Gentility in Drinking:
Chinese Intellectuals and Tea/Coffee Culture in
Republican Shanghai (1920s-1930s)

by

Zhuyuan Han

Critical Asian Humanities
Duke University

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Critical Asian Humanities
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The coffeehouse emerged as an unprecedented popular leisure spot in Shanghai during the 1920s, which always conjured up an aura of western exoticism. Accordingly, drinking coffee became prevalent among elite men and women who advocated a modern lifestyle, especially cultural intellectuals, and coffeehouses were soon favored by many writers and artists for social gatherings. Such a kind of gathering resembled the phenomenon of “salon” indigenous to the seventeenth century France that Habermas regarded as the most typical form of civil culture cultivated by public spheres such as cafés and restaurants. Meanwhile, the teahouse (茶館 chaguan), which had long functioned as a popular place for social gatherings in China that intellectuals sat together and communicated on literary topics or political issues, although despised by some Republican reformists as backward ill tradition, had experienced some self-transformation to cope with the rapidly developing urban environment. The traditional habit of drinking tea of Chinese people was refreshed with a modern connotation, and the stimulated “tea talk meeting” (茶話會 chahua hui) phenomenon then prevailed among Republican cultural elites, which was the combination of the tradition of the genteel gathering (雅集 yaji) among Chinese literati and the introduced European salon culture, and was vital to inspiring literary and cultural productions.
In the meantime, “tea” and “coffee” became important cultural symbols, with the actual gatherings that happened in teahouses and coffeehouses extended to the print media. Two best examples are the “Coffee Seats” (咖啡座 kafeizuo) column appeared on Shenbao 申報 in the late 1920s and the journal entitled Literature and Art Tea Talk (文艺茶话 Wenyi chahua) first produced in the early 1930s, where articles on literary and artistic topics were solicited and cultural elites could participate another form of gathering in an imagined public cultural space. The physical and virtual gatherings shared some highly similar essences, and both were crucial to the formation of collectivity and identification among cultural intellectuals.

Referring to Shanghai’s city historical archives, memoirs and diaries of writers and artists, newspapers and literary journals, and such notions as “public sphere,” “structure of feeling,” and “imagined communities,” this thesis is going to investigate how the teahouse and coffeehouse as both physical and imagined social spaces activated significant cultural implications and were closely related to the identity politics of cultural intellectuals in Republican Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s. I regard the teahouse/coffeehouse as important public sites that accommodated multilayered elements of cultural modernity and “tea/coffee” as conspicuous cultural symbols manifested in literature and popular culture.
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Acknowledgements

I am more than grateful to my advisor Professor Carlos Rojas for his unwavering support and constant intellectual inspirations during my precious two years at Duke. His erudition in Chinese cultural modernity broadened the scope of my project, and his meticulous attitude towards academic research also left a strong impact on me.

I would like to show my thankfulness to Professor Eileen Chow and Professor Ralph Litzinger for serving on my committee. Their timely feedbacks and genuine advice had smoothed the revision and polishing work of the final draft of my thesis.

I want to acknowledge my appreciation to the faculty and stuff of the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Duke University, whose dedicate efforts make the CAH program outstanding. I have spent numerous wonderful moments at Perkins Library, and I am indebted a lot to the friendly stuff there for their constant assistance to my academic needs.

Besides, I’d like to thank my classmates at Duke and intimate friends in China. Yinzi, Xiaoting, and Sheng, I am more than fortunate to have generous and truehearted old friends like you, with whom I can always share tears and laughter.

I am also obliged to my boyfriend, Qiwei, whose spiritual support and companion relieve my loneliness and make me feel at home when I am in the United States.

Last but not least, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and sincerest affection to my beloved parents, who always lay unconditional trust on me and offered me solace when I was suffering from frustrations. I have been struck each day by thinking of how lucky I am for having such wonderful parents as you. I can never be who I am today without the purest
love and the most considerate care you have provided me since I was a little baby who was barely able to speak a word.
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1. Introduction

On February 15, 1936, the first issue of *Liu Yi* (六藝 Six Arts) published a black and white comic painting by Lu Shaofei 魯少飛, a famous Chinese comics artist and editor. The painting was named “Picture of the Tea Talk of the Literary Field” (文壇茶話圖 wentan chahua tu), and the caption below it introduced some of the participants of the tea talk. According to the caption, the one sitting on the master seat was Shao Xunmei 邵洵美, with Mao Dun 茅盾 sitting at his left and Yu Dafu 郁達夫 at his right. Lin Yutang 林語堂 was the man with cigar in his mouth and was situating himself near Lao She 老舍. Zhang Ziping 張資平 was sitting beside Bing Xin 冰心 and Bai Wei 白薇. Others included Hong Shen 洪深, Fu Donghua 傅東華, Lu Xun 魯迅, Ba Jin 巴金, Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, Du Heng 杜衡, Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, Lu Yan 魯彦, Shi Zhecun 施蛰存, Ling Shuhua 凌叔華, Mu Shiying 穆時英, Liu Na’ou 劉吶鷗, and several other prominent celebrities in the literary and artistic circles.
The painting represented the tea talk meeting joined by a large group of writers in 1930s Shanghai. It constructed an aura of gentility and elegance by depicting the gathering scene of the most notable cultural figures in China thereat belonging to different literary and artistic schools. Although Lu’s painting was merely an imaginary work, it did capture the social reality to some extents, because at the time of the 1920s and 1930s, cultural gatherings associated with tea and coffee drinking enjoyed prevalence.
among cultural intellectuals in Shanghai, and the teahouse and coffeehouse were also frequented by those intellectuals as an ideal place for sociality and carrying out conversations on literature and art.

The collective activity among cultural intellectuals is related to the question of gentility, and in China, the tradition of genteel gathering (雅集 yaji) had long existed and had a great impact on the formation of the literate culture. In his monograph, Hu Jianjun traces the emergence and genealogy of the genteel gathering among literati in pre-modern China, from pre-Qin to Northern Song Dynasty.¹ He indicates that the rituals of the genteel gathering had matured up to the Northern Song, which was embodied by the gathering in Xi Yuan 西園 hosted by a cluster of renowned literati thereat such as Su Shi 苏轼. His analysis shows that genteel gathering constituted a significant part of the cultural life of Chinese literati and that some symbolic gathering activities such as the Xi Yuan gathering evolved as an important symbol for cultural imaginary which promoted the production of various literary writings and artistic works. Luan Meijian, while focusing particularly on the modern period, also studies the gathering activity of Chinese

literati from the perspective of the formation of a modern literary association, the Southern Society (南社 Nanshe). He investigates the way in which members of the Southern Society inherited the long-lasting tradition of literati’s genteel gathering while infusing it with modern connotations, and he argues that the collectivity of the association was engendered by the transformative rituals of traditional genteel gathering. Similarly, when interrogating the development of modern Chinese literary communities, Michel Hockx pays attention to the continuation of traditional conventions of genteel gathering and its relationship with modern Chinese literary practice. Besides, Fei Dongmei’s research also deals with the phenomenon of gatherings among Chinese cultural intellectuals in the early twentieth century. Although she emphasizes more on the introduction and prevalence of the salon culture from Europe, she discusses briefly the evolution of the convention of genteel gathering in China and how it impacted literati’s cultural life in modern times.

If we delve deeper into the cultural tradition of genteel gathering, it can be perceived that drinking constitutes a significant part of the gathering among Chinese literati, which were well recorded in many cultural works or historical records accounting for various literary gatherings. Tea and wine were two major preferred drinking products when literati were gathering in ancient China. According to Bret Hinsch, up to the Tang Dynasty, tea had substituted wine to become the most preferred beverage when gentlemen were enjoying cultured activities.\(^5\) Laikwan Pang, on the other hand, focuses on Chinese intellectuals’ experience of coffee drinking in the Republican period. Her study reveals how consuming coffee and attending café assisted the identification of young intellectuals, and how the café became a space that fulfilled Chinese intellectuals’ imagination of modernity in 1920s Shanghai.\(^6\) Besides, Hu Yuehan notes in his article that in Republican Shanghai, the teahouse and coffeehouse, along with the restaurant, functioned as the main venue for the development of intellectuals’ social networking and collective identification.\(^7\)

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Both the relationship between cultural gatherings and the collectivity of Chinese intellectuals and the correlation between the experience of tea or coffee drinking and Chinese intellectuals have captured researchers’ eyes. However, neither the combining study of intellectuals’ cultural gatherings, their identity formation, and the tea and coffee culture embedded in their cultural practices nor the investigation of the cultural gatherings characterized by “tea” and “coffee” in both actual space and virtual print media, has attracted scholarly inquiries. To fill in this gap, my project approaches the question of the identity politics of Chinese cultural intellectuals through interrogating their collective activities appeared in the teahouse and coffeehouse associated with tea/coffee drinking, and at the same time, their cultural practices manifested within the print media as a way of an extended version of cultural gatherings in the public space in reality.

The coffeehouse emerged as an unprecedented popular leisure spot in Shanghai during the 1920s, which always conjured up an aura of western exoticism. Accordingly, drinking coffee became prevalent among elite men and women who advocated a modern lifestyle, especially cultural intellectuals, and coffeehouses were soon favored by many writers and artists for social gatherings. Such a kind of gathering resembled the phenomenon of “salon” indigenous to the seventeenth century France that Habermas regarded as the most typical form of civil culture cultivated by public spheres such as cafés and restaurants. Meanwhile, the teahouse (茶館 chaguan), which had long
functioned as a popular place for social gatherings in China that intellectuals sat together and communicated on literary topics or political issues, although despised by some Republican reformists as backward ill tradition, had experienced some self-transformation to cope with the rapidly developing urban environment. Many teahouses in Republican Shanghai also embraced modern and Avant-garde aesthetic ideologies as coffeehouses did, and they were also welcoming sites for gatherings in many intellectuals’ eyes. The traditional habit of drinking tea of Chinese people was refreshed with a modern connotation, and the stimulated “tea talk meeting” (茶話會 chahua hui) phenomenon then prevailed among Republican cultural elites, which was the combination of the tradition of the genteel gathering among Chinese literati and the introduced European salon culture, and was vital to inspiring literary and cultural productions.

