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# Mapping Chinese Coffee Culture in the Land of Tea. The Case of Yunnan Province

Ching Lin Pang & Mo Li

## Abstract

In this article we aim to map the rapidly emerging coffee culture in the province of Yunnan, renowned as the land of tea in China. We first look into the historical development of coffee production of Yunnan province, taking up 99% of the total coffee production in China. Yunnan coffee culture is the oldest in China since the introduction of coffee by a French missionary at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the beans are of the Arabica species that is much sought after in specialty coffee houses. Not only in terms of production but also coffee consumption is rising in line in Yunnan's capital Kunming. We conceive coffee culture shaped and driven by a web of interconnected actors, constituting an increasingly intricate global/regional network. Coffee culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century China has paved the way for the emergence and proliferation of new coffee experts operating in the vast area between coffee farmers and coffee consumers of the global coffee chain. These new jobs include barista's, coffee consultants, coffee entrepreneurs, coffee auctioneers, coffee machine makers, etc. In addition coffee expertise and related coffee business have shown a high level of fluidity and flexibility in China. The young generation of coffee entrepreneurs display a personal interest in the consumption of coffee and are opening coffee shops on their estate. Although for some coffee culture was present while growing up the majority of entrepreneurs start from scratch not having any connection with coffee whatsoever. They develop from consumer to prosumer to coffee expert. In other words production and consumption become entangled in the burgeoning coffee market in China. Our findings are based on an extensive literature study of both Chinese and English sources and recurrent ethnographic fieldwork in Kunming, Dali, Pu'er and Menglian since 2013.

## Introduction

China is indisputably and iconically represented as the land of tea. Not only is the tea plant indigenous to China but the tea in its many manifestations as cultural heritage, luxury beverage and quotidian drink is deeply entrenched in the cultural DNA of Chinese society (Ahmed et al. 2010; Cheng, S. et al. 2012; Huang & Hall 2007; Leung 2007; Xiao 2007). Within Chinese tea culture Simao city that has adopted the name of the famed tea leaf Pu'er is particularly renowned for its century old tea culture. However the prominent tea culture does not impede the development of a rapidly emerging coffee culture in China. China has joined other global Asian societies in developing a taste for coffee. Coffee -as a commodity and beverage- and the culture around it constitute such a rich, thick and multilayered topic that lends itself to manifold of studies in terms of global commodity, taste, connoisseurship, representation, main driver for city renewal, etc. (Elliott 2011; Manzo 2010; Nelson & Venkatraman 2008; Pendergrast 1999; Roseberry 2005; Tucker 2011; Yang, Hu et al. 2012). In

this article we limit ourselves to mapping the current dynamics of this development in China and Yunnan (Huang 2009) in particular by probing into the motives and practices of the newly emerged coffee experts, the main drivers behind the most recent trends and trending of coffee(houses) and consumers in coffeehouses. Our findings are based on literature study and repeated fieldwork in Kunming, Pu'er and Menglian, complemented by continuous netnography with key coffee actors. We conceive coffee culture as an intricate web of interconnected actors, giving rise to an increasingly interconnected global/regional network. Coffee culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has generated a range of highly coffee experts operating in the vast area between coffee farmers and coffee consumers of the global coffee chain. These new jobs include barista's, coffee consultants, coffee entrepreneurs, coffee auctioneers, coffee machine makers, etc. The new generation of coffee producers running coffee estates does not only aim to improve the quality of the coffee bean but they see huge potential in the consumption of coffee and coffee houses. Seduced by the coffee taste and culture at the persona level they open coffee shops and invent new forms of coffee-related events on their estate or elsewhere. Independent coffeehouse owners also cross professional boundaries by entering into roasting business, coffee education of all sorts, to growing coffee from local seeds. Last but not least coffee consumers do not only like to linger in coffee shops. Some are becoming prosumer, aiming to join the coffee trade in a further stage of their life. In present day China production and consumption of coffee (shops) are rapidly shaping and transforming coffee culture in China.

## Historical Overview of Coffee Industry

China's coffee history has colonial roots. It can be traced back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Mengzi became a treaty port in 1889 in the aftermath of the Sino-French war. This marks a new era for the province of Yunnan, which hitherto has been a hinterland due to its location in the Southwestern part of China, bordering Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand. With Mengzi as treaty port Yunnan has become a bridgehead connecting Indochina with other parts of China. Although the treaty port has been less documented, especially in the English language literature than the emblematic treaty port of Shanghai, Mengzi, too has undergone a 'gallic remake', manifested in train stations, trams, department stores and of course also coffee houses, representing the typical accoutrements of a 19<sup>th</sup> century French modern city (Huang 2009).

