and rationalization. Tomlinson(1991) further refers the global expansion of western lifestyle as 'cultural imperialism'. All of them concern a capitalism driven, western material culture-dominating force that eliminates local differences.

By contrast, Miller's (1998) empirical work in Trinidad suggests that consumers are not as vulnerable as some theorists thought them to be. In Trinidad, Coca Cola is never taken as a foreign product but as a local necessity, even though it is often seen as a symbol of Corporate America. Coca-cola is a 'black' drink referring to the 'black' people - the Black African Trinidadians - in contrast with the traditional 'red' drink and the red people - the East Indian immigrants. The reading of Coca-cola as an ethnic symbol is not given by the global business but created within the local Trinidadian culture. The Trinidadians like sweetness. As Miller goes on to explain, efforts to make sweet drinks more in line with global trends by reducing the high sugar content might have succeeded in another cultural milieu, but in Trinidad such products did not catch on. In this case, global businesses cannot alter the Trinidadian's taste (Miller, 1998). Another example, American soap operas are usually seen as a form of foreign invasion. However, Miller (1992) argues that the way Trinidadians enjoy gossip, fashion and the contradiction between the American soap opera Dallas and the values and traditions of Trinidadians can, in a way, sharpen their national identity.

As Miller probes into the Trinidadians' daily practices, he indicates that the ways people consume foreign goods can reveal and further strengthen local culture and identities. Morley (2000)

also argues that national culture is understood to be both firmly rooted in what appears trivial and to be continually reproduced through the cultural practice of everyday life. At the level of emotional effect, the sense of national belonging is often inscribed in the taken-for-granted practices of everyday life: for example, the way stamps are bought in France as opposed to in Poland; the way a burger can be ordered in Amsterdam as opposed to in New York; or the many tiny details which make a Swedish supermarket or post office different from a Norwegian one. In other words, everyday practices in the same nation have led to some collective experiences on which a collective identity is founded.

Situated in the debates above, this paper explores the consumption of coffee in Taiwan. Until recently, coffee had been exotic to the Taiwanese consumers. The drink was brought to Taiwan by its former Japanese colonizer as a symbol of Western modernization. In the post-War Taiwan, coffee was considered a luxurious import and hence discouraged by the authority. It was Taiwan's close political and economic relations with the US during the 1950s – 70s that ascribed the consumption of coffee to the fantasies of the West, and especially American culture. From the 1990s, the chained coffee shops started to provide coffee at reasonable prices and turned coffee houses into popular meeting places in the cities. Coffee in Taiwan has long been associated with the West, but whether or not it stands for another example of globalisation and homogenization is a question worth more discussions.

Collective practices in consumption, such as consumers' common preferences and aversions, can be seen as a shared but often neglected expression of culture resulting from multiple influences in society. By investigating how coffee is remade in Taiwan, I attempt to find some answers to the following questions: What is it to have foreign imports? How are novel imports domesticated and appropriated by local people? How are interpretations and evaluations of these goods related to the historical context and to consumers' personal backgrounds? How is the fantasy/othering of goods connected to the image of the US?

## **The meanings of coffee**

Originated in the Red Sea region, coffee had been a common drink in Yemen since the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Hattox, 1988). The drink later spread throughout the Ottoman Empire and quickly conquered the European's palates. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, coffeehouses had become popular meeting places in European cities. The rise of the coffee-drinking habit in coffeehouses was seen as an indicator of the birth of a consumer society and the emergence of a 'public sphere' (Cowan, 2005). The culture of drinking coffee was introduced to Japan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Meiji Restoration, which began in 1868, was a project to absorb Western civilization and accelerate Japan's industrialization. Drinking coffee was then regarded as a symbol of being modern and therefore swiftly became a fashionable habit of the urban elites.

In the 1880s, coffeehouses began to emerge in Tokyo and were frequented by the upper class only. By the 1910s, the consumption of coffee had spread to the middle class in various cities of Japan (Tai, 2003). After its victory over the Qing Empire in the First Sino-Japan War in 1895, Japan's power reached to Taiwan. Coffee and coffeehouses were seen by the Japanese colonial government as a demonstration of modernization. In a guidebook to Taipei's commerce published in 1928, there were already 28 coffeehouses listed (Shen, 2005). On March 6 1934, a report titled 'Daitoutai Noticeably Modernized – Thriving and Prosperous Café Street, the Birth of Theatres' on the *Taiwan Nichinichi shinpo* (i.e. Taiwan Daily News), a newspaper supported by the Governor-General's Office in Taiwan, wrote:

In recent years, with the accomplishment of road construction and street lighting facilities, and the inaugurations of department stores and retail shops, Taipei's *Daitoutei* had become a modern urban region. Situated in the central part of *Daitoutei*, *Taiheicho* Avenue appeared to be even more splendid and flourishing with the emergence of cafes, including Eruteru, The First, The World, Peacock. ... (Evening edition, *Taiwan Nichinichi shinpo*, 06 March 1934)