In the meantime, “tea” and “coffee” became important cultural symbols, with the actual gatherings that happened in teahouses and coffeehouses extended to the print media. Two best examples are the “Coffee Seats” (咖啡座 kafeizuo) column appeared on Shenbao 申报 in the late 1920s and the journal entitled Literature and Art Tea Talk (文艺茶话 Wenyi chahua) first produced in the early 1930s, where articles on literary and artistic topics were solicited and cultural elites could participate another form of gathering in an imagined public cultural space. The physical and virtual gatherings
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This thesis consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, I trace the historical development of the culture of tea and the teahouse in China and the emergence of coffee and the coffeehouse in the modern period. I try to prove that tea drinking has long associated with refined cultural connotations, and tea was constructed as a significant cultural icon crucial to the development of Chinese civilization. The teahouse, once provided an ideal venue for people to enjoy tea, degraded to a notorious place that embraced social degeneration since the early modern period, and its popularity among literati was gradually replaced by the newly emergent coffeehouse. I also try to demonstrate that although the teahouse and tea drinking were disparaged as backward cultural leftovers by some progressive intellectuals, some teahouses in Shanghai achieved
self-transformation and made themselves as attractive places for urbanites to enjoy leisure time as coffeehouses that invoked imaginations on Western modernization.

In the second chapter, I discuss the emerging kind of social gatherings of writers and artists in the teahouse and coffeehouse and the associated cultural significances, as well as their influences on Chinese cultural modernity, unraveling the way in which they anchored both the French salon culture and the traditional Chinese genteel gathering among cultural elites and had cultivated particular cultural phenomena and productions. I first trace the genealogy of the cultural tradition of genteel gathering among literate people in China and discuss how it continued to thrive in the modern time. I illustrate the significant role that tea drinking played in the genteel gathering and the civilized gathering within the teahouse in Shanghai during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I then try to address how the coffeehouse’s function for social networking captured cultural intellectuals’ attention after it gained popularity. I argue that the teahouse and coffeehouse were constructed by modern intellectuals as a kind of civilized public space where they shared refined cultural taste and rebuild self-recognition, because they were situated under the “structure of feeling” through which they were able to obtain a sense of belonging, during the historical moment when they were undergoing the transition of cultural identity.

In the third chapter, I pay attention to two most typical cultural phenomena evoked by the culture of coffeehouse and teahouse gatherings — “Coffee Seats” column in Shenbao and the Literature and Art Tea Talk journal sponsored by a group consisting
of several cultural elites including Zhang Yiping, which was called Wényì cháhuà 文藝茶話. I intend to explore how such an actual public space as the coffeehouse and teahouse became an imagined public cultural space in print media, and these two kinds of public spaces together were significant to the development of modern Chinese literature and aesthetic ideologies. I argue that the cultural practices manifested in the newspaper column and the literary journal assisted a large group of Shanghai’s cultural elites to establish an “imagined reading and writing community,” through circulating “coffee” and “tea” as important cultural symbols in print media. Therefore, they were able to reinforce the mutual recognition, retrieve their authority in the realm of cultural production and knowledge construction, and win the symbolic “cultural capital.”
2. Tea and Coffee Culture in Early Republican Shanghai

2.1 A Brief History of Tea Culture and Teahouses in China

China has a long history of drinking tea. *The Classic of Tea* 茶經, produced by Lu Yu 陸羽 (733-804), is usually regarded as the earliest book-length work exclusively accounting for tea culture in China, which helped to elevate tea from a bitter vegetable and medical material into a desirable beverage. It introduces the methods of planting, brewing, and serving tea, and how it should be drunk.\(^1\) It also traces the origin of tea in China back to the period of the Divine Husbandman (Shennong 神農), insisting that he was the first person who discovered and made use of tea. But in fact, the beginning of tea drinking in China still remains a myth and no explicit conclusion has been drawn. The earliest existing textual record of tea can be dated back to the Western Han Dynasty, when Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (B.C. 179-111) referred to *chuancha* 芷詫, which means exactly tea, in his *Alphabet Book* 凡將篇.\(^2\) The noun *cha* 茶, which denotes tea in Chinese today, did not appear until the Tang Dynasty. In earlier texts, tea was called *ming* 茗.

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茗, which continues to be used until present, *jia* 業, which was described as a small tree whose leaves could be “boiled to make a soup for drinking,” and *tu* 茶, whose morphology shares similarities with *cha*.

In pre-modern China, tea drinking was associated with refined cultural connotations, and tea was constructed as a significant cultural icon that was crucial to the development of Chinese civilization. Tea drinking was first popular among people living in the south. Southern literati’s enthusiastic embrace of tea in their poems and essays attracted men of letter in the north, the center of cultural orthodoxy, and facilitated the prevalence of tea in the northern region after the eighth century, when tea ultimately became a common drink throughout the nation. Since then, tea culture was fostered as a high culture by the elites, and tea drinking was treated as a refined cultural activity endowed with sophisticated rituals and intricate aesthetic ideas. Tea soon substituted wine to become a popular theme in literary imaginations, appearing frequently in poems and verses produced by literati in the Tang and Song Dynasties.

As tea gained popularity within Chinese society, teahouses emerged accordingly as the major public sites for tea service and tea drinking. According to existing records, small shops called *chasi* 茶肆 that brewed and sold tea emerged as late as the Tang Dynasty in many towns and cities in northern China, which could be viewed as the initial

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3 Benn, 23.
4 Hinsch, 16.
form of teahouses. In the Song Dynasty, teahouses became common in many regions, and were granted some other names such as chafang 茶坊 and chadi 茶邸. Some teahouses not only served tea, but also provided space for taking a rest and even had shower rooms. Also, owners started to decorate their teahouses with refined items to create a civilized atmosphere. For example, the entry entitled “Teahouse” (Chasi 茶肆) in The Book of Dreaming of the Liang 夢梁錄 once recorded:

Delis in Bianjing hang famous paintings in order to attract passerby and make consumers do not want to leave. Now teahouses in Hangzhou also emulate to arrange flowers of four seasons and hang paintings painted by the eminent for decoration.

汴京熟食店，張掛名畫，所以勾引觀者，留連食客；今杭城茶肆亦如之，插四時花，掛名人畫，裝點店面。^6

When it came to the Qing Dynasty, teahouses spread throughout the country, and tea drinking prevailed as a social trend among the ordinary people. During that time, teahouses also served delicate desserts and were prone to be built at places with graceful surroundings. According to Anthology of Petty Matters in Qing 清稗類鈔, the first

^5 Wu, 6.
^6 Quoted from Wu, 8.
^7 Wu, 9.
teahouse appeared in Shanghai in the first year of Tongzhi, the Qing Dynasty (1856), a three-layer grand building facing the Pidgin named Lishui Platform. Shanghai’s teahouses first developed at the southern part of the city — some famous ones included Lake Point Pavilion Teahouse, Four Beauties Pavilion, and Brilliance Tower. Later, teahouses expanded to the northern part. During the late Qing and early Republic, teahouses were ubiquitous in Shanghai: there was Crane Woods Spring on Yunnan Road, Pine Breeze Pavilion on Guangdong Road, and Green Lotus Pavilion on Fuzhou Road. It was estimated that up to 1919, there had been 164 teahouses in Shanghai, but the real quantity was probably much more than this. The names of Shanghai’s teahouses usually embodied explicit traditional Chinese cultural elements and aesthetic orientations and referred to images that were common in classical poetry and verse.

Based on the price of tea products, locations and settings of different teahouses, teahouses in Shanghai exhibited distinct classifications, and they constituted an

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9 Wu, 11.

10 Wu, 15.
indispensable part of civil life. When Shanghai was open for concessions during the late nineteenth century, most of the famous teahouses, such as Lake Point Pavilion Teahouse, Brilliance Tower, The First Tower of Lang Garden 闔苑第一樓, and Genteel Conversation Tower 雅叙楼, all gathered around the Chenghuang Temple 城隍廟.\footnote{Cao Juren 曹聚仁, \emph{Shanghai Chunqiu} 上海春秋 (The Spring and Autumn of Shanghai) (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian chubanshe 生活·讀書·新知三聯書店出版社, 2007). 295.}

These teahouses served a large variety of tea with high qualities, so the price was relatively high. For example, Green Lotus Pavilion provided famous tea from various regions, ranging from black tea from Qimen and rock tea from Mount Wuyi, to cloud mist tea from Mount Huang and longjing tea from Hangzhou.\footnote{Wu, 31.} Besides, these teahouses were also tastefully furnished, and thus attracted customers from the middle class to spend their leisure time in these hospitable places. These people frequented a particular teahouse for tea drinking at a specified time every day — whether after lunch or at the early morning, sitting inside to read newspapers, eat some delicious desserts, and discuss current affairs with friends.\footnote{Yu Dafu 郁達夫, “Shanghai’s Teahouses” 上海的茶樓, from Chen Zishan 陳子善 eds., \emph{Ye shanghai} 夜上海 (Nightlife in Shanghai) (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe 經濟日報出版社, 2003). 215.} Visitors also went to teahouses for business exchange, friend-making through playing chess, and bird-walking, and some teahouses even set up
the “story house” (書場) for the performance of the storytelling and ballad singing in Suzhou dialect — ping tan 評彈.