From the production perspective it was the French missionary Alfred Liétard (Tian Deneng in Chinese), who brought the first coffee sapling from Vietnam to Zhukula, a small village in Binchuan district in Yunnan Province in 1902. The crop was cultivated by the Wa and Lahu ethnic minorities (Balinieri 2015; Chen 2017). Since the production was small-scale; primarily serving the missionaries in their daily consumption and villagers on special occasions such as coffee drinking in wedding ceremonies, it remained a local practice and thus largely unnoticed by the Chinese in other parts of China and the rest of the world (Lu 2014).

Systematic coffee production in Yunnan started to off only after the installation of the People Republic of China in 1949. More than 5,000 coffee trees have been planted in 1950. At first Tipica and Bourbon constituted the predominant beans, followed by other types: Catimor; Mexico Caturra and to a lesser degree Robusta since the 1960s. Soviet experts, who were brought in to assist in China's modernization played a significant role in the development of coffee production. Recognizing the potential of coffee production in Yunnan they have been instrumental in the expansion of the coffee production and in diversifying the beans for export to the USSR (Balinieri 2015; Li, Yang, Li & Wang, 2007). During fieldwork we learned that in 1952 official agricultural technologists brought coffee from Dehong to the Lujiang valley in Baoshan. This marked the start of a thriving coffee industry in Lujiang valley. All these beans were exported to the Soviet Union.

In the first decade of the Reform period from 1988-1989 the local government experimented with coffee production. In 1992 UNDP assisted Chinese government in developing coffee industry and establishing Yunnan Coffee Processing Plant Company, at present still the largest coffee roasting and processing company in China. The UNDP supplied the company with advanced roasting and processing machines. The yielded coffee beans were exported to United States, Japan, Singapore and beyond.<sup>1</sup> At the same time Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan also developed coffee industry. The rapid development of the coffee industry in Yunnan is caused by a sustained support from the government, transnational companies and emergent domestic players. The provincial government of Yunnan has given assistance in expanding the planting area. Agricultural departments provided technology support to local farmers in order to improve productivity. Moreover it encouraged local actors to set up local coffee companies in Yunnan and introduce Yunnan coffee to the world. The most important domestic companies are Hougu (后谷); Zhukula (朱苦拉) and Yunlu (云潞). It also encouraged Yunnan coffee actors to participate in global exhibitions to improve the reputation of Yunnan Coffee (Lu Hu, 2014). Last but not least transnational companies like Nestlé and Starbucks have also noticed the potential of the Yunnan coffee industry and set up cooperation invigorating the coffee industry in size and in quality. The main coffee regions in Yunnan province are: Pu'er, Baoshan, Dehong and Lincang (Liu & Zhang 2011).