The report above showed that coffeehouses, together with department stores, illuminations and road construction, were regarded as indicators of prosperity, urbanization and modernization by the colonial authority. Back in the colonial Taiwan, there were two kinds of coffee houses: 'cafés' and 'tea shops'. Cafés in Tokyo and Taipei in the 1930s were places where male customers were accompanied by hostesses – as such they were associated with sexual businesses (Chen, 2005), while tea shops were more like normal coffee houses today. Both Cafés and tea shops were places for the very rich classes. Chen (2005, p.29) cited the following extract from a lady's memoir: 'my eldest sister who married to the richest family in Keelung visited me every week when I was in high school. We always went to Mori tea shop first and then had sushi and saw films in cinemas.' Apart from selling drinks and snacks, these shops were often air-conditioned and decorated with lace curtains. Neon bulbs, light music from the radio, western-styled tables and chairs, pretty wallpapers, and green plants, these were basic elements for a tea shop in the 1930s. No doubt that these were most vogueish leisure spaces in the city at the time.

Shortly after World War Two ended, the Chiang Kai-Shek led Nationalist Party (Kuo-Ming-Tung, hereafter the KMT) lost Mainland China to the Chinese Communists in the civil war and fled to Taiwan to be the island's long-time ruler. During 1948-1987, the KMT enforced martial law in its continuous war against China. The KMT determined making preparation for a war but was desperately in need of foreign reserves. Therefore, a thrift lifestyle was encouraged. Drinking coffee was associated with luxury lifestyles and discouraged by the authority. Importing coffee beans were banned in 1951 (Taiwan Province Archives, 1969), together with perfume, tobacco, cocoa, poker cards, silk stockings, ... etc. In 1952, the government issued guidelines for an economized war-time lifestyle. Among the many detailed instructions and penalties for everyday life given by the guidelines, a progressive business tax was imposed on coffee shops and new operations of the kind were restricted. A newspaper article revealed the mainstream discourse of that time:

Why do we need so many restaurants, coffeeshops and winehouses? ... Being so wasteful in various aspects, how could we mobilize all the resources to fight against the Communist and win the final victory? (United Daily News, 8 April 1952, p.1)

Although the ban on coffee imports was later eased in 1964, a very high tariff was imposed on imported coffee beans and coffee shops, which made coffee extremely expensive (see Table 1). In post-war Taiwan, there were two types of coffee shops. Those with Chinese names were mostly operated by the mainlanders from Shanghai. A writer wrote in the 1960s that these shops were like time machines - 'inside the shops it was like Shanghai in the 1940s. Elderly gentlemen sat there chatting with each other in Shanghai dialects' (Shen, 2005, p.86). Customers were mostly well-educated writers, journalists, politicians or business people.

**Table 1. Tariff rate on imported coffee, Taiwan, since 1948**

Year	Article	Tariff Rate(%)		
		Column 1	Column2	Column3
1948	Coffee Beans	50		
1955	Coffee Beans	100		
1956	Coffee Beans	100		
1959	Coffee : including Beans and Extract	80		
1965	Coffee : including Beans and Extract	60		
1970	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	60		
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	60		
1971	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	60		
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	78		
1972	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	60		
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	78		
1973	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	46		
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	55		
1977	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	46		
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	55		
1978	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	45		
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	55		
1979	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	45		
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	55		
1980	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	45	35	-
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	55	35	-
1987	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	35	20	-
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	55	35	-
1988	(1) Coffee : Green and unprocessed	10	5	-
	(2) Coffee : Roasted	15	10	-
1989	(1)Coffee, Not Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	10	5	-
	(2) Coffee Not Roasted. Decaffeinated	10	5	-
	(3) Coffee, Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	15	10	-
	(4) Coffee, Roasted. Decaffeinated	15	10	-
1992	(1)Coffee, Not Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	10	5	-
	(2) Coffee, Not Roasted. Decaffeinated	10	5	-
	(3) Coffee, Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	7.5	5	-
	(4) Coffee, Roasted. Decaffeinated	15	10	-
1998	(1)Coffee, Not Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	10	4.5	-
	(2) Coffee, Not Roasted. Decaffeinated	10	4.5	-
	(3) Coffee, Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	7.5	4.5	-
	(4) Coffee, Roasted. Decaffeinated	15	9	-
2002	(1)Coffee, Not Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	10	0	-
	(2) Coffee, Not Roasted. Decaffeinated	10	3	-
	(3) Coffee, Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	7.5	3	-
	(4) Coffee, Roasted. Decaffeinated	15	3	-
2003	(1)Coffee, Not Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	10	0	-
	(2) Coffee, Not Roasted. Decaffeinated	10	2.4	-
	(3) Coffee, Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	7.5	2.4	-
	(4) Coffee, Roasted. Decaffeinated	15	2.4	-
2004	(1)Coffee, Not Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	0	0	10
	(2) Coffee, Not Roasted. Decaffeinated	1.8	0	10
	(3) Coffee, Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	1.8	0	7.5
	(4) Coffee, Roasted. Decaffeinated	1.8	0	15
2006	(1)Coffee, Not Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	0	0	10
	(2) Coffee, Not Roasted. Decaffeinated	0.6	0	10
	(3) Coffee, Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	0.6	0	7.5
	(4) Coffee, Roasted. Decaffeinated	0.6	0	15