Teahouses that sold tea at a low price and lacked elegant settings were regarded as an ideal place to go for the lower-class, especially those who were associated with gangs. This kind of teahouses occupied a large proportion of Shanghai’s teahouses, and were located at land-and-water transportation hubs, vital communication lines, and other densely-populated places. The most common scene appeared in these teahouses was the arbitration of disputes carried out by gang people, which was called “drink talking tea” 吃講茶. It denoted that when two parties were in a disagreement or conflict on an issue, they would appoint time to make a negotiation in the teahouse under the witness of people surrounding. Some large teahouses like Tongyu ju 全羽居 and Yile tian 一樂天 hanged billboards which banned “drink talking tea,” but brought little effect.

2.2 The Emergence of Coffee and Coffeehouses

Coffee was imported to China associated with the introduction of western cuisine. After the signing of The Treaty of Wangxia 望夏條約 in 1844, foreigners were allowed to settle in concessions in Shanghai, promoting the dissemination of western food culture.

14 Yu, 214.
15 Yu, 215.
It was speculated that as late as that time coffee had already appeared in Shanghai.\(^1^6\)

Coffee was initially regarded as a kind of supplementary beverage in the eye of Shanghainese — when coffee was served, it meant that a meal had come to the end. Just as a zhuzhi poem produced in 1907 had described:

> Before the main dishes, there should be some soup. Dishes that are served during the middle is hard to be recognized. Don’t complain that having pudding as the substitute of rice is insufficient. When coffee is finished, it is time to leave.

大菜先來一味湯，中間肴饌辨難詳。補丁代飯休嫌少，吃過咖啡即散場。\(^1^7\)

“Big dishes” (大菜) was then used by Chinese people to refer to western foods; other synonyms included dacan 大餐 and fancai 番菜.\(^1^8\) At that time, there had not yet existed coffeehouses, where coffee was exclusively served. Instead, coffee was provided in

\(^{16}\) Ke Ling-jhen 柯伶蓁, “Coffee and Modern Shanghai” (咖啡與近代上海), Master’s Thesis (Taipei: National Taiwan Normal University 國立臺灣師範大學, 2011). 62.


\(^{18}\) Xu, “Western Foods” (西餐), [https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=961443&remap=gb%E8%A5%BF%E9%A4%90](https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=961443&remap=gb%E8%A5%BF%E9%A4%90), accessed on December 9, 2019.
western restaurants along with desserts, and appeared as an important constitutive part of the meal on menu.\textsuperscript{19} An advertisement published on Shen Bao on January 1, 1876 wrote:

Now a western café-restaurant has just opened the business at the Eryangjing Bridge.

We provide all kinds of noodles from day to night, and we welcome our honored guests to visit our small restaurant.

今在二洋涇橋新開架啡番菜館，各色麪食，早晚常便，若有貴客光顧者，請至小店可也。\textsuperscript{20}

This advertisement was posted by a western restaurant named Xingfa 興發, and it can be speculated that people in Shanghai had already visited western restaurants for dining during the late 1870s, where they were able to taste coffee. At first, Shanghai people experienced the newly emerged culture of coffee drinking in restaurants owned by foreigners. The earliest western restaurant that served coffee in Shanghai, Laodeji 老德記, was opened in 1853 by several foreigners, located in the British Concession.\textsuperscript{21} Later

\textsuperscript{19} Ke, 56.
\textsuperscript{20} “The Newly Opened Undertaken Western Restaurant” (新開承辦番菜), Shen Bao 申報, January 1, 1876, page 6.
\textsuperscript{21} Chen Wenwen 陳文文, “Studies on Coffeehouses in Shanghai, 1920s-1940s” (1920-1940年代上海咖啡館研究), Master’s Thesis (Shanghai: Shanghai Normal University 上海師範大學, 2010). 7-8.
when Chinese people got familiar with this extraneous beverage, they set up their own western restaurants that sold coffee. The first western restaurant managed by Chinese in Shanghai, opened in 1883, was called Yipinxiang 一品香 and located on Fuzhou Road. It offered both western and Chinese foods, as well as coffee and tea. At first its business was bleak, but soon it bloomed and other similar restaurants were also following suit to set up, such as Haitianchun 海天春, Jiangnanchun 江南春, and Jixiangchun 吉祥春.22

The popularization of western foods in Shanghai had effectively fostered the increasing prevalence of coffee culture.

Coffeehouses first appeared in western restaurants and clubs in Shanghai. It was not until the 1880s that a coffeehouse which was operated independently appeared in the Hongkou area, and their service objects were mainly seamen. It also provided various kinds of beer in addition to coffee.23 According to the record of Xu Ke, Chinese people had set up coffeehouses in Shanghai and Tianjin during the reign of Emperor Xuantong (1909-1912):

In Europe and America, there are coffeehouses similar to teahouses in our


23 Shanghai Archives Center 上海檔案館, eds. Meeting Minutes of Board of Directors of the Municipal Council 工部局董事會會議記錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2003), vol. 8. 709.
country. There are also coffeehouses in Tianjin and Shanghai, which are established by Chinese who followed the foreign examples. These places also sell candies accompanying the beverage.

歐美有咖啡店略似我國之茶馆。天津、上海亦有之，华人所仿设者也，兼售糖果以佐饮。24

According to the introduction provided by Guidebook of Shanghai 上海指南, published in 1914, apart from coffee, black tea, and milk tea, coffeehouses also served desserts like candies, cakes, and biscuits.25 This suggests that coffeehouses in Shanghai shared many similarities with teahouses in regard to social function — both were venues where beverages and desserts were offered. The quantity of independent coffeehouses remained scared until the 1920s, when the growth of the number of specialized coffeehouses in Shanghai reached the peak.

2.3 The Vogue of Coffeehouses and Decline of Teahouses

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the prosperity of coffeehouses in Shanghai. During this period, the economy experienced its golden age — Shanghai’s foreign trade

24 Xu, “The Category of Foods and Drinks” (飲食類), https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&chapter=961443&searchu=%E5%92%96%E5%95%A1%E5%BA%97&remap=gb, accessed on December 9, 2019.
enjoyed a thriving progress, and a tremendous number of foreign products were imported, including coffee. At the same time, Shanghai had officially established its status as the national financial center, and the city’s economic prosperity effectively elevated people’s living standard, which prompted their desire for the pursuit of spiritual enjoyment.\(^2\)\(^6\) In this regard, coffeehouses were able to satisfy Shanghai citizens’ needs. The records of coffeehouses in archives and newspapers also increased during the 1920s, famous ones including Carlton Café, Nowgn’s Café, Royal Café, The Winter Garden Café, and the Palais Café.\(^2\)\(^7\)

In addition, the large scale of the immigration of Russian also promoted the increase of coffeehouses. Since the October Revolution in 1917, many Russian nobilities settled in Shanghai as refugees. According to Huang Zhenxia’s 黃震遐 article, coffeehouses in Shanghai were clustered on two main areas, the French Concession and the Hongkou area. Most of the Russian immigrants habited the French Concession, making it become “the colony of White Russian émigrés in Shanghai,” and its most famous avenue, Avenue Joffre, was occupied mainly by Russian coffeehouses emulating the Parisian models, exhibiting a mixture of French and Russian affective tone.\(^2\)\(^8\) These coffeehouses were mostly named after Russian people or places, written in English or Russian on signboards. Some representatives were The Balkan Milk Store,

\(^2\)\(^6\) Chen, 10-11.
\(^2\)\(^7\) Chen, 11.
\(^2\)\(^8\) Huang Zhenxia 黃震遐, “Our Shanghai” (我們底上海), Shen Bao 申報, December 30, 1928, page 27.
Constantinople, Dairy Café, DD’s Café, Federal, Metropole, Café de Renaissance, Sullivan’s, Trakchenko Brothers Café-Restaurant, and Kingsley.\(^{29}\) Trakchenko Brothers Café-Restaurant was one of the earliest garden restaurants in Shanghai with the largest scale – more than 100 coffee tables were able to be placed in its garden.\(^{30}\) Many other coffeehouses were much smaller, usually with ten to thirty seats and simple and unadorned interior finish, but they were infused with conspicuous East European atmosphere. They only served mocha and vodka, played the records of famous Russian composers such as Tchaikovsky and Romsky, and decorated their walls with copies of Russian painters’ works.\(^{31}\)

Café de Renaissance was the base camp for the gathering of Russian diasporas. It appeared frequently in textual works of many Chinese cultural figures. Its name was taken from “the renaissance of the Czarist Dynasty,” embodying its owner’s yearn for retrieving the Czarist sovereignty. Royal and rich White Russians and those who sympathized them were the loyalist costumers of the café, and they were always indulged in their bygone luxurious life when they stayed together.\(^{32}\) The café had the finest

\(^{29}\) Pang, 26.

\(^{30}\) Xu Hongxin 許洪新. *Cong xiafei lu dao huaihai lu* 從霞飛路到淮海路 (From Avenue Joffre to Huaihai Road) (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui chubanshe 上海社會科學院出版社, 2003). 10.

\(^{31}\) Shu Fen 树棻. *Shanghai de zuihou jiumeng* 上海的最後舊夢 (The Last Old Dream of Shanghai). Quoted from Xu, 148.

\(^{32}\) Cao, 323-324.
furnishings in Shanghai at that time, with gramophones and beautiful waitresses. DD’S was a two-story coffeehouse and owned by an old lady, who might be a French or a White Russian. Western foods were served at its first floor, and coffee seats were posited at the second floor where there was a stage for musical performances at the center, and its layout was in an apparent Parisian style.

