

Research on Cultural Consumption of Urban Elderly Groups Under the Multimodal “New Media+”—Illustrated by the Example of Shanghai

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In recent years, the provision of high-quality elderly care services for an ageing society has become more important in China's social developments. As an indispensable part of the process, meeting the spiritual life needs of the elderly groups has received increasing attention. Taking Shanghai, an international metropolis with diverse forms of cultural consumption and high cultural consumption demand, as an example, this paper examines the modalities of combining coffee culture with cultural consumption of middle and old age groups, taking coffee consumption of old age groups as a research object and finding that: Firstly, coffee consumption combined with new media presents multimodal coffee consumption, which promotes the multi-level popularity of coffee culture. Secondly, coffee consumption can meet the spiritual needs of Shanghai middle-aged and elderly groups such as socialization and the inheritance of coffee culture to a certain extent. The cultural consumption of coffee consumption provides an important reference for the international elderly care service in Shanghai.

Keywords: new media, multimode, elderly groups, cultural consumption, Shanghai, coffee

Introduction

The advent of an ageing society has made “how to age” an important issue for the development of contemporary and even future Chinese society. To provide material life security for the elderly, to enrich their spiritual needs and to build a healthy and diversified pension system is an important embodiment of the superiority of the socialist system and the promotion of our traditional “filial piety” culture. At present, with the steady improvement of China's economic development level, the material life needs of the elderly groups are basically satisfied, and the spiritual and cultural needs gradually appear. The spiritual life of the elderly groups in China is basically divided into three types: (1) Some old people help the next generation to bring up their grandchildren, busy with household chores resulting in less spiritual entertainment life. As a result of the different living habits between generations, different parenting styles and other contradictions, leading to family breakdown cases are common; (2) some live independently and do not need to help raising children, and mostly meet spiritual needs in the form of travel, playing mahjong and square dancing. However, in recent years, square dancing has led to a lot of conflicts between the elderly and the youth, and “square dancer” has become a derogatory term in a sense; (3) the life of widows and orphans is mainly home-based, with few social

activities and a lack of spiritual needs. The spiritual life of the elderly is greatly influenced by “space” and “modality”. The exploration of multimodal cultural consumption to meet the spiritual needs of the elderly has gradually become one of hot topics in society. Cultural consumption refers to people’s consumption of spiritual and cultural goods and services to meet their spiritual and cultural needs, and generally focuses on the quality cultivation of youth and the development of popular culture. The cultural consumption of the elderly groups is less studied and mostly concentrated on the study of public cultural consumption patterns. For example, encouraging elderly publishing to promote intergenerational communication and wisdom transfer (Yu & Feng, 2019); in the process of cultural consumption of traditional arts such as cross talks and operas, elderly people play the dual role of consumers and inheritors (Wang, Hu, & Yan, 2015); social interactions such as square dance promote consumption upgrades for the elderly (He, She, & Wang, 2021). However, similar studies are mostly trapped by objective factors such as the economic conditions, health status, cultural literacy, and restricted spatial resources of the elderly group. With the high degree of integration between the Internet and social life, technology and aging should not be separated, and older people should not become an island in the online society. At a time when the practice of cultural consumption space is being extended from traditional space to innovative, experiential, virtual and temporary space (Dai, Na, & Zhao, 2021), the participation of the elderly groups, who are the disadvantaged groups of the Internet society, in the integrated development of online and offline cultural consumption should be promoted. The creation of “new media+” multimodal cultural pension system can meet the needs of the spiritual life of the elderly groups at multiple levels and improve their sense of well-being.

This paper takes Shanghai, an international metropolis with diverse cultural consumption patterns and high cultural consumption demands, as an example, and examines the feasibility and problematic points of combining coffee culture with cultural consumption of middle-aged and elderly people, and explores a new path for exploring “new media+” modern urban cultural aging, providing a reference for exploring the silver economy and international elderly services in Shanghai.

The Origin and Development of Shanghai Coffee Culture

General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed that “People’s cities are built by the people, and people’s cities are for the people”, and hoped that Shanghai would “create a new situation in building people’s cities”. Focusing on meeting people’s diversified and multi-level needs for a better life, the city will provide universal and balanced basic public services, substantially increase the supply of high-quality and internationalized education, medical care, pensions, cultural tourism, sports and other quality resources and systems, and promote the construction of a 15-minute living circle. Shanghai has a large base of elderly people. According to Statistical Information on Monitoring the Elderly Population and Ageing Business in Shanghai in 2020, by the end of 2020, the elderly population in Shanghai aged 60 and above is 5,334,900, accounting for 36.1% of the population. An important task for Shanghai as an international metropolis is to build a cultural retirement atmosphere with a combination of traditional filial culture and modern technology, which can be a crucial manifestation of Shanghai’s cultural soft power.