2007-2017	(1) Coffee, Not Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	0	0	10
	(2) Coffee, Not Roasted. Decaffeinated	0	0	10
	(3) Coffee, Roasted. Not Decaffeinated	0	0	7.5
	(4) Coffee, Roasted. Decaffeinated	0	0	15

Notes: (1) During 1980- 2003, the rate was divided into two columns. Column 2 applied to goods imported from regions that have reciprocal treatment with Taiwan, while Column 1 applied to the rest regions. (2) From 2003 onwards, the rate has been further divided into three columns. Column 1 applies to goods imported from WTO members or from regions that have reciprocal treatment with Taiwan. Column 2 applies to the specified goods imported from the specified underdeveloped or developing regions, or from those which have signed Free Trade Agreement with Taiwan. Column 3 applies to the rest.

Sources:

1. Inspectorate General of Customs. (1948, 1955, 1959, 1965, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988). *Customs Import Tariff of the Republic of China*.: Inspectorate General of Customs, R.O.C., Taipei.
2. Inspectorate General of Customs. (1956, 1978). 'Import & Export List of Commodities under control', *Customs Import and Export Tariff of the Republic of China*. Taipei: Taiwan Trade Press.
3. Commission on Taxation Reform, Executive Yuan. (1970) *Revised Import Tariff of the Republic of China* (Draft Edition). Executive Yuan, R.O.C., Taipei.
4. Lusan Publication Center. (1972) *The Code of Standard Classification Commodities of the Republic of China*. Lusan Publication Center, Taipei.
5. External Trade Development Council. (1992). *Customs Import Tariff and Classification of Import & Export Commodities of the Republic of China 1992*. External Trade Development Council, Ministry of Economic Affairs, R.O.C., Taipei.
6. Directorate-General of Customs, M.O.F. & Board of Foreign Trade, M.O.E.A. (1995, 1997, 1998, 2006, 2009). *Customs Import Tariff and Classification of Import & Export Commodities of the Republic of China*. MOF&MOEA, Taipei.

The other kind, with Japanese names, which were influenced by cafés in the colonial Taiwan, were seen as unsavoury places and the general impression was that only criminal types or 'underworld' people would frequent them. Here the ethnic stereotypes revealed: coffee houses run by the mainlanders, those who followed the KMT from Mainland China to Taiwan after the War, were crowded with upper class poets and artists, while those operated by the natives, those who experienced Japanese colonization, were associated with sex businesses and crime.

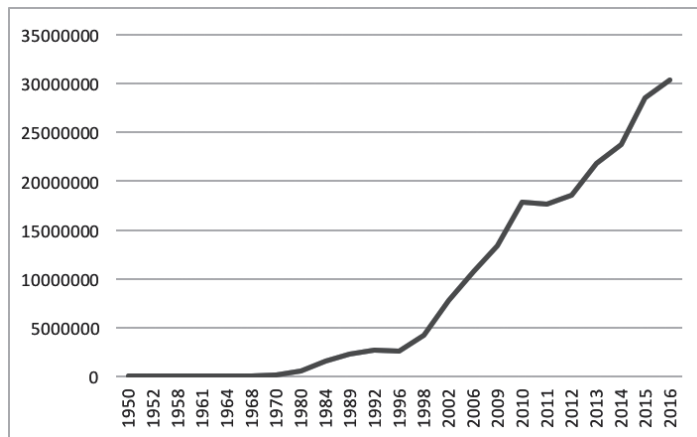
After the US became involved in the Vietnam War in 1965, Taiwan became a support station for the US force. Many American soldiers had their vacations in Taiwan and the places they most visited were bars, cinemas and coffee shops. From the 1960s onwards, coffee shops with Japanese names switched to American ones, such as Hollywood, Monroe, and Susie. In the 1970s, 'dark' coffee shops indicated those coffee stores that offered sexual deals. From 1974 to 1987, the government stopped releasing new permits to 'coffee shop' owners but the ban didn't work at all for shops that registered as restaurants still supplied and advertised 'coffee' (Shen, 2005). The negative impression of coffee shops didn't change until the late 1980s.