The Russian-style coffeehouses on Avenue Joffre were spiritual shelters for those displaced Russian émigrés who moved far away from home to a foreign country, creating a strong sense of belonging through borrowing familiar Russian cultural elements. When the grieved Russian nobilities were enjoying coffee at the corner of coffeehouses alone, surrounded by nostalgic music and indoor environment, they recollected the past glory of the age of Czarist Russia and thus obtained solace to some extent. Because of the low price and denseness of Russian coffee, Russian coffeehouses soon prevailed over French ones to be preferred by people in Shanghai. At the same time, the exoticism of those coffeehouses also fascinated Chinese intellectuals, who projected their cultural imaginations upon western civilizations through depictions of the blond-hair Russian

33 Huang Zhenxia 黃震遐, “Coffee Shops on Avenue Joffre” (霞飛路上的咖啡店), Shen Bao 申報, January 6, 1929, page 28.
34 Zhao Qing 趙青, “DD’S in the Old Shanghai” (老上海的 DD’S), Wenhui Daily 文匯報, September 26, 1996. Quoted from Xu, 157.
36 Chen, 65.
ladies and frustrated Russian male drunkers wandering around coffeehouses, and the fragrance of coffee in the air.

The Hongkou area was then the Japanese Concession. Some smaller and cozy coffeehouses located in its North Sichuan Road. Different from Avenue Joffre, which was famous for its dense European exotic sentiment, North Sichuan Road was fulfilled by typical East Asian atmosphere. There were more than ten coffeehouses owned by Chinese on North Sichuan Road, with waitresses providing services. Some coffeehouses operated by Japanese, such as Bijinza Café, were also attractive to customers because of their enticing female dance performances. The atmosphere created by Japanese-style coffeehouses on North Sichuan Road can be regarded as the variation of the culture of Ginza café in Tokyo, which emerged in the 1910s and was well-known for its sexually attractive “café lady” and the “high-collar” environment affected by educated Japanese elite. Coffeehouses on North Sichuan Road were less luxurious and attractive to customers from the higher-class than those on Avenue Joffre, but were instead favored by less well-off left-wing intellectuals. For example, Gongfei was chosen by the leftists as the place for meetings, and Shanghai Café was alleged to be

37 Sun Zongfu 孫宗復 (ed.). Shanghai youlan zhinan 上海遊覽指南 (Tour Information of Shanghai) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1935). 71.
38 Chen, 66.
40 Pang, 26.
owned by Zhang Ziping 張資平, the member of the left-wing literary group, *Creation Society* 創造社.

Urbanites in Shanghai regarded visiting coffeehouses as a way of leading a modern lifestyle. Since most coffeehouses were owned by foreigners and because of the extraneous peculiarity of coffee, consuming in coffeehouses created a sense of establishing a concrete relation with fascinating foreign cultures for many Shanghai youngsters. Just as Leo Ou-fan Lee has insightfully indicated, the coffeehouse “was one of the crucial symbols of modernity, together with the cinema and the automobile.”⁴¹ The Western settings, decorations, commodities, and names of coffeehouses constituted an aura of exoticism. Also, the gramophone airing Western music, imported carpets, copies of famous paintings hanging on the wall, electric lights, and the fireplace, together made the coffeehouse a modern space in which people who had never been to foreign countries were able to perceive the symbols of Western material civilizations. As a result, coffeehouses provided local Chinese “a symbolic access to the West and to the modern” through their participation in the vogue of coffee drinking and coffeehouse-going.⁴² In most cases, people visited coffeehouses not for savoring the tasty of coffee, but was instead out of the purpose of immersing themselves into the exotic environment provided.

⁴² Pang 27.
Concurrent with the prevalence of coffee and coffeehouse culture was the gradual worsening of people’s perception of teahouses in Shanghai. Since the late nineteenth century, functions of teahouses in Shanghai became increasingly diverse, and various forms of teahouses also made the teahouse a place mixed with all kinds of people. With the popularization of teahouses promoted by the rapid development of commercial culture and urbanization, many social problems were engendered. Although some teahouses remained sites that embraced high-brow culture and more civilized customers, others were perplexed by the notorious reputation resulted from undesirable phenomena occurred within them.

The rampancy of prostitution within teahouses was the most conspicuous problem. Owners of some teahouses invited prostitutes from surrounding brothels to accompany and entertain customers, making teahouses filled by vulgar enticing languages and behaviors. Many prostitutes also actively visited teahouses to seek for potential clients or solicited business through wandering around teahouses. Crimes such as swindle and fighting and brawling also appeared in some teahouses, and many people gathered smoking opiums within teahouses. In addition, gambling was another troublesome issue for many teahouses. Fan A’duo, the owner of a teahouse in the American Concession, was arrested for allowing customers’ gather-gambling and

squeezing profits himself. On the same day of Fan’s arrest, the Police Agency enacted an announcement which harshly criticized the unhealthy social morality of gathering-gambling in teahouses. But the governmental ban produced very little affect, and Brilliance Tower, one of the most famous teahouses in Shanghai, still sanctioned gathering-gambling, and the teahouse owner who enticed customers to participate in gambling and took a cut of the winnings was arrested along with other gamblers within the teahouse. In the eyes of the early Republican urban elites, the teahouse was the embodiment of China’s backward and ill past, and the teahouse culture was associated with destructiveness, which nurtured moral decay and social disorder. The lower-class customers and their decadent social life within teahouses were disdained by new cultural elites, and newspapers dominated by those elites continuously contributed to the regulation, police, and criticism of the “poisonous” aspects of teahouses.

However, even though the decadency of commercial teahouse culture which continued from the early modern period was disparaged by many cultural elites, most of the Shanghai elites had never discarded the habit of tea drinking. Some cultural celebrities still found it difficult to get accustomed to drinking coffee. The prominent

44 “Gathering-Gambling in the Teahouse” (茶館聚賭), Sin wan pao 新聞報, October 23, 1916.
45 “Announcement of Banning Gambling by the Police Agency” (警察廳禁賭文告), Sin wan pao 新聞報, October 23, 1916.
46 “Gather-Gambling in Brilliance Tower” (得意樓聚賭抽頭), Shen Bao 申報, June 3, 1929, page 15.
writer, Lu Xun 魯迅, did not drink coffee, nor did he exhibited much interest in the vogue of coffeehouse-going. He once expressed his preference of tea over coffee: “I am not a genius. I just take the time that others spend on drinking coffee to work. I prefer drinking tea” (我哪裡是天才，我是把別人喝咖啡的時間也用在了工作上。我還是喜歡啜茗。). Lu Xun was nearly addicted to tea drinking. He regarded it as a blessing to have great tea to drink and to know how to taste great tea, and he frequently bought tea leaf and boiled tea by himself. Besides, he also presented his families and friends tea. In his diary, Lu Xun had recorded several times that he gave tea to his brother and his Japanese friend in Shanghai, Uchiyama Kanzo 内山完造, the owner of Uchiyama Bookstore. It seems that Lu Xun attached great importance to tea, not only enjoying drinking tea himself but also using it as an important tool for maintaining social bonds.

49 “Tea Drinking” (喝茶), Shen Bao 申報, October 2, 1933, page 5.
50 On May 25, 1933, Lu Xun wrote: “Presented tea to Uchiyama, Kamata, and my youngest brother respectively” (以茶葉分贈內山、鐮⽥及三弟。). On May 9, 1935, he wrote: “Gave a bag of tea to Mr. Uchiyama as a gift” (以茶葉一囊交內山君，為施茶之用）。. These are exerted from Lu Xun riji 魯迅日記 (Lu Xun’s Diary) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe 廣東人民出版社, 2019).
Lu Xun’s brother, Zhou Zuoren 周作人, also an outstanding writer, was a loyal tea drinker too. He had written several articles which discussed his knowledge of different kinds of tea and the methods of tasting tea. Zhou was picky about the breed of tea and manifested a dislike of coffee as well as those tea that tasted like coffee. In an article entitled “About Bitter Tea” (关于苦茶), he said:

There are many things such as coffee and other foreign products that can replace tea, but I merely find these novelties nothing more than interesting. As for me, I still think tea is better, and I only drink green tea. I don’t like black tea and scented tea because they taste like coffee.

許多東西都可以代茶，咖啡等洋貨還在其外，可是我只感到好玩，有這些花樣，至於我自己還只覺得茶好，而且茶也以綠的為限，紅茶以至香片嫌其近於咖啡。51

At the same time, teahouses in Shanghai experienced drastic transformations in the 1920s and 1930s, in order to adjust themselves to the prosperous modern urban culture and to attract more customers from the higher social class, who disliked the noisy environment of the teahouse and were prone to favor the newly emerged coffeehouse as

an ideal place for leisure life. Green Lotus Pavilion, once a historic traditional teahouse, transformed itself by absorbing Western entertaining elements, in which a billiard room, a distorting mirror, and some installations of Western scenery were housed. Some tearooms (chashi 茶室) operated by Cantonese introduced the new-style “musical tearoom” (音樂茶室). Canton tearooms emerged in Shanghai during the late Qing period, which had delicate tea set with clean and tidy seats inside and charged a higher fee, marking an explicit distinction from many other teahouses. Following the success of tearooms such as Happy Garden 安樂園, Little Pot Sky 小壺天, Canton Pavilion 廣東樓, and West Lake Pavilion 西湖樓, in the summer of 1927, Sun Ya Tearoom 新雅茶室 was opened in the Hongkou area. The price of its tea was relatively high, and it was devoid of the noisiness of many normal teahouses, therefore attracting many customers who were longing for a quiet environment to enjoy tea. The tearoom embodied the most representative form of the modern teahouse, and bear apparent influences from the blooming coffeehouse culture. Sun Ya Tearoom was furnished in a Western style and served coffee, cocoa, and western desserts, apart from tea and Canton appetizers,

53 Wu, 47-48.
54 Tu, 14.
appealing to champions of modern urban lifestyle. The “musical tearoom” was an eye-catching form that many tearooms including Sun Ya advertised. This kind of tearooms usually invited famous songstresses to deliver performances accompanied by bands, and dancing floor was also set where tea drinkers were able to dance with the music. The modern teahouse coped with the entering of coffeehouses through westernized self-transformations. Although it did succeed in retrieving customers, it was suspected by some people as merely the alteration of the Western coffeehouse, and its function was ambiguous in-between the teahouse and coffeehouse.