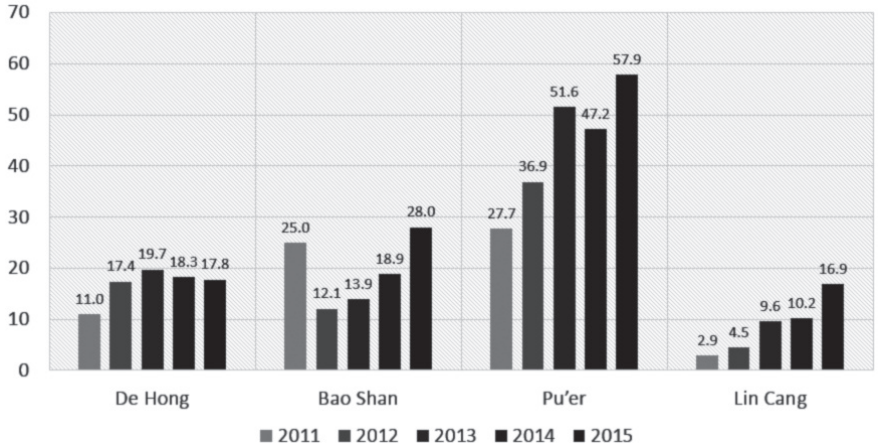
### Main coffee regions in Yunnan



Source: Authors' compilation

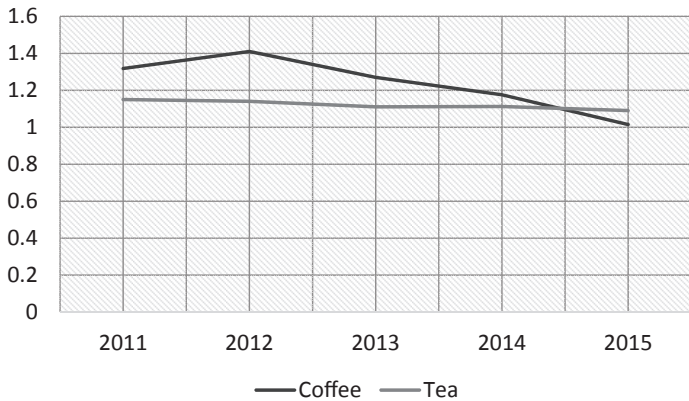
<sup>1</sup> The background materials came from the introduction website of Yunnan kafei chang (Yunnan Coffee Processing Plant): <http://www.yncoffee.cn/>.

**Production in the Main Coffee Regions 2011-2015 (in thousand tons)**



Source: The Annual Statistics Report of Yunnan 2011-2015.

**Annual growth rate of coffee and tea of Yunnan**



Source: The Annual Statistics Report of Yunnan 2011-2015.

Even though tea stands firmly as one of the most important cash crop in Yunnan the annual growth rate of coffee is dynamic and rapidly expanding. Tea is a traditional everyday-life beverage universally drunk by Chinese, while the consumption of the new beverage of coffee is more dynamic and subject to growth and setback. To illustrate the growth of rate of coffee is higher than tea from 2011 to 2014. The rapid development of the coffee industry has the support of the local and provincial government (Lou & Yu 2014.). At the micro level there is a saying that ‘tea is in the heart of the farmers, but coffee is in their purse’ (De Smet in Meyer 2014). Coffee is more profitable for farmers than tea.

**Coffee Making in Yunnan**

We conceive coffee making in Yunnan as including coffee planting, roasting coffee beans and making coffee drinks. Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century Yunnan has employed more than thousands of people

working in the coffee industry. Making coffee has surpassed making tea in terms of popularity and ‘coolness’.

### *TNCs and Coffee Plantations*

Among all the TNCs Nestlé has been the first to enter China. In 1997 it created a 20-hectares experimental farm in Mensong (Xishuangbana) as it was looking for a source of beans for its Nescafé plant in Dongguan (Guangdong). In 2002 Nestlé opened its Center in Pu’er City and started to reach out to villagers. They presented coffee saplings and cultivars to ethnic communities (like the Dai, the Lahu and others) and offered free training and soil analysis. The seeds were provided to the farmers without profit (Meyer 2014). Since its entry it has provided training and technical assistance to almost 9500 farmers in Yunnan (fieldnotes 2014). The Global Nescafé Plan, introduced in 2012 strives for sustainable growth and the improvement of farming practices by implementing the 4C (Common Code for Coffee Communities) certification. In 2013 Nestlé signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the government of Pu’er city to cooperate and improve local coffee-growing culture. During our fieldwork in the summer of 2014 we visited Nandaohé village, where the farmers work in both coffee and tea plantations. They have benefitted greatly from the cooperation with Nestlé.