The Import of Coffee to Shanghai

Coffee had been developed in the West over the past hundred years and had become a necessity in the daily life of Westerners. It was officially introduced to China in the mid-19th century with the opening of

Shanghai. At first, the Englishman J. Lewellyn sold coffee at the Old TakKee Pharmacy when coffee was called “cough syrup” by the Shanghainese who were not used to the taste of coffee. The increase in the number of Westerners in the Concession stimulated the demand for coffee, and after the opening of the first “coffee room” in Shanghai in 1860 in the renovated Hotel Lichard, cafes sprang up on the streets of Shanghai. As an original culture, coffee brought a multitude of opportunities to Chinese businessmen. In 1935, Zhang Baocun opened the first Chinese coffee shop in Shanghai, Desheng Coffee House, in the then Jing’an Temple Road (now near Tongren Road and West Nanjing Road). By 1946, there were more than 500 coffee shops, including cafes, Western restaurants and hotels which served coffee. Coffee took root in Shanghai and became one of the symbols of the city. *The 1910 Shanghai Guide* listed “coffee” as one of the items tourists must experience when visiting Shanghai¹. Featuring fashionable drinks and personalized spaces, coffee shops not only attracted foreigners, but also became a place for entertainment and work as to some Shanghai citizens, especially for intellectuals, politicians and businessmen of the time. After China’s Liberation, the former Desheng Coffee Company became the state-run Shanghai Coffee Factory. Its product, “Shanghai Brand Coffee” in tin cans, sold well throughout Shanghai and carried memories and passion for coffee of several generations of Shanghainese. In the 1960s, the cost of traditional coffee was high, and Shanghai introduced a new drink at this time—“coffee tea”, which was sugar cubes made by grinding leftover coffee beans into fine powder, spreading layers of powdered sugar, and then drying and pressing them. The method to drink is only to pour boiling water and put a cube of “coffee tea” into a cup, which is similar to instant coffee. The low cost of “coffee tea” met the needs of ordinary Shanghai citizens for coffee to a certain extent. In the absence of professional coffee equipment, Shanghai people would wrap the coffee powder in gauze and then put it into a pot to boil. In order to get a better taste, some people would filter the coffee through a filter paper again after it was brewed. As an imported product and a luxury symbol, coffee developed a popular culture in Shanghai and satisfied the spiritual and cultural needs of the citizens. Shanghai citizens have gradually localized it through a variety of production methods.

Localization of Coffee Consumption in Shanghai

In 1989, Nescafe launched the era of instant coffee in China. Its well-known TV slogan: “Nescafe, it tastes great!” sparked an unprecedented interest of Chinese people in this new product, instant coffee. The convenience, low cost and ease of use of instant coffee made it a maximum integration into people’s daily lives, and coffee became a fashionable product in the homes of ordinary people. In 2000, the first Starbucks opened in Shanghai, creating a history of Starbucks, which started to make profit after 21 months of opening, and this reflected the great potential of Shanghai coffee market. In 2001, the number of Starbucks stores in Shanghai at a fast speed increased to more than 40, and its consumer group was mainly positioned in the urban white-collar group who pay attention to enjoyment, leisure, modern taste. Starbucks coffee has gone beyond the function of coffee to become a carrier of style (Li, 2011). Coffee and space have been effectively combined to meet the cultural needs of the public.

As a global metropolis, Shanghai is also an international leader in terms of cultural consumption demand. *The 2020 International Cultural Metropolis Evaluation Report*, jointly published by Shanghai Jiaotong University and the University of Southern California, shows that Shanghai ranks eighth in the overall

¹ Zhang Sirui, Drinking coffee in Shanghai was a must for the tourists in 1910 (in Chinese). Retrieved from https://m.thepaper.cn/api_prom.jsp?contid=12106876, *THE PAPER*, 2021-4-13.

assessment of 50 international cultural metropolises, with the total number of teahouses and cafes ranking first². Like the traditional Chinese beverage tea, coffee, an imported product, has become part of the residents' lives. Moreover, Shanghai has a wide range of cafes and a diverse cafe business structure. Although Starbucks has the largest number of stores in Shanghai, standardized large brand chains are not the ruling components of Shanghai cafes. According to Meituan, a China's leading life service e-commerce platform, over 60% of cafes in Shanghai are independent cafes. Independent cafes are known for their individuality, unique decoration style and different control of coffee quality of each shop. The number of cafe chains meets the business needs of Shanghai's urban development, while the diversity of independent cafes creates a "third space" for Shanghai citizens to meet their social and cultural needs.