55 Wu, 48.
56 Tu, 14.
57 Wei Miao 溫妙, “A Discussion on Teahouses (Part 2)” (茶館論·下), Jing Bao 晶報, June 7, 1936.
3. Cultural Gatherings in Teahouses and Coffeehouses

3.1 The Cultural Tradition of Genteel Gathering in China

The “genteel gathering” (yaji 雅集) was a unique way of networking among literati in ancient China, within which literati usually drank wine, compose poems or paintings, and conducted discussions and debates together. The concrete connotations and perceptions of genteel gathering had evolved over time in Chinese cultural history. The earliest record of literati’s gatherings appeared in pre-Qin period (before 221 B.C.) in The Book of Odes 詩經: “With pleased sounds the deer call to one another; eating the celery of the fields. I have here admirable guests; the lusts are struck, and the organ is blown (for them).” (呦呦鹿鳴，食野之蘋。我有嘉賓，鼓瑟吹笙。) These sentences in “The Singing of the Deer” (鹿鳴) describe vividly the joyous atmosphere among people within the same banquet. Since the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 24), because of the unprecedentedly elevated status of Confucianism, emperors were fond of banqueting literati in the palace to discuss literature, as a way of showing respect to talented subjects who were spokesmen of Confucian thoughts. For example, King Liangxiao 梁孝王, son of Emperor Wen of the Han 漢文帝, often invited famous literary figures such as Mei Cheng 枚乘 and Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 to compose responsorial poems, and Cao Cao 曹操, the founder of the Wei Empire during the Three Kingdoms Period (A.D. 220-280),
frequently entertained literati in West Garden 西園 in the capital city Yexia 鄴下, where participants wrote poems and proses and responded to each other. The genteel gathering in West Garden was praised for its embodiment of the flourishing age of literacy admiration and providing a platform for the discovery of the talented.

The most famous and representational case of genteel gathering in pre-modern China may be the one that held in the Orchid Pavilion 蘭亭 in the ninth year of the Yonghe reign of Emperor Mu (A.D. 353), according to which the renowned calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 produced the famed “Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection” (蘭亭集序) that depicted details of the gathering and introduced the poems that the participants, including Xie An 謝安, wrote to mark the occasion. Unlike most of the genteel gatherings in the past, this gathering was an autonomous one joined by a group of like-minded literate friends, instead of being organized by people from the ruling class. Surrounded by streams, tall bamboos, lofty mountains, and fresh breeze, they gathered at the time of the spring, admiring the harmony between humans and nature, and composed poems that expressed the sorrow on the elapse of time and the slim chance for a reunion in the future. “In writing and recording, the friends take part in an ongoing transmission of sentiment, aligning themselves with the ancients, drawing on and re-creating the same

58 Hu, 9.
emotions.” During the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907), private literary gatherings emerged. Literati with similar tastes gathered at personal courtyards to exchange views and drink together. This had laid the foundation for the formation of patterns of literati gathering in the Northern Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1127), when the canonical cultural tradition of genteel gathering finally came into being. The genteel gathering in the Northern Song Dynasty was normalized as part of literati’s cultural lives and became the paradigm of association among literati. Its scope was enlarged, for organizers and participants were no longer confined within the imperial court – an increasingly large number of literati from local regions also frequently joined in such a kind of gatherings. The genteel gathering in West Garden (西園雅集) was another epitome of the rite of literati association. It was joined by Su Shi 蘇軾, the eminent Northern Song writer, and fifteen other prominent literati at that time, including Su Zhe 蘇轍, Qin Guan 秦觀, and Mi Fu 米芾. It can be regarded as one of the grandest gatherings among literati throughout Chinese history. Since then, “West Garden” functioned as a conspicuous cultural symbol that represented the gentility of Chinese literati’s cultural lives and the ritual of the refined gathering among the literate class.

60 Hu, 12-13.
Genteel gathering embodies an ideal kind of tasteful lifestyle and cultural phenomena in China. It constitutes the cultural sophistication of Chinese literati’s mutual communication and distinguishes them from those less literate, thus marking a kind of distinct cultural identity. The aim of the gatherings was mainly for learning from counterparts by producing poems, paintings or calligraphic works, touring the scenic spots, drinking good wine and tea, and appreciating artistic products together, through which the spiritual bond and emotional communication among literati could be effectively strengthened. Traditional genteel gatherings were simultaneous leisure activities led by literati, and they had greatly influenced the cultural lives and molding of personality of the literary gentlemen class (士子階層).^61^ Genteel gathering also served as the most important activity for literati within the same literary community. They often organized informal gatherings in which literary works, in most cases poems, were produced when enjoying food, wine and beautiful scenery. According to Chen Baoliang, such a kind of phenomenon can also be referred to shishe (詩社 poetry party) and

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wenyan (文宴 literary banquet) apart from yaji, and he describes such gatherings as

“collective expressions of the refined literary life” (風雅生活的集體表現).\(^\text{62}\)

Drinking constituted a crucial part of literati’s genteel gatherings, and drinking activities were well recorded in many cultural works or historical records accounting for various literary gatherings. For example, in Wang Xizhi’s record of the genteel gathering in the Orchid Pavilion, it was depicted that participants were drinking wine while composing poems, and those who were unable to finish a poem will be punished for drinking thirty litres of wine.\(^\text{63}\) Tea and wine were two major preferred drinking products when literati were gathering. According to Bret Hinsch, up to the Tang Dynasty, tea had substituted wine to become the most preferable beverage when gentlemen were enjoying cultured activities such as listening to music, and writers in the Song Dynasty exalted tea as “elegant and profound” while defining wine as “some ordinary” and “even mediocre.”\(^\text{64}\) Many famous poets such as Bai Juyi 白居易 was fond of drinking tea when

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\(^{63}\) Please refer to Liu Yiqing 劉義慶. “A New Account of the Tales of the World: No.16 Qixian” (世說新語·企羨第十六), annotation quoted from Wang Xizhi 王羲之, “Narration besides the River” (臨河敘), from Collection of Annotations for A New Account of the Tales of the World 世說新語匯校集注 (Shishuo xinyu huijiao jizhu) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海：上海古籍出版社, 2002). 539.

\(^{64}\) Hinsch, 23.
discussing literature with cultured counterparts during their gatherings, and at the same
time, they would carry out debates regarding the merits of different kinds of tea and the
possible best way to brew tea. In Yan Liben’s 閻立本 painting recounting for the famous
genteel gathering in the Orchid Pavilion, the original wine describe by Wang Xizhi was
replaced by tea,65 which well testified literati’s increasing preference of tea over wine
when genteel activities were taking place. Wine had long been associated with high
culture by literati. When tea became prevalent among the gentry class, it was also
endorsed with elegance and sophistication. As have discussed in the previous chapter, tea
was embraced by Chinese cultural elites as a significant cultural icon that manifested
their distinct social status. Therefore, the refined gatherings among literati were naturally
prone to choose tea drinking as the pivotal activity to emphasize the identity superiority.
Tea, as “an important medium for self-expression at a time when society began to
emphasize individual merit,”66 perfectly corresponds to the inherent essence of genteel
literary gatherings – traditional literati’s search for emotional sustenance and mutual
recognition.

3.2 Civilized Gatherings in Teahouses in the Modern Period

During the late Qing and early Republican period, although the Chinese society
had gone through drastic transformations in different layers, ranging from the political

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65 Hinsch, 25.
66 Hinsch, 10.
institution to cultural orthodox and educational system, genteel gathering still played a significant role in Chinese literati’s cultural lives. After the abolishment of the long-existing imperial examination system in 1905, many officials and literati were forced to expelled from the capital city Beijing to different parts of the country, and most of them settled in Shanghai, which was then the economical center. Associated with the repealed imperial examination system was the collapse of the established Confucian cultural values. This means that the communal ideological system shared by traditional literati had been disintegrated, which entailed the formation of community groups among lost literati to fulfill their need for spiritual recognition with counterparts. Holding genteel gatherings was the most important routine for many literary and cultural associations, and through joining those communities, members were able to obtain a sense of belonging. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there existed many cultural associations led by “the old adherents to the collapsed Qing Dynasty” (晚清遺老 wanqing yilao) who were advocates of orthodox literary traditions but got frustrated by the decline of the last empire, as well as some traditionally educated literati who were armed with aggressive revolutionary ideologies. These associations included the Chao Society (超社 chaoshe), the Song Society (淞社 songshe), and the Southern Society (南社 nanshe). The Southern

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Society was derived from the Grok Society (神交社) which was established by some revolutionary-minded literati such as Chen Qubing 陳去病 and Liu Yazi 柳亞子 in around 1907, and it usually organized gatherings in private gardens or restaurants in Shanghai, during which participants would drink tea and taste desserts or fruits while carrying out literary discussions.\(^\text{68}\) The Chao Society and the Song Society were both established in the early 1910s by the late Qing old adherents residing in Shanghai, and members of the two associations created poetic works every time they gathered in places like temples.\(^\text{69}\)

The major function of these associations was more about providing a platform for the frustrated literati cultivated by the obsolete cultural system to achieve social networking than promoting the literary production. Just as Ye Zhongqiang has stated, they assisted to rebuild the literate community under a tumultuous historical moment and a new social structure.\(^\text{70}\) But the literary discussions within gathering activities of those communities eventually did contribute to a distinct literary phenomenon – the classical poems produced by community members together formed the so-called “literature of the old adherents” (遺老文學 yilao wenxue).