Starbucks is a latecomer as it entered China in 2009 when it signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Yunnan Academy of Agricultural Science (YAAS) and Pu’er government (Barlow 2013). This MoU has among other things led to the opening of a Starbucks Farmer Support Center to promote Pu’er as a high-quality Arabica growing region. Starbucks also introduced the CAFE (Coffee and Farmer Equity) practices to improve the quality of the bean, increase the yield per hectare and reduce production costs per hectare (Gibson 2013). In 2012 Starbucks entered in a joint-venture with the Aini Group. The Aini Group although registered as American company is founded and run by Liu Minghui, a Chinese with Yunnan roots. He was involved in the coffee business since 1990s. As early as 1993 he ran a coffeehouse in Kunming. After he moved to the States he registered there Aini coffee company in 1997, specializing in coffee processing and roasting business. His dream was to launch Yunnan coffee on the American market. However he did not succeed in this endeavor. Since he did not make any profit for a whole year, he decided to return to Yunnan, where he entered in coffee plantation. He registered Aini agricultural company of Yunnan locally and rented 5000 mu fields for planting coffee, while at the same time, he developed animal husbandry. Since the joint-venture with Starbucks most coffee beans of Aini coffee Yunnan are sold to Starbucks, while in return Starbucks sources free coffee saplings to Aini coffee farmers. The joint-venture has improved the quality of the coffee management system and increased the quality and reputation of Yunnan coffee. In 2013 Aini coffee Yunnan announced that they will invest 6 billion yuan to establish a coffee manor in Pu’er, which includes a coffee processing factory, a lab for coffee genes, coffee cultural museum and other tourism constructions. During our fieldwork in the summer of 2014 we visited the coffee plantations of Aini Garden, while we also had a beef hotpot meal in their highly popular Aini restaurant. We were told that they achieved a cup score of 81.5/100, which qualifies as a specialty coffee according to world class standards. At present the total coffee production amounts to 150,000 tons, of which one-fifth or 30,000 tons coffee beans are processed in Yunnan. Yunnan has currently two nationally labeled coffee companies and ten provincially labeled coffee companies. The export of Yunnan coffee production amounts to 63,000 tons, an increase of 79.3% in comparison with the previous year. Despite the steady growth of coffee production, coffee plantations are insignificant when comparing with tea production. Tea production remains one of the most important cash crops of Yunnan province.



### *Rise of the 'Resource-Rich' Coffee Entrepreneurs*

Yunnan has the oldest coffee history in China. Some local coffee companies in Pu'er and Baoshan have more than three decades of experience of growing coffee on their lands. Usually local companies do preliminary processing of coffee beans and export or sell their green beans to Nestlé or Starbucks. However some young coffee entrepreneurs aspire to improve Yunnan coffee culture and increase the coffee quality.

G.J. is the third generation of Gaosheng Manor Coffee Company in Baoshan. Gaosheng Manor Coffee Company is a large company with a provenance dating back to the 1980s. It has more than 1500 mu coffee fields in Lujiang valley of Baoshan and Pu'er in 2017. Gaosheng produces more than 300 tons coffee beans a year and export these green beans mostly to Europe and United States. G.J., a third generation daughter is healthily ambitious young woman with a plan. She is 30 years-old and obtained MBA in United States in order to better run the family business. Instead of staying in the US she returned home, got married with a local person and took over family firm in Baoshan. She is not only a coffee entrepreneur but also a coffee aficionado. She genuinely loves coffee and wants to develop the coffee industry in China. In Lujiang valley (Baoshan) very few coffee entrepreneurs have interest in specialty coffee business. Most of them just plant coffee trees and sell green beans for the highest price. Moreover most of them do not like drinking coffee. G.J. is different as she applies new technology and management to plant specialty coffee trees. She also takes classes in coffee roasting and coffee making such as latte art and hand drip coffee. She said

*'I have great interest in coffee and really like the taste and fragrance of coffee since I was a child. Our family's business spans over a period of more than 30 years. I want to make Yunnan Coffee known to the world. I visited several countries to research their coffee plantations and coffee industry: Costa Rica, Brazil and Taiwan. The price of Yunnan coffee beans follows the international futures market and is not stable. It is a pity since the quality of Yunnan coffee is high and some coffee should be selected as specialty coffee. One day the price of Yunnan coffee will be as good as some other traditional famous coffee regions. I also want to run a coffee house.'*

L.Y.L. is a young female, originating from Pu'er. We met her in a coffeehouse in Kunming. Her family also runs a coffee company in Pu'er with thousands of mu ground for growing coffee. This coffee company has developed longstanding cooperation with Nestlé. At the moment she studies in a university in Kunming. When she graduates she aspires to take over the family coffee business. She often goes to Wen Lin Street to drink coffee and connects with coffeehouses owners. She said:

*'I know some owners here, to whom I recommend the coffee beans from my family. After graduating from University, I will go back to Pu'er and enter the coffee business. I dream to run a coffeehouse.'*

H.M. is the owner of the coffee house, called No.3 coffee at Wen Lin Street in Kunming. In addition to the coffeehouse he also has a coffee lab in the city center, where he engages in the art of roasting. In this lab he also organizes roasting workshop and training. He has two impressively professional roasting machines, imported from Japan. Selling roasted coffee beans is the dominant business of his enterprise. He regularly participates in coffee auctions in search for high-quality beans. He has become a very respected coffee entrepreneur in Kunming. Most coffee fans in Kunming would like to buy his roasted coffee beans. No.3 is no longer an ordinary coffeehouse. It

has become a famous coffee brand in the city. H.M. has participated in many international training sessions and obtained a wide range of certifications such as that from of SCAA at 2014.