After the PRC took over Taiwan's place in the United Nations in 1971, the KMT's claim in representing China was seriously challenged and it was urged to loosen up restrictions. This pressure eventually contributed to the lifting of martial law in 1987. Since then, Taiwan has experienced a dramatic change: moving from a closed to open society. The tariffs on coffee imports remained at 50 – 80 percent levels during the 1970s and were then significantly and continuously reduced since 1988. In 1991, McDonald style coffee chain stores from Japan began to sell coffee at NT\$35 per cup, a move that made coffee shops popular meeting places for ordinary people. Starbucks came to Taiwan in 1997; thereafter many chain coffee houses run by native businesses follow a semi-

Starbucks style - turning coffee shops into lounges, with sofas, music, and paintings on the walls. Soon after Starbucks became really popular, take-away coffee stalls emerged on busy streets.

After Taiwan joined the World Trade Organization in 2002, coffee's tariff was further deducted to zero to all members in the WTO. Since the late 1990s, the quantity of coffee import has rapidly surged (see Graph 1). Now coffee shops catering for different markets and designed for different purposes are available everywhere in Taiwan. People rarely notice that coffee shops once had a bad reputation; rather, coffee represents modern urban culture.

**Graph1 Quantity of Coffee Imports in Taiwan since 1950 (Unit: Kilograms)**



Sources:

1. *The Trade of China (Taiwan Region)* (1949-1989), the Statistical Department, Inspectorate General of Customs, Taipei.
2. *Monthly Statistics of Imports (1990~1999)*, Directorate General of Customs, Ministry of Finance, R.O.C.
3. Customs Administration, Ministry of Finance, R.O.C., (2000~2016), Trade Statistics Search. Retrieved from <https://portal.sw.nat.gov.tw/APGA/GA01Statistical>

## Methodology

In addition to my long-time observation to Taiwan and an archival investigation of coffee's history in this region, I conducted focus group interviews to better understand how consumers in Taiwan perceive, drink and re-create coffee. Prior to the political and economic liberalization, Taiwan was described as an ethnically stratified society which was made up of an upper mainlander class, the *waishengren*, and a lower Taiwanese class, the *benshengren* (Gates, 1979, p, 388) - the former dominated the public sector and symbolized for a high culture from China, while the latter was inferior in their socioeconomic status and represented for a marginal segment. The *benshengren* were people of the native province, Taiwan, while the *waishengren* were originally from other provinces in Mainland China. The classification was adopted in the state's registry system and further formulated residents' ethnic identity. The ethnic boundaries had now become blurred but influences from the KMT's long-time rule still linger.

Another consideration was the generational differences. Before liberalization, people on the island lived for four decades in a state of war. Travelling abroad for tourism purposes was prohibited; the media were controlled by the government; daily consumption was supervised and regulated in order to ensure a proper war-time lifestyle. The end of martial law made all sorts of foreign



commodities available and freed people from their cages. Consumers in Taiwan embraced foreign influences without haste: not only Disney and Hello Kitty, but also Portuguesa snacks, Korean dramas, Thai food, and many others. It is often said on the media that the younger generation was a generation of consumption. Based on the contemplation above, I organised six focus groups in Taipei in 2006 to know how consumers of difference social backgrounds may appreciate coffee differently. Informants were divided according to their ethnic backgrounds and ages – the middle-aged generation who grew up under the enforcement of martial law and the youngsters who were born after 1987.

The places I met with my informants presented the various styles of coffeehouses in contemporary Taipei. Apart from two groups with the younger informants, which were held in a cafeteria on a university campus, the rest of the discussions were held in coffee houses in the city. I met three middle-aged *waishengren* women in a branch of Barista coffee, situated within 3 minutes' walk to a metro station. Barista coffee was run by a Taiwanese business but the decoration and service were similar to those of Starbucks. This place was chosen by one of the informants who lived in the neighborhood. She said the residence committee of her community often held meetings in that coffee shop. The second shop that I went to with two middle-aged *benshengren* men and one woman had run for 50 years. That was a typical mainlanders' coffee shop. Desserts provided there were not western sponges nor brownies, but Chinese snacks, such as peach crisps, almond cakes. The female member learned about this shop from magazines and chose the place. The third shop I went to with two middle-aged mainlander men was to our surprise. We thought it was a coffee shop from the outside - they had small tables and booths, but actually it provided traditional dishes with after meal coffee and tea. The last one, where I went with a group of female insurance saleswomen, was a composite shop that supplied coffee, tea, juice, set meals and buffet. This shop located near a metro station and was crowded by office workers during lunch time. Set meals were traditional food served in a western style - a small portion of every dish arranged in a plate, rather than many dishes on a big round table. The buffet included fresh salads, breads, corn soups, stir-fry vegetables, and more. These coffee shops chosen by informants partly reflected the fact that coffee houses have become popular meeting places for city residents. The styles and services provided by each shop also indicated various ways of domesticating coffee.