\(^\text{68}\) Luan, 34-37.
\(^\text{70}\) Ye, 263.
The occurrence of interpersonal interactions can never be free from the concrete material space. So was the genteel gathering in Chinese society. Conventionally, Chinese literati preferred organizing their gatherings in natural places, of which the environment was able to provide affluent poetic inspirations. During the late Qing and early Republican period, those old-school literati in Shanghai, having been immersed in the long-standing cultural values, were naturally prone to carry on the custom of their predecessors, but the cityscape cultivated by the development of urbanization was unable to provide the previous ideal venue. In effect, traditional Chinese literary scholars had developed intimate interactions with public places within the urban area regarding their social activities, such as the teahouse, restaurant, and brothel– these are the so-called “three buildings” (三樓). According to Ye Zhongqiang, in ancient China, visiting the “three buildings” had a “compensatory social function,” which enabled literati to temporarily depart from the orthodox social regulations.\(^{71}\) They had gatherings and made friends within these places, and were able to form a collective community that embraced mutual identification and recognition. Closely associated genteel gatherings that provided occasions for literati to obtain spiritual emancipation, the “three buildings” culture functioned as a significant complement to the tradition of genteel gathering, enabling the perfection the literary-scholar tradition. At the very beginning, the traditional “three

buildings” were of irreplaceable importance in “social integration” among Chinese literati living within the concession in Shanghai. They gathered strangers that migrated from different parts of the country in a public space that they were familiar with, and thus established new social networks. But later, the expansion of the new urban space had effectively impacted traditional Chinese literati’s sentiment toward the “three buildings,” creating an unprecedented modern consuming space that was alienated with the traditional literate cultural space constructed by the “three buildings.” In the meantime, the traditional gathering among the literate was also refreshed by some westernized connotations.

As have discussed in last chapter, the teahouse, one kind of the “three buildings,” experienced self-transformations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in order to adjust themselves to the rapid urbanization. In addition, some teahouses in Shanghai also endeavored to get rid of the notorious reputation of modern teahouses and to retrieve the gentility generated through the interactions between literati and teahouses in the previous time. One of the most representational example was a teahouse named Civilized Genteel Gathering 文明雅集 located in the Second Road in Shanghai. It was run by Yu Dafu 俞达夫, a painter who learned from the famous painting master Ren

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72 In his article, Ye discusses in detail how the development of buildings with modern social functions, such as cinemas, western restaurants, and coffeehouses in the Shanghai city, had weakened the significance of the traditional “three buildings” and further impacted Shanghai literati’s cultural activities and identity constructions. See Ye, 27-32.
Bonian 任伯年. Unlike many other simple and crude teahouses, Yu’s teahouse was always clean and tidy, decorated with delicate tea sets and refined figure paintings, and thus attracted many literate people. These people often gathered in the teahouse to compose poems, draw paintings, and discuss history and current affairs, following the rituals of the genteel gatherings organized by their predecessors in the old time. An association named the Ping Society 萍社, which was led by a group of cultural celebrities thereat, such as Sun Yusheng 孫玉聲, Chen Kuilong 陳夔龍, and Wang Junqing 王均卿, was the most famous literate group within the teahouse. Members of the Ping Society frequently organized guessing games, and many other literate people were enthusiastic about joining the games while tasting great tea in the teahouse. Besides, a group of lovers of traditional stringed and woodwind musical instruments and chess also regarded Civilized Genteel Gathering as an ideal place for frequent gatherings.73

The modernized teahouses in Shanghai were also prevalent among those intellectuals for cultural gatherings. Sun Ya Teahouse was one representational modern reformed teahouse mentioned in the previous chapter. Located on the Northern Sichuan Road, it was opened in 1927 and decorated with train seats. It not only functioned as a teahouse, but also served Cantonese cuisine and western foods. Its modernized and refined settings attracted many cultural celebrities who were advocates of different

73 Information gathered from Wu, 39-42.
cultural ideologies but all longing for a genteel place for gathering with like-minded friends. For example, Lu Xin, the pioneer of left-wing literature, once wrote in his diary on February 1, 1930 that he joined a dinner party in Sun Ya Teahouse with Feng Xuefeng, Shen Duanxian, Wang Fuquan, and many other left-wing revolutionary minded intellectuals. The liberal Republican journalist and writer, Cao Juren, also recalled in his memoir that lots of his old friends within the cultural circle used to gather and spend leisure time in Sun Ya. According to Hu Shanyuan, the aesthetic writer Lin Huiyin and Zhou Yang often met at Sun Ya, which was then the club for many “street literati” (street literati). Shao Xunmei, a representational writer belonging to the decadent-aestheticism school (decadent-aestheticism school) keen on social interaction, was eager to visit Sun Ya from a very distant place when he learned that a large group of literati frequently gathered there, and he was always welcomed by those literati to join their gatherings because of his politeness and

75 Cao, 305.
76 Hu Shanyuan, Wentan guankui: He wo you guo wanglai de wenren (A Glimpse to the Literary Field: Literati that I Have Had Contact) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000). 57.
eruditeness. Moreover, the prominent writer, Mao Dun 茅盾, hosted the “Monday meeting” every Monday in Sun Ya, which was joined by many other young writers in Shanghai, and during the meeting, participants would exchange ideas on current events and received literary instructions from Mao Dun. Sun Ya then became the place where literati and artists usually gathered after work and made acquaintances with each other, including those intellectuals who were returned students from abroad that favored Westernized social interaction patterns.

3.3 Cultural Intellectuals’ Gatherings in Coffeehouses

When the coffeehouse gradually gained popularity in Shanghai for its eligibility of providing people a place to imagine and experience Western modernity, its function for social networking also captured cultural intellectuals’ attention. During the peak of its development in Europe, the coffeehouse had already embraced a culture of sociability in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When the young Karl Marx visited Paris in the

78 Duanmu Hongliang 端木蕻良. “A Literary Start has Fallen: In Memory of Mr. Mao Dun” (文學巨星隕落了——懷念茅盾先生). Beijing Daily 北京日報. April 9, 1981.
early 1840s, he attended meetings of artisans in Parisian cafés and noted that people did
not go to the café simply for drinking or eating, but instead it was the possibility of the
formation of society and association in the café, as well as its accommodation for
different conversations and thoughts that appealed to the public. Functioning as “a
primary circuit for Parisian social networks,” the conversations and rituals nurtured by
cafés had generated political revolutions and different modern ideologies including
republicanism, socialism, bohemianism, and anarchism. Parisian cafés initially catered
to a relatively elite clientele, and they gradually developed into politicized spaces of
public discussion where “the most gallant and wittiest heads of every estate come
together.” People gathering in coffeehouses engaged in wide-ranging topics of
conversations that were civil and void of authoritarian intervention from the state. The
sociability and civilized order within the European coffeehouse attracted Chinese cultural
intellectuals longing for a place for genteel gatherings in the modern period, especially
those who were fascinated about Western exoticism.

Zhang Ruogu’s 張若谷, a liberal Haipai (海派) literati who once studied abroad
in France, defined the coffeehouse as the symbol of modern urban life in his article. He
once recalled the time that he spent with friends discussing literary and cultural issues in
a coffeehouse named Balkan Peninsula:

80 W. Scott Haine. The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class,
81 Haine, 2.
82 James Van Horn Melton. The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe (Cambridge:
I remember that in the afternoon on this year’s April 1, Fu Yanchang, Tian Han, Zhu Yingpeng and I spent half of our day there. Every one of us had a large cup of Warsaw coffee in front of us … We talked and laughed; topics discussed ranging from food to literature and art, current affairs, celebrities, the nation, the world, and so on.

記得在今年四月一日的下午，傅彥長，田漢，朱應鵬與我，在那裏坐過整個半天。我們每人面前放著一大杯的華沙珈啡，……大家說說笑笑，從“片萊希基”談到文學藝術。時事，要人，民族，世界，各種問題上去。83

According to Zhang, one kinds of the joyfulness that led to Shanghai middle class urbanities’ fascination about visiting the coffeehouse was that it provided a place where people could carry out long conversations with friends, which was “the fun of life.”84 In the spring of 1927, Zhang encountered his friends from Japan in Shanghai, from whom he learned their unsatisfaction toward the lack of the coffeehouse owned by the Eastern

83 Zhang, Jiafei zuotan 珈啡座談 (Panel Discussion of Coffee) (Shanghai: Shanghai zhenmeishan shudian 上海真美善書店, 1929). 3-4.
that was analogous to the literature and art club. This had prompted Zhang to started envisioning for a kind of “literary and artistic coffeehouse” of Chinese people’s own.\textsuperscript{85} Zhang’s proposition gained support from the circle of literature and art, and many existing coffeehouses were then disparaged as too vulgar to cater to the refined taste of literati.\textsuperscript{86} In fact, although the kind of coffeehouse advocated by Zhang was relatively hard to find in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s, many coffeehouses owned by foreigners would be able to satisfy his aspiration -- the DD’S Coffeehouse was one of the cases in point. DD’S was a Russian-style coffeehouse famous for serving coffee from Russian, Warsaw, and Vanna. From the late 1920s to the 1940s, it hosted the gatherings of a large number of new literati. Those frequented DD’S included famous writers, painters, dramatists, musicians, and film directors, such as Ouyang Yuqian, Xu Beihong, Xu Zhimo, Yu Dafu, Ye Lingfeng, Shi Zhecun, Nie Er, and Cai Chusheng.\textsuperscript{87} 