*'At the beginning, I knew nothing about coffee. I just invested to No.3 coffee in 2011 to help out my friends. When the coffeehouse just opened I thought making coffee was very cool. It is like a performance behind the bar counter. So I started to learn how to make coffee. First I thought it was cool to do latte art. Then I moved to hand-drip coffee. Now I move on into roasting coffee beans. That requires experience and mastery. In order to well, I went to Qingdao and Shanghai for training and got several certifications from SCAA. I also like to go abroad to source hard-to-get beans. I just got back from Panama, where they have the best geisha-beans. I think it is good to promote Yunnan beans but they need to have top-quality. I don't believe in superficial product marketing. A true coffee master needs integrity in his search for the best beans and the best cup of coffee.'*

L.T. is a successful entrepreneur in Yunnan. He is the owner of two restaurants and one coffee shop. Besides running catering business, he is a successful barista and coffee master. He often participates in coffee cupping and Italian coffee competitions. He has many students, who are inspired by his charisma and fame. L.T. is passionate about food and drinks. After running successfully the restaurant Happy Kitchen, he became interested in coffee. He went to Shanghai to learn how to make coffee several times some fifteen years ago. Therefore the coffee served in Happy Kitchen is on average much better than in other restaurants of the city. He has not opened a coffeehouse until 'Morning Coffee' in 2015. By then he reckoned that the time was ripe to open a coffeehouse as more and more Kunming people were craving for a cup of good coffee. At the same time, more people could afford drinking expensive coffee and taking coffee training. L.T. began to open coffee making workshops in 2015. These workshops are open to all coffee aficionados -no matter whether they are high-school students or a 60 years-old lady keen in knowing more about coffee and making coffee. One day when both researchers were sipping coffee in Morning Coffee we witnessed the training sessions with these two students. The boy was about to leave for the US for study. He wanted to learn how to make a good cup of coffee before going abroad. His mother totally supported him drinking coffee as she thought coffee is healthier and classier than soft drinks. The senior lady is planning to open a tea and coffee house with a female friend after her retirement. Since she wants to serve coffee she needs the training. The fan group of L.T. is expanding. This year he opened another new restaurant in the city center. Because of his reputation Yunnan government hired L.T. to participate in promotional activities regarding Yunnan coffee, such as international conferences on Yunnan coffee Development and Yunnan Coffee Cupping. He is a key person in Yunnan's coffee development.

#### *From Coffee Aficionado to Idiosyncratic Coffee Expert*

X.J. used to be a civil servant. She did not grow up drinking coffee. One day when visiting a friend, she was so overwhelmed by the coffee sweet fragrance, ever since she was completely drawn into the realm of coffee tasting and making. In 2009 she resigned from her work and opened a small coffee workshop at home. She started to source different kinds of roasted beans and make coffee for friends at home. Slowly but surely she attracted customers. When she discovered that making coffee could be a livelihood, she took some training in making Italian latte and in roasting coffee beans. In 2011 she bought a roasting machine and rented a big apartment to organize her coffee workshops. On the side she is selling roasted coffee beans and coffee utensils mostly on internet through Taobao. Besides formal workshops X.J. also set up coffee drinking gatherings to mutually share coffee



making experiences. In September of 2017 when she has amassed sufficient experience and funding, she opened her coffee house in city center.

Y. is a soft spoken former white-collar employee in Changsha. Currently he rents a small place, where he gives coffee workshops in the north of Kunming. He left his former work and spent some time working in Yokohama, Japan. Since he likes coffee and Kunming the capital of Yunnan - the coffee region par excellence of China - he moved to this city. He does a lot of self-study and always keen on learning more and deeper about coffee. He is also interested in growing coffee plants himself. In his office he has three different types of coffee plants

*Kunming is a nice city, I really like here. Yunnan is the most important place of coffee. I want to stay here and make coffee. I do not have many customers but I roast coffee beans when customers ask for it. I have my own style of making coffee and do not like commercial coffee business.*

## **Consuming Coffee in Yunnan**

Before the 1990s coffee was not a common beverage. If Chinese people drank coffee it was instant coffee. A common view was that Italian coffee tastes bitter and drinking coffee in coffee houses too expensive, a luxury for the happy few. However with the double digit annual economic growth after the 1990s, a cup of coffee in a coffee house has become more accessible to an increasing group of people. In the new millennium especially but not exclusively youngsters in urban cities, also labeled as xiaozhi (小资) (Yu 2014) are embracing the consumption of coffee and their palate became equally sophisticated as their peer youngsters in other global cities. This has sparked the mushrooming of coffeehouses.