### **Fantasy, informality and classiness**

Tea and coffee are two common soft drinks now consumed in many places around the world. Grigg's (2003) research on patterns of tea and coffee consumption suggests that the consumption of coffee and tea is related to income level. In Britain, coffee and tea have been associated with different lifestyles, for example, tea is now more commonly drunk at home by the old, coffee by the young and outgoing. In Taiwan, tea and coffee consumption also makes and marks distinctions between people.

Tea is deeply rooted in Taiwan and is often regarded as a valuable gift, with local and emotional affiliation. Renowned Taiwanese tea was locally grown and consumers knew the origins of their tea very well. As my informant Chang (44, male, *benshengren*) said: 'When people give me tea as a gift, I usually know where it is from, Nan-tou or Jia-yi'. The two ethnic groups typically drink different kinds of tea and in their own ways. The *waishengren* brought their favourite kinds of tea from China and drink it by putting loose tea in a glass of hot water. My informant Guang-Hua, a *waishengren*, said that tea in his family is something you drink alone, and it is not suitable for sharing. This is probably because of the *waishengren*'s lack of kin in Taiwan. On the other hand, the *benshengren* way of drinking tea is more complicated and an indicator of sociability. Usually the host would put



a large spoonful of loose tea into a small pot and then add boiling water. The tea goes from a pot to a jug firstly and then is poured into the guests' tiny cups. The process of making tea is an art and the host family would provide the best tea in their collection to treat guests.

In contrast to tea that is local grown and bound to families and traditions in Taiwan, coffee came to Taiwan as an absolute novelty without existing associations or traditions. None of my informants, not even the youngsters, came from families that recognized coffee as a daily necessity as many westerners do. Many middle-aged informants' first experience of drinking coffee was at western-styled restaurants.

My first experience of coffee? That might be when I was in high school. Sometimes my parents took us kids to western restaurants. My mother and sister, they loved the after-meal coffee and began to buy instant coffee. We didn't dine out very often so that was kind of rewards if we kids did well at school. .... I did not like steaks really, but I was extremely excited when thinking that we were going to have a western meal. (Liang, 42, *waishengren*)

While the *benshengren* and the *waishengren* have distinct traditions and styles of tea drinking, coffee, being new and neutral, signifies social status in another sense. Two decades ago, when Taiwanese society was opening up and experiencing changes in the 1980s, coffee was novel and its drinkers were considered to be members of a stylish group who had better tastes. My informant Guang-Hua (46, male, *waishengren*), a middle-aged colonel, treated visitors to coffee, rather than tea, when he worked on a naval warship in the 1980s, because 'it showed that you really valued the guests, while tea was something you drink by yourself'. Wei remembered that, in 1981 she earned NT\$ 24 per hour as a part-time waitress in a coffee shop while the cheapest coffee in the store was NT\$ 60 per cup. The wage was bad but being a waitress in a coffee shop was very cool. As she recalled:

Coffee houses were not popular back then - unlike now, everyone can go to coffee shops, even children, everyone, and there are many different kinds of coffee. .... When I was young, coffee was a pronoun for "advance". Ordinary people wouldn't go to coffee shops but we did, because we were very fashionable. I think coffee represents foreign culture, especially the American culture.

Back in the 1950-60s, although few in Taiwan could afford to patronize coffeehouses, coffee was often reported by newspapers when feature writers attempted to portray lifestyles in so called 'advanced countries', particularly for Western Europe and the US. The image of coffee is probably influenced by the Taiwanese impression of the West, especially the US. After the Second World War, the KMT retained its alliance with the US and Taiwan became politically, economically and militarily dependent on the US. During that period, the KMT regime claimed itself as the 'Free China' and a member of the 'Free World', led by the US, against the Soviet Union led communist countries. Taiwan received \$1.4 billion US Aid during 1951-1965 (Chen MY, 2015) and in turn had been taken as a base of the American force in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Even today, although there is no diplomatic tie between the US and Taiwan, the Americans play a key role in cross-strait balance: the US agrees to defend Taiwan if China starts a war, while Taiwan has to purchase a massive amount of weapons from the US.

The KMT authority advocated the values of modernization from the US. The US was described as Taiwan's strongest supporter, an ally in defence and a friendly country that provided economic aid. As the major supplier of economic and military aid and as the KMT's main ally in its continuing

war with China, the US was able to influence the direction of Taiwan's economy. Taiwan had to open doors to private enterprise and foreign capital, so that American corporates could take advantage of Taiwan's cheap labour. Since the early 1950s, the US has been the country to which most Taiwanese youth went for postgraduate education. In Taiwan, English has been called the 'American language'. For a very long period of time, Mandarin and American English represented high culture, while local dialects and culture were considered less valuable and discouraged.