In 1928, a writer named Shenzhi published an article entitled “Shanghai Café” (上海咖啡), in which he mentioned a café named Shanghai Café located on North Sichuan Road, and claimed that he encountered many literary and cultural celebrities in

\textsuperscript{85} Zhang, “Coffee” (咖啡), \textit{Shenbao} 申報, 1927.11.04. 87-88.
\textsuperscript{86} Chen, 84.
\textsuperscript{87} Ye, 292-293.
the café, including Lu Xun, Yu Dafu, Ye Lingfeng, and Meng Chao 孟超. Some of these people were conducting edifying talks with each other and others were merely sitting silently to contemplate philosophical questions. The author was intoxicated in the atmosphere within the coffeehouse and defined it as a “cultural paradise” which he hoped that readers could notice its existence. However, five days later, Yu Dafu published an essay entitled “Revolutionary Advertisement” (革命廣告) in the magazine Strands of Language (語絲), furiously retorting the contents of Shenzhi’s article. He negated his association with the Shanghai Café and criticized current intellectuals’ fetishization of the concept of “revolution.” In the same issue of the magazine, Lu Xun also ridiculed Shenzhi’s article, announcing that he had never visited such a kind of café and that he despised the pretentiousness of it. He even noted that the coffeehouse was bourgeois in essence. Lu Xun’s essay was later selected into his complete volume under a new title “The Café of Revolution” (革命咖啡店), satirizing some cultural celebrities’ hypocritic equation of “coffee” and “revolution.” It seems that as far as Yu Dafu and Lu Xun were

88 Shenzhi 慎之, “Shanghai Café” (上海咖啡), Shenbao 申報, 1928.08.08.
89 Yu Dafu 郁達夫, “Revolutionary Advertisement” (革命廣告), Strands of Language 語絲 4(33) (1928.08.13): 44-45.
concerned, the notion of “coffee” was associated with petty-bourgeois sentiment and capitalist commercialism and was thus incompatible and even contradictory with the proletarian colored “revolution.”

In effect, the coffeehouse in Shanghai was not only attractive to adherents of new literature and urban culture such as writers belonging to the New Sensationalism. It also appealed to left-wing literati advocating proletarian literature and art. For example, the DD’S mentioned previously witnessed the initial interaction between the left-wing culture and Chinese film industry. Xia Yan 夏衍, the renowned left-wing playwright and screenwriter, recalled that he met with Zhou Jianyun 周劍雲, one of the managers of the Shanghai Star Film Company (上海明星影片公司), with Xia’s two other friends Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨 and Zheng Boqi 鄭伯奇 in DD’S Coffeehouse in the summer of 1932, to discuss issues about inviting some “new literary and artistic workers” (新文艺工作者) to serve as scriptwriters for the Company. In addition, the Gong Fei Coffeehouse 公啡咖啡店 located on Northern Sichuan Road had hosted several regular meetings of many left-wing intellectuals during the late 1920s “white horror” when the Nationalist

government implemented harsh persecutions on left-wing people. Because it was owned by a Jewish and frequented by foreigners, it won’t attracted surveillance from the police. 93 Gong Fei was also the cradle of the Left League 左联. 94 The first preparation meeting of the Left League was hosted on the second floor of the coffeehouse, joined by twelve members including Lu Xun, Xia Yan, Zheng Boqi, Feng Naichao 馮乃超, Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈, Roushi 柔石, and Feng Xuefeng, in the middle of October in 1929. Since then, consecutive preparation meetings were held regularly every week in Gong Fei. 95 Other left-wing cultural groups also preferred to generate meetings in the coffeehouse. For example, Xia Yan convoked the meeting of the Left-Wing Drama League on behalf of his superiors in the autumn of 1929. 96

3.4 Identity Politics and the “Structure of Feeling”

Either the teahouse or the café in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s functioned as a social public space where different discursive ideologies intertwined, and

94 The abbreviation of the League of Chinese Left-Wing Writers 中國左翼作家聯盟.
95 Xia Yan, 98-99.
96 Xin Wenshu Shiliao 新文學史料 (Historiography of New Literature), No. 3 (1981): 291.
intellectuals’ gatherings within it manifested the consolidation and reinforcement of their shared collective identity. Associated with the abolishment of the imperial examination system in the early twentieth century, Chinese literati were disengaged with a long-lasting communal cultural value system and experienced the identity transformation – transforming from the traditional literati-scholar, shi 士, to modern intellectuals, zhishi 知識分子. The traditional Chinese society was a “four people society” (四民社會) centering the literati-scholar, which was consisted of literati-scholars, peasants, workers, and merchants, and was ethics-centered and had clear occupational dividing lines. In the early twentieth-century China, literate people no longer had a direct access – the imperial examination system – to the political power, but the development of modern commerce,

97 Yu Yingshi 余英時 suggests that “intellectuals” tends to be a modern Western concept deriving from the Enlightenment. It is usually translated to zhishi fenzi 知識分子 in Chinese and shares many similarities with shi 士 in regard of the similar social status of intellectuals and shi. I agree with Yu’s idea that shi was not a refined concept but instead a fluid one, changing over time and should not be simply defined as a pre-modern concept. Here by claiming “identity transformation,” I am suggesting that during the period of modernization in China, the notion of shi was gradually enriched by the associated connotations of zhishi fenzi, following the introduction of modern Western knowledge and institutions. When I write “literati,” I am mainly referring to literate people in the pre-modern sense, who were usually classified as shi and whose social value was defined by the imperial system, and I use “intellectuals” to denote literate people in the modern sense. Please refer to Yu, “Introduction,” Shi yu zhongguo shehui 士與中國社會 (Literati and the Chinese Society) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海：上海人民出版社, 2001). 1-8.

98 Please refer to Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, “Chapter 5” and “Chapter 8,” Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi 中國文化要義 (Highlights of Chinese Culture) (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe 上海：學林出版社, 2000).
publishing industry, and public education in Shanghai had opened alternatives for them to receive authority.\(^{99}\) In this sense, an “intellectuals society” (知識人社會) had gradually developed,\(^{100}\) within which literate people were classified as “intellectuals,” or called *wenren* 文人,\(^{101}\) while the usage of the word *shi* was slowly abandoned. One of the most distinctive features of the intellectuals society was that, within the society, modern intellectuals developed their social networking through gathering in the urban public space. This was distinct from the gentry society within which traditional literati-scholars were situated. The social activities of traditional Chinese literati-scholars were based on fixed kinship and geographical relationship, and therefore, the spatial framework of their networking was natural, limited, and comparatively static. In other words, the transformation from traditional literati-scholars to modern intellectuals was in essence a

\(^{99}\) According to Wang Fansen 王汎森, the emergence of the notion of “all of the four people are literati-scholars” (四民皆士) in the late Qing period greatly prompted the collapse of the traditional “four people society.” This notion suggests that knowledge is not inclusive to the literati-scholar. Alternatively, the other three kinds of people can also have the knowledge authority. Please refer to Wang, “The Transformation of the Self-Image of Modern Intellectuals” (近代知識分子自我形象的轉變), in *Zhongguo jindai sixiang yu xueshu de puxi* 近代中國思想與學術的譜系 (The Geneology of Modern Chinese Ideologies and Academics) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi 臺北：聯經出版公司, 2003).

\(^{100}\) I borrow the concept “intellectuals society” from Xu Jilin, which denotes the society composed by intellectuals from all walks of life that drifted away from the imperial and familial order to the folk society. It emerged in the late Qing era and developed in the early Republic, which was around 1895-1925. Please refer to Xu, 4.

\(^{101}\) In many contexts, *wenren* refers to modern intellectuals, while it can also denote those literati stuck to old Chinese literary traditions, when used as *jiupai wenren* 舊派文人 (old-style literati).
process within which intellectuals gradually dispensed themselves from kinship and geographical relationship and entered the urban public space. In this sense, the intellectuals society was a society comprised of strangers, and therefore, the public space such as the teahouse and coffeehouse provided a venue for intellectuals to gather and develop new social relationship, and further assisted the self-identification of those young and progressive intellectuals. In addition, genteel gatherings among cultural intellectuals within the teahouse and coffeehouse promoted the formation of various cultural or literary communities and associations, and encouraged the emergence of different aesthetic ideologies and cultural trends, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Through hosting regular meetings during which literature and art were discussed, the teahouse and coffeehouse were constructed by modern intellectuals as a kind of civilized public space, where they shared refined cultural taste and identity with other like-minded well-educated people.

In his The Long Revolution, Raymond Williams proposes the notion of “structure of feeling,” which denotes “the culture of a period” and “is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization.” It is not learned and won’t be inherited from one generation to another. Instead, it derives from the conflict between the established convention and new living experience, between the mainstream social values and new subjective feelings. He later discusses this notion in detail in Marxism and

Literature, defining it as “practical consciousness” which is being *lived* and disparate from “official consciousness.” It is “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period.” In other words, it is lived experience in process and manifests itself before it “precipitated” and given fixed forms. Williams is convinced that the structure of feeling turns out to be most distinctive during period of social transformations. Through suggesting the concept of “structure of feeling,” he is delivering the idea that cultural transformation is equivalent to changes of structure of feelings. In the early twentieth-century China, cultural intellectuals were experiencing drastic transformations in both social institutions and cultural values system. Their existing cultural consciousness was struck by newly emergent living experiences constituted by modern urban space. As a result, when they joined cultural gatherings within the teahouse and coffeehouse, they were situated under a “structure of feeling,” through which they were able to obtain a sense of belonging and internal self-recognition. The “practical consciousness” captured by this “structure of feeling” was then internalized into the cultural productions and activities of those intellectuals as lived aesthetic perceptions.