### *Coffee houses in Kunming*

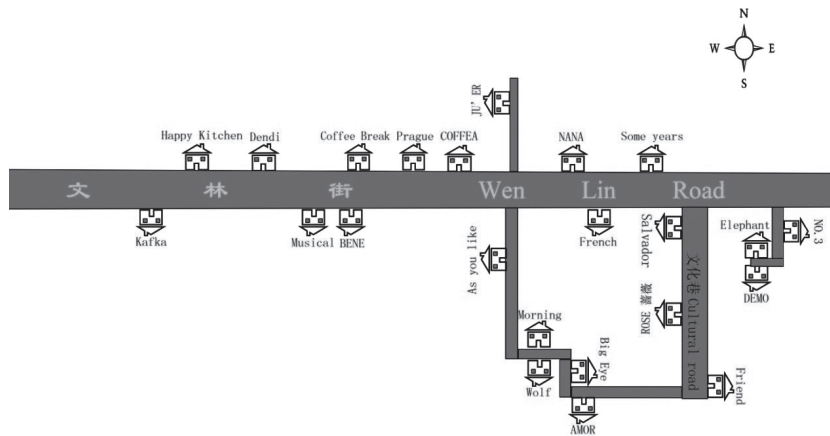
We did fieldwork in the Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province and more notably in Wen Lin Street. This street is located on the edge of Yunnan University campus in the city center and known for its vibrant night life. It is locally labeled “foreigners’ street” as the streetscape is dominated by Western coffee houses and bars, attracting young people in search for fun and adventure. It is also the best location for opening a coffee house. During fieldwork we identified busy Wen Lin Street area as having one dominant road and four alleys, totaling nearly 1600 meters. Wen Lin Street region has 23 coffee houses, some are bookshop-coffee houses; some are coffee-bars; some are restaurants –coffee but most are coffeehouses just serving coffee.

Several coffee houses have been established for over a decade and enjoy a favorable reputation in Kunming. Often their owners are of foreign descent, hailing from the US, France or South-Korea.

Salvador café was set up in 2004 by three Americans and a Japanese. At present Salvador has transformed into a well-known place to eat and to have coffee in Kunming. They serve American-inspired food based on the philosophy of social and ecological sustainability. They use local organic produce including Yunnan coffee beans. Not only do they hire and train employees of ethnic minorities background, they also set up NGOs to do reach out activities in the area of organic farming and other environmental issues (Flahive 2014). The French Café is the continental counterpart of Café Salvador. The owners consist of a French-Belgian couple and a local female entrepreneur. They specialize in French bread and pastries, while serving Yunnan coffee. Café Prague has also set up business for more than ten years. The Chinese owner updates the menu continuously in order to cater to the ever-changing taste of the customers. He has expanded the selection of coffee bean selection over the years including as specialty coffee beans from Ethiopia

or Columbia. Happy Kitchen is strictly speaking not a coffee house. As a restaurant serving pizza it offers high-quality coffee. As already mentioned the owner has become a reputed barista and coffee expert over the years.

More coffee shops have emerged with the third wave coffee trend. The most famed specialty coffee shop is No3, run by the before mentioned coffee entrepreneur H.M. Coffee Break is a Korean style coffeehouse, serving Italian coffee and Korean dessert. Students like to gather here for chatting and doing homework. Morning Coffee and Wolf Coffee are coffee houses offering specialty coffee and a small selection of breads. NANA is a tiny coffee house, that shares the shop space with hand-made leather product. The owner of NANA is enamored with coffee and adroit in hand-drip coffee. As specialty coffee houses they are pocket-size but very popular in this coffee neighborhood. Self-declared authentic coffee aficionados prefer these two coffee houses because they have professional barista's and high-quality coffee. They enjoy watching the hand-drip coffee ritual, that appeals to multiple senses. The sight of the elegant dripping ritual, the fragrance of the coffee, the cool-looking barista's, the peer group of young, aspiring and cool looking co-consumers, the elegant interior of the coffeehouse all these elements contribute to the total coffee(house) experience.