Two of my *wai sheng ren* informants were servicemen. Their conversations revealed that Taiwan's defence sector always had a close relationship with the US, especially with the navy which often ran training sessions on US warships. My informant Ding-Jiang said:

The navy is more internationalized than the army. They are more westernized. That's why people say the navy looks more handsome, while the army is a bit stiff. Once I got the chance to attend a meeting with the navy. Meetings used to be very serious in the army. Everyone had to sit tight. I was impressed when the chair ordered coffee for everyone at present. We had coffee during the meeting and leaned back on our chairs. The feeling was very special. [Q: Which kind of coffee was that?] Instant coffee, maybe, I didn't know. It was not coffee itself, but the feeling that was important. With coffee you could feel more relaxed. We were more willing to talk that day. In the army, it seemed that you might easily get into trouble if saying something wrong.

Coffee here is equated with American culture. It was not the taste of coffee but the 'feeling' that mattered. 'American' is modern, relaxed, and more 'handsome'. The impression is not limited to the military sector. Taiwan in the 50s had a strict control over public speech. Even popular culture had to be related to 'anti-communism'. Wang Mei-Hsiang (2004) studied the 'World Today', a magazine in Chinese sponsored by the US, which intrigued the Taiwanese with its representation of Western cultural and sexual imagination and gave the youngsters a temporary escape from the Chinese orthodoxy constructed by the KMT regime. In the same way, American rock and roll appealed to many Taiwanese in the 60s.

The Taiwanese always envied the Americans who appeared to have time and money to enjoy their lives. This is why 'American time' means 'plenty of free time' in Taiwan. The image of the US in Taiwan has been associated with a modern, advanced, democratic world. The decoration and music in coffee houses also construct an atmosphere that associates coffee with love, romance, leisure, and exoticness. If tea means calm and peace, coffee refers to excitement and fun. Coffee gains its popularity in Taiwan not because it is tasty but for the image that it has brought. Going to coffee houses has become a fashionable activity for urban citizens. For example, Shu admitted that she has been very keen on exploring featured coffee houses: 'Many people, they may not like drinking coffee but, considering the living standard has come to this high, would want to see how other people do their businesses, decorate their own shops. At least I think so.'

Shu clearly associated coffee with a higher living standard and a better quality of life. In other words, coffee is about enjoying a better life, perhaps the life of the imagined American style, which many elderly and middle-aged people in Taiwan have struggled for years to achieve. As Taiwan constantly lives under the threat of war, many people have emigrated to the US. Prior to the 1980s, a good percentage of Taiwanese graduates went to study in the US and stayed there. When I conducted my interviews, many informants had worked in the US, studied in the US, and have relatives living in the US. Many Taiwanese have an American dream.

## Coffee in Everyday Life

Nowadays coffee shops have become common meeting places in the city. They are usually situated in urban areas so that busy office workers can get a quick drink and leave. Coffee is also offered by widespread beverage stalls and convenience stores, and served together with other more traditional options like bubble tea and papaya milk. In less than two decades, coffee has again changed its meanings in Taiwan: from a luxurious import signified for a higher cultural heritage from the West, to a common drink available at every street corner. The popularity and changing features of coffee, to a certain extent, reflected Taiwan's booming eating-out culture and westernized daily menus since the 1990s.

People in Taiwan experienced a change from a closed society to opening up, also a transformation from an agricultural to an industrial lifestyle in the 1980s. As many married women grasped the opportunities to be full-employed, commercialized dishes that supplied by catering services gradually replaced home foods. During the focus group discussions, many informants mentioned that they do not usually eat at home – instead breakfast bars, cafeterias, and 24-hour convenience stores provide everything they need.

Research in the US and the UK shows a common trend in the increase of frequency and spending on eating out in the latest two decades (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Warde, 1997). Take-away meals and convenience foods have been largely incorporated into the everyday food practices in order to save time. Nevertheless, Alan Warde and Lydia Martens (2000) suggest that eating out is not necessarily an effective time-saving strategy but more a desire for extravagance, a leisure activity that is directly contrasted with the bustle of everyday life.