Multimodal Coffee Consumption Culture Among Older People

Shanghai has become a veritable coffee capital of China with its huge coffee consumption market and high per capital consumption level. In Shanghai, coffee consumption is more than a symbol of young people. Middle-aged and elderly group have been also important forces in the development of Shanghai coffee culture in recent times. Through the study of their coffee consumption channels, consumption psychology and other aspects we found that: Firstly, online consumption has contributed to the domestication of coffee consumption. In the 2015-2017, Taobao Tmall Coffee Consumer Age Distribution shows that the proportion of consumers aged 36-50 is increasing year by year and in the two categories of "Urban Silver Hair" and "Middle Class", the number of consumers who consume coffee beans with high frequency is more than the number of those with low frequency³. It can be seen that the middle-aged and elderly groups consume coffee at home more for cultural needs. China's middle-aged and elderly groups promote their coffee consumption through new media such as online shopping. Secondly, the older group is more likely to make offline coffee consumption than the younger group. While coffee consumption of the young is concentrated in coffee chains, supermarkets and "coffee+" stores with coffee consumption services, Shanghai's middle-aged and older age groups are more interested in boutique coffee shops with a long history and unique flavor. KAISLING CAKE, for example, has a history of 80 years and is not only the meeting place where Wang Jiazhi waits for Mr. Yi in the famous scene from the movie *Lust, Caution* (2007), but also bears the memories and sentiments of many Shanghainese. The shop is quaint and elegantly decorated with antique bronze ceiling fans and European-style cage lights, full of old Shanghai mood. HongBaoShi is located at 625 Wanhangu Road, Jing'an District, and boasts one of Shanghai's most classic snacks. Inside the shop, old people sit around drinking coffee and eating snacks. In the book called *Shanghai's Flowers and Snow*, Chen Danyan⁴ writes,

Have you ever seen those old gentlemen with "white hair"? They have primly combed hair, fine bowler hats, shiny leather shoes, and elegant manners like a gentleman. The last period of their lives creates the scenery of HongBaoShi. If you enter that shop, you'll notice these old gentlemen unawares.

The century-old DeDaXiCai Restaurant is also an old Shanghai cafe. Every morning, the shop's many elderly patrons push the heavy revolving wooden doors and wait patiently for a pot of freshly brewed coffee.

² Jiang Peng, Cultural landmark empowerment: What is Shanghai's cultural soft power? (in Chinese). *WENHUI DAILY*, 2021-1-8(5).

³ Source: 2018 China Coffee Industry Insight Report, CBN Data First Financial Business Data Center.

⁴ Chen Danyan, female, a member of the Chinese Writers' Association and syndic of the Shanghai Writers' Association.

The coffee consumption culture of the elderly group in Shanghai is not so much a consumption of drinks as a remembrance of the times and a cultural sentiment.

In addition, the elderly group can regain happiness of life from coffee socializing. One of the great dilemmas of the elderly population is the feeling of loneliness. According to the survey among the elderly in Shanghai, 15% of them “are deeply troubled when meeting difficulties”, 7.3% of them feel nervous and afraid, and 8.3% of them often feel lonely (Zhang, Dong, Tang, & Fang, 2002). This is mainly due to the lack of companionship and the fact that their recreational life is too simple. Nowadays, the forms of coffee socialization are becoming more and more diversified. The International Hotel lobby coffee bar, an iconic Shanghai landmark that retains an old Shanghai feel, is often filled with elderly cafe goers. Its review section of Dianping, a China’s leading consumer review website, mentions that the lobby at tea time is basically filled with Shanghai’s uncles and aunties chatting and gathering. What’s more, a special offer from IKEA in Shanghai, “From Monday to Friday, consumers can exchange their membership cards for free coffee”, has attracted many senior citizens. Coffee consumption provides a space for social activities for the elderly and alleviates their mental isolation. Older people do not just consume coffee one way, they also increase their participation and gain sense of well-being in the process. In front of Shanghai Hongqiao Center Garden on Hongqiao Road, there is a special public service cafe called “Yi Coffee”. The baristas and waiters are all middle-aged and elderly volunteers, and the cafe has received a lot of support and appreciation from the public since it opened. The cafe relies on the revenue generated from the cafe to support the charity work of helping the elderly, providing advice and services for the elderly. Although they are not paid for their work, learning new skills and participating in social activities largely improve their sense of well-being.

Conclusions

After more than a century of evolution and development, imported coffee has become a unique and charming part of the regional culture with distinctive characteristics of Shanghai. Living in a city steeped in history and culture, Shanghai’s middle-aged and elderly groups will continue to be an important part of coffee consumption today and in the future. The advent of an aging society has increased the demand for the construction of spiritual and cultural life of the elderly in Shanghai, and cultural old-age care has become an important component of Shanghai’s urban soft power. Relevant departments and enterprises should further explore the spiritual and cultural needs of middle-aged and elderly people, combine with new media, realize multimodal coffee consumption, and provide new ways for cultural old-age care.

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