Source: Own compilation

### *Imaginations of Coffee (Culture)*

Coffee is not a mere commodity nor an everyday beverage. 'A cup of coffee' is an attitude, a way of living. It is a drink that demands connoisseurship of the user, while at the same time also sparking his or her imagination. Coffee drinking has also the potential to generate personal transformation. In February 2015 20 interviews<sup>2</sup> of respectively 10 females and males were conducted in 10 different locally owned coffeehouses<sup>3</sup> in Kunming. All coffee houses are locally owned, including the chain café *Sculpting in time*. The interviewees belong to the generation of the

<sup>2</sup> The interviews were conducted in Chinese by Li Jing Jing

<sup>3</sup> French café (2), Five Miles Around café (2), Downstair café (2), Mellower café (2), Juan'er café (2), Prague café (1), Coffee break (2), *Sculpting in town* (2), Elephant Books (3), No 3 café (2)

1980s and 1990s. These Chinese millennials belong to the generation of the one-child policy, growing up in an increasingly affluent Chinese urban culture and society. In terms of occupation they are white collar workers (bank clerk, graphic designer), students, a PhD student philosophy, and barista and (future) coffee house owners.

Most interviewees are precise and meticulous when discussing taste, smell and aftertaste. Most are captivated by the aroma of the coffee, followed by taste and mouth feel. The smell is described as 'fragrant', 'having base notes', resembling fresh fruits on fruit trees, as an 'active smell of acidity floating from the cup' and as a mix of caramel and the fragrance of tropical fruits. The taste of coffee is appreciated for the bitterness, the acidity, the burning taste (of the roasting process) and to a lesser extent the sweetness and the milky taste. As for aftertaste features such as 'smoothness', 'lingering' have been invoked numerous times. The image of coffee drinkers is constructed in an overwhelmingly positive way. Coffee drinkers live a fast and hectic life and thus crave for a place where they feel comfortable and relaxed. *'Like coffee, they are steady, calm and focused'*. The act of drinking coffee stands for a positive attitude towards life: enjoyment and passion for life. They are living a 'natural' (authentic) kind of life. They are artistically inclined young people. One recurrent theme is the quietness and the solitude that coffee drinkers seek in the act of drinking coffee (in a coffeehouse). *'If alone in café, I enjoy my coffee quietly, while reading some books'*. According to one respondent, coffee drinking people can be divided in two groups: *'Those who prefer a strong thick taste of coffee come from natural science background, those who prefer single bean coffee or light taste of coffee are from social science background'*. Only a handful respondents voiced neutral or critical remarks. One differentiate coffee drinkers between two subgroups: people putting on an act and the real coffee lovers. One interlocutor attributes no special meaning to the act of coffee drinking, as he does that either to lose weight or when having business meetings at work.

Drinking coffee did not come natural as most have taken the habit to drink coffee following the advice of a family member, friend or from magazines and on internet. The reasons for drinking coffee at the onset were rather instrumental such as using coffee as a medicine against fatigue or to lose weight rather than genuinely appreciating the taste and fragrance of a cup of coffee. However over time their gustatory connoisseur taste has evolved and fine-tuned as part of an ongoing learning process. Some have expanded their social network through networking with fellow coffee lovers in real life and on line. All respondents were eager to share their coffee knowledge and preference, discerning and naming coffee qualities with ease and expertise. When describing the taste as exotic fruit, still hanging on the tree reflects a deep involvement in the third coffee movement, where this new coffee lexicon is being developed and used.

#### *The Coffee (House) Dream: Aspiring to Become Coffee House Owner*

The coffee house or the spatial context of coffee drinking constitutes a core part of the third wave coffee culture (Roseberry 2005). Coffee houses are appreciated for its 'specific' ambiance: it is relatively small place with a subdued décor having sofa and soft background music. Also the fragrance of coffee is important. The ideal image of a coffee house is a cozy small place with few people, reading books, sitting in a comfortable sofa or gazing outside the window, doing nothing, while enjoying the sunshine. Being solitary, and having the possibility of doing nothing are seen as desirable 'activities' in a coffee house. Coffee houses in China, in contrast to Oldenburg's third place (1991) in the West do not necessarily represent a 'home away from home', where thick ties are being fostered, maintained and developed. It represents a quiet haven for personal enjoyment detached from societal noise and social encroachments into one's life by others. In terms of decoration, cafés are valued for the subdued style, soft background music and a limited number of small tables.