The development of Taiwan's eating-out culture is similar and more prevalent than those either in the UK or the US. On average each household in Taiwan spent 7.38% of their food and beverage budget on eating out in 1983 and the proportion increased to 30.69% by 2003 (Chuang, 2006). Although eating out certainly covers the perspective that Warde and Martens address, it is also a main form of everyday eating for most people. According to the survey conducted by the Global Vision magazine (Hsu, 2007), 70.2 percent of the adult population, aged older than 20, eat out at least one day a week. 19.3 percent of respondents (around 3.3 million people) eat out 7 days a week and 9.9% eat out every meal. Those who reported eating out everyday are mostly students and office workers, aged between twenty and thirty-five: 66.8 percent of them eat out for breakfast, 78.7 percent for lunch, and 51 percent for dinner. 'Time-saving and convenience' (56.2 percent) ranks as the top reason for eating out, while only 3.6 percent reported that they dine out for social meetings and gatherings. A more recent survey conducted by Health Promotion Administration, Ministry of Health and Welfare in Taiwan revealed that, in 2011, 66.7 percent of employed workers eat out more than five days a week (HPA, 2011).

Surveys also showed that changing eating habits in Taiwan is not mainly for pursuing more delicious food but has more to do with living for a more efficient life. Not only has eating out become a common lifestyle, the menus of daily meals have changed greatly from the previous generation. Bi-sia used to have rice gruel when she was a kid but gave her son milk and bread for breakfast, because 'they are easy to prepare'. Both my *waishengren* and *benshengren* middle-aged female members in the focus groups said that they seldom cook, and even if they sometimes do, they would 'make it simple' (Tsai) or 'rather cook a western meal to save trouble washing so many dishes' (Bi-sia), except for one member who cooked five dinners a week, because she had a regular working schedule as a civil servant and lived near her office.

When I worked in Taipei, in my fifteen-minute's walk from my residence to the nearest metro station, I would pass four chain breakfast bars, three convenience stores, two bakeries, and several

traditional vendors in the morning. A diverse range of tastes is catered for by ‘Nice & Nice’, a leading brand among breakfast bars: beverages usually include milk, soya milk, coffee, tea and juice; sandwich fillings could include ham, eggs, tuna, peanut butter, and fried shredded meat; oriental food like Chinese turnip cakes, egg pancakes, steamed buns, and sesame cakes are also available. Customers can grab a rich combination of breakfast for a fairly cheap price. Tsui (2001) commented that ‘efficiency has a top priority in contemporary Taiwan society’.

Coffee has been incorporated into menus of most breakfast bars, beverage stalls and restaurants commonly include coffee. The popularity of coffee is not only for the attraction of the drink itself, nor the symbolic indulgence that it signified, but largely related to the space and services that coffee shops provide rightly fit into consumers’ lifestyles. For the Taiwanese who are used to living in crowded communities, coffee shops are an extension of their living rooms. Before chain coffee shops emerged, the youngsters usually met up at ice-fruit bars, where juice, fresh fruits, ice products were supplied, or, in the 1980s, at McDonald’s. But neither the ice-fruit bars nor McDonald’s can compete with chain coffee stores since the latter are usually equipped with romantic lighting, cozy sofas and lovely music. Business appointments used to be held in restaurants where people can have meals while talking about deals. However, if things can be settled within the time it takes to drink a cup of coffee, why waste a meal? The compression of time and space helps explain the emergence of chain coffee shops.

## **It’s about Time and Space**

Several of my informants are insurance salespersons who often meet clients scattered in different parts of the city at chain coffee shops. For them the popularity of coffee shops is not for the drinks but for the convenience: ‘There were no places for tea like coffee shops before. This style of shops was introduced from the West. This is very convenient for friends to chat or for us to talk with clients. I think this is why coffee gets popular’ (Bi-Sia). They love the service that coffee shops provide because it practically fits into a busy schedule and frequent non-family meetings

Indeed, for many Taiwanese who go to coffee houses, it is the space that matters. For Guang-Hua, coffee shops are good places where he and his wife can take a break from the family. ‘My wife and I sometimes go to coffee shops. Because when we stay in Taipei, we live at my parents’ house. My wife would think that we need more space of our own. So we would go to coffee shops, accompanied with some desserts, quite nice’. Coffee houses provide private spaces and enable couples who live with extended families to have more quality time together. Many informants said they don’t exactly like ‘drinking’ coffee, but they do love the space, the convenience, the atmosphere and individuality that coffee shops have brought them. Combining comfortable space and a simplified style of drinking tea, chain tea shops have recently emerged in urban areas. My experiences of holding interviews in different types of coffee shops have also showed that local businesses have actively adopted the western style service while providing traditional food.

The emergence of tea chains and composite stores indicated that consumers in Taiwan have domesticated coffee by incorporating the space and re-structuring it to fit their familiar tastes. When my informants talked about westernised menus and eating style, they did not look for the exotic taste of food, but focused on time-saving and convenience. The following dialogue between my saleswomen informants indicate that what attracts them is not the western menu with steak and potatoes, but the individualized dining style.

Huei: I like Chinese food but served in a western manner.

Q: like what we are doing now?

Huei: yes. Chinese food but divided into individual portions

Tsai: That's a popular practice, isn't it?

Bi-Sia: Meals are like that in hotels, restaurants, or wedding banquets.

This focus group was held in a composite shop where beverages, set meals and a buffet were provided. Set meals are small portions of traditional dishes with rice arranged on a plate, and each one eats only her own set rather than sharing many dishes on a big round table. The latter is traditional while the former is a new invention: a combination of desirable food and eating manners, in a form that is easy to sell to different size groups and to individuals. In the discussion, there was a slight dispute about whether what we were having should be called a 'western', 'Chinese' or 'simplified' meal but, in general, the members liked it. The shop, the meal and the conversations above show that eating habits in Taiwan have been largely westernized.

The generational differences regarding styles of eating are very obvious. Middle-aged informants, especially those with the *benshengren* origins, had few experiences of eating out when they were kids. A few *waishengren* informants recalled that eating out was mainly as a reward for good performance at school, once or twice at most, and the choices were limited. Nowadays, with various choices at affordable prices, the younger generation have richer experiences of eating out since they were little. Wei said her daughter likes 'pizza, pasta, or spaghetti'. In the group with the youngsters, I asked members to name some impressive dishes often made by their parents, several of them said 'apple sauce' and 'spaghetti'. You-Hua said his mother often 'steals' ideas from restaurants to make new dishes and he personally prefers western-style restaurants serving things, 'such as pasta and the like'. For them, western food has been part of their home food in everyday life.

Coffee, similar to other western foods in Taiwan, has become embedded with childhood memories for the younger generation. Focus group discussions with the youngsters who were born after 1987 indicated that the informants had drunk instant coffee since they were kids. Some of them mentioned how their mothers loved to brew coffee at home and had coffee at breakfast every morning. To the younger generation, coffee is not a novelty anymore - it has become normal. In the focus group discussions no one associated coffee with the foreign. My informant You-Hua loves coffee and is interested in all kinds of skills in brewing coffee. You-Hua is a 19-year-old medical school student but has already traveled to the US, France, and the UK. There is no need for him to imagine the West via coffee. The passion toward coffee is no longer for its exoticness but for pure pleasure.

## Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have given cases to reveal how coffee is localizing, or, in other words, consumers in Taiwan are domesticating coffee, from the 1920s to the 2010s. Coffee was introduced to Taiwan by its former Japanese colonizer to promote western modernity and was later classified as an extravagance in post-war Taiwan. The styles of coffee shops were once a marker of ethnic boundary between the *waishengren* and the *benshengren*, but the distinction was soon replaced by a common imagination of the US - a modern, leisured and quality style of life. The American dream that the Taiwanese people commonly had was built on the close tie between Taiwan and the US since the 1950s. Nevertheless, the significance of the coffee case in Taiwan is not limited to the symbolic fantasy that it carries.

Coffee drinking is one of the food practices that can be implicated in making and reproducing distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. It is worth noting that different practices may play different roles in terms of boundary making. While practices deeply rooted in tradition often replicate and signify ethnic



distinction, newly introduced practices can bridge between existing divisions and create new ones. The roles of practices and corresponding lines of ethnic and other kinds of division are constantly shifting. While the *waishegren* and the *benshengren* drink different kinds of tea, they show little difference in coffee consumption, though coffee divides the elder and the younger generations, and urban and country residents.

As demonstrated, the widespread popularity of coffee houses in Taiwan should be attributed to the services that they provide. Coffee shops have become extensions of living rooms and popular meeting places for urban citizens largely because the services fit into people's lifestyles. Today consumers in Taiwan have various ways of remaking coffee. Tea chain and composite shops adopt the décor, music, individualized set meals that are accompanied with coffee but provide foods of traditional tastes. Breakfast bars and beverage stalls incorporate coffee into their menus, supplied with noodles and dumplings. Canned and iced coffee are available on the shelves of convenience stores, among various choices of soft drinks such as canned tea, juice, soda and flavoured water. These have together re-shaped the landscape of cities and broaden the scope of eateries.

The world today has been characterised by many as a globalized world where people and products frequently cross national boundaries and thus time and space are highly compressed. Globalization has brought diverse cultures together and made constant encounter with 'others' possible through travel, consumption and other activities. My article has shown that embracing foreign culture does not necessarily make groups cultural victims of a western invasion. As we saw with coffee in Taiwan, it can be an eager rather than a reluctant adoption and adaptation. The diverse ranges of coffee in Taiwan indicate that consumers have not just domesticated coffee by re-imagining it, but actively re-invented it according to their own tastes and needs.

The story of remaking coffee in Taiwan reminds us of the following: a globalized world is not necessarily a homogenizing world and local cultures do not vanish in waves of globalization. People appropriate and domesticate foreign imports to fit their needs. In doing so, they constantly enrich and change the meanings of the foreign and reshape their own traditions.

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