Emptiness, quietness, space, time, slowness and sunshine constitute the more intangible but indispensable properties of a ‘nice-and-comfy’ coffee house. These features contrast sharply with Chinese restaurants and teahouses, more well-known and appreciated for the *hot and noisy* (热闹) atmosphere.

In the coffee workshops run by L.T. and H.M., most participants dream to become a barista or opening a coffee house. They enjoy making beautiful coffee and drinking different kinds of coffee. R. is working as a barista in Morning Coffee and Happy Kitchen, both owned by L.T. She is only 22 years-old but she has been working and learning making coffee for three years in Happy Kitchen. She is committed in improving her skills in making hand-drip coffee and practices several times a day, while inviting friends to taste.

*‘I like coffee: drinking and making coffee. I drink regularly and I have access to good single coffee beans to practice my making-coffee skills. Making hand-drip coffee is difficult. I still need to work on my sense of water temperature and timing. Sometimes, I totally fail in making a decent cup of coffee.’*

Y. is a teenage high-school going girl. Yet she is a student of H.M. in No.3 Coffee. She feels great pleasure in making Italian latte. She practices incessantly to create nice patterns.

*‘I want to be a barista one day and make beautiful Italian latte. Personally, I like drinking Italian coffee best, so I chose the class of making Italian latte’.*

Besides formal training some coffee aficionados do part-time work in coffee houses. They purchase coffee roasting machines in order to practice roasting coffee at home.

## **Some Reflections as Provisional Conclusion**

China (and Yunnan in particular) is indisputably and iconically (re)presented as the land of tea. Not only is the tea plant indigenous to China but the tea in its many manifestations as cultural heritage, luxury beverage and quotidian drink is deeply embedded in Chinese culture and society. Yet coffee culture has taken root in China. If we conceive coffee culture as a web of interconnection among coffee actors, who are active on the coffee chain with at both extreme ends the producers and consumers, then coffee culture in Yunnan is vibrant and making significant progress in coffee production since the 1990s and ten years ago for the transition from second to third wave coffee houses in the capital Kunming. In the process of becoming an important coffee culture center in China, we witness novel and interesting societal changes and developments. It is clear that the dreams and business projects of coffee aficionado’s render the boundaries between producers and consumers increasingly blurred. Apart from the TNCs a new generation of coffee producers have emerged, keen on improving both the quality of the bean as well as coffee making rituals. In advancing Yunnan coffee they aspire the making of a distinctive Chinese coffee identity. Some coffee barista’s actively promote Yunnan coffee, while others still prefer foreign premium beans. Specialty coffee has been warmly embraced by a wide range of people from different age category, men and women, professional background, etc. These coffee actors act as intermediators between the customer and coffee producing companies. They inform and teach coffee users the taste, the place and the comprehensive coffee culture lifestyle (Manning 2012; Manzo 2010, 2014). These consumers mostly but not exclusively millennials or xiaozhi (小资) are eager to learn about the taste and to enter the realm of coffee culture. The act of drinking coffee or to make the decision to take up

this beverage of ‘postmodernity’ (Roseberry 2005) by students, hipsters, cultural entrepreneurs and white collar workers in China for sure serves as a marker of an aspirational lifestyle (Yu 2014) or performing a Chinese kind of individualism (Henningesen 2012). The process of imbibing coffee is closely linked to the place of consumption, namely the coffee house. As Merry White (2012) elegantly argued in ‘Coffee life in Japan’ where coffeehouses serve as sanctuaries of recluse and offering the overactive city dwellers to indulge in doing nothing (focused). To conclude, in all areas along the coffee chain -production, processing, roasting, selling, marketing, schooling, coffee related business- the Chinese are advancing and innovating a new coffee-scape. Coffee culture has finally taken root in China, the tea country par excellence. However it has not come into full bloom. If that takes place, coffee culture will not replace tea culture. It will mean that coffee, in a similar way as tea, will become a ‘cup of humanity’.

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