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4. “Tea” and “Coffee” as Significant Cultural Symbols

4.1 The “Coffee Seat” Column on Shen Bao

While progressive intellectuals frequented the coffeehouse in Shanghai for cultural gatherings, they shared similar aesthetic ideals and literary tastes with participants within the same gathering and thus established self-identification and constructed self-image. Later, a group of modernist cultural figures favoring the refinedness and the aura of exoticism of the gathering within the coffeehouse extended such gathering to the page of public press.

On August 6, 1928, Zhu Yingpeng 朱應鵬, the editor in charge of the special column called “Art Circles” (藝術界 yishujie) on Shen Bao 申報, published a short essay introducing the establishment of a new affiliated column to “Art Circles,” which was named “Coffee Seat” (咖啡座 kafeizuo). Zhu wrote in his opening remark for the new column:

From this month, our newspaper sets up a special space for the establishment of a “coffee seat,” which serves as the place for gatherings and conversations for our readers. Topics discussed can be literature and art, knowledge, social problems, and everything. Hope that you can join and sit here when you are free. All are welcomed.

從本月起，本刊闢出這樣一塊小小園地，設立了一個咖啡座，為讀者諸君隨
At the time of the establishment of the “coffee seat” column, the tide of urban exoticism had reached to its peak in literature and art circles in Shanghai, and the prevalence of Western salon culture effectively contributed to the vogue of urban exoticism among modernist literati. The salon first emerged during the Renaissance period in Europe, where men and women of letters gathered to enjoy polite conversation regarding topics like music and poetry. Meanwhile, it was also a pivotal public space dominated by writers for the generation and circulation or written works. Before the mid-eighteenth century, the word “salon” often referred to the spacious reception halls in royal and aristocratic households. It was appropriated to refer to the parlor around 1750, and later it designated “a more modest room where individuals socialized on a relatively intimate basis.”¹⁰⁶ The salon culture developed to its more refined form in France, especially in Paris, and it reached its high point between 1740 and 1780.¹⁰⁷ After the French Revolution, the term “salon” started to refer to social gatherings and embodied

¹⁰⁵ Yingpeng 應鵬. “Opening Remarks” (開幕詞), Shen Bao 申報, 1928.08.06. 167.
¹⁰⁶ Melton, 198.
¹⁰⁷ Melton, 205.
one of the most distinctive features of the Enlightenment public sphere, which was relatively independent to state regulations.

The salon culture was introduced to China associated with the entrance of Western new knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the meantime, Chinese students sent out abroad by the Westernization (洋務派 yangwupai) for overseas studies also brought back advanced Western notions and cultural traditions when they returned. Chen Jitong 陳季同, one of the 35 overseas students sent out by Foochow Arsenal (福州船政局 Fuzhou chuanzhengju) in 1877, was deeply immersed in the French salon culture when he studies at France. He was invited to join many salons in France to discuss various French and Chinese cultural topics, and his humor and wits left good impression on many French writers. In one of his articles, Chen shared his experiences … Salon culture was soon welcomed by many other modernist literati that admired French romanticism and Parisian exoticism, including Zhang Ruogu, Zeng Pu 曾樸, and Li Jinfà 李金發, most of whom were once overseas students to France and


majored in literature or art there. Under the enthusiastic introduction and advocation of French literary and artistic archetypes by these literati, most of the cultural gatherings within the coffeehouse in Shanghai were dyed by the aura of Parisian salon. Gathering with several friends to carry out polite conversations on literature and art while tasting coffee in the coffeehouse, under many circumstances, was out of the admiration and deliberate imitation of French literary and artistic salon.

From the introductory remarks written by the editor in charge, it can be inferred that the set-up of the “Coffee Seat” column aimed at continuing conversations and gatherings within the coffeehouse on printed products. The popularity of French salon culture in Shanghai had gradually turned the coffeehouse into a conspicuous public space ideal for hosting literary and artistic salon for writers and artists. Just as the actual gathering within the coffeehouse was especially keen to discussions of trending literary and artistic ideas, most of the short essays solicited to be published on the column featured topics on literary and artistic vogues thereat. A large portion of the published essays was concerned with the most recent activities within the literature and arts circles,

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110 Both Zhang and Li studied at France or French-language country – Zhang majored in Sociology and Philosophy in Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, and Li majored in Sculpture in National Academy of Fine Arts in Dijon in France – and wrote intensively on introducing French literature and art. For example, Zhang’ book entitled *Yiguo qingdiao* (Exoticism) was published in 1926, in which he introduced many aspects of French culture and expressed his admiration of them. Li once published an article entitled “Salons Litteraires in France” (法國的文藝客廳) on the 18th issue of *Renjian Shi* 人間世 (Mortal World), in which he discussed the characteristics of French salon culture and appealed to the adoption in China. Although Zeng Pu had never been to France himself, he received the instruction from Chen Jitong regarding French and French literature, and regarded French salon as the symbol of Western exoticism. Please see Fei, 18, and Chen, 90.
as well as the introduction of foreign artistic concepts and theories. For example, on September 21, 1928, an author named Ziyin 紫因 published a short essay on the column, in which he/she discussed the modernist Japanese novelist, Koizumi Yakumo’s 小泉八雲 (Patrick Lafcadio Hearn) opinions toward the literary styles of the works of George Meredith, the well-known British writer. Another essay published on December 8 in the same year by Chong 重 introduced how the collected paintings of Goethe were discovered recently in Germany that disclosed the fact that Goethe was not only an outstanding poet but also a brilliant painter. A month later, the same author published another essay entitled “An American Writer in France” (一位在法國的亞美利加作家) that introduced Julian Green, an American diaspora who made a name for himself in the literary world of France. On February 21, 1929, Ruilin 瑞麟 wrote an article for the column to discuss Hernani, the representative dramatic work of Victor Hugo, and at the same time he introduced several key western literary and artistic concepts, such as romanticism and the three unities in classical drama. In addition, the column often announced advertisements about the time and place of various literary and artistic activities, information about the public performance in theaters in Shanghai, and news about the publish of new literary works produced by modernist writers, especially those belong to the New Sensationalism. For example, on August 8, 1928, the column advertised the autumn public performance in Nanguo Theater 南國小劇場, and it also
once published an article introducing the new novel entitled *Trolleybus* (無軌列車 Wugui lieche) written by Liu Naou, one of the representative New Sensationalist writers.

Those writers and artists who usually frequented and gathered in the coffeehouse were at the same time the major contributors to the “Coffee Seat” column, making the column a window for the showcase of their aesthetic tastes and orientations. Thus, the new column could be regarded as an extended imaginary salon comparable to its concrete and actual version existing within the coffeehouse. In the envision of those writers and artists longing for the aura of France, the column on the newspaper, analogous to the coffee seat in the urban city, was a symbol of an imaginary venue where views could be exchanged within a public urban space.\footnote{Chen Shuo-wen 陳碩文. *Shanghai sanshi niandai duhui wenyi zhong de bali qingdiao (1927-1937)* (Paris in Shanghai: Exoticism in Modern Shanghai Literature, 1927-1937). PhD dissertation. Taipei: National Chengchi University, 2008. 118.} The salon in Enlightenment Europe centered on its communicative structure and attached much importance to the formation of a collective identity achieved through constant exchange of ideas and news, and at the same time, the conversation in the salon tended to be heterogeneous and egalitarian.\footnote{Melton, 202-206.} Within the “Coffee Seat” column, such characteristics were also perceptible. It encompassed a large variety of topics concerning different aspects of modern literature and art, and the selection of articles for publish was devoid of hierarchy in any sense – regardless of whether the writer was famed or not, rich or not, or in a relatively higher...
social class or not. The column embodied modernist literati’s cultural imagination of the sophistication of modern urban life constituted by the import of Western salon culture centering on coffeehouse gatherings, and it also functioned as an imaginary communicative space among those literati. However, on the other hand, the “Coffee Seat” column also inherited the inclusive feature from its Europe archetype to some extents. The European salon was usually joined by fixed participants, and it was not easy for outsiders to integrate into it unless they were introduced by “someone known and trusted by the salon.” Similarly, the writers of the “Coffee Seat” column were also confined within a particular group of people, whose names repeatedly appeared on the pages. Zhang Ruogu was one of the most enthusiastic contributors to the “Coffee Seat” column, and in 1929, his monograph entitled Kafei zuotan (珈啡座談 Coffee Seat Talking) was published by Shanghai’s Zhenmeishan Bookstore 真美善書店, which took its name directly from the column and collected some of the articles that he had published on the column, sharing the same literary and artistic connotations with the column. Before the establishment of the “Coffee Seat” column, he had already been renowned for his frequent publish of essays concerning literature and art on “Art Circles,” the special column to which “Coffee Seat” was affiliated. In the preface of Kafei zuotan, Zhang expressed his gratitude towards the editor Zhu Yingpeng, for Zhu’s presiding over “Art Circles” for more than three years, encouraging the publish of literature and art reviews

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113 Melton, 206.
and thus providing a pivotal venue for the exchange of information among the literary and artistic circles in Shanghai. He then showed his joyfulness to the newly set up “Coffee Seat” column and mentioned his delighted experience of sitting in the real coffee seat to deliver casual conversations with close friends, implying that the column would be an ideal place to continue the gathering rituals of his old acquaintances and himself:

Apart from sitting to write and hunting in bookstores, I often spend my free time in coffeehouses on Joffre Avenue. I only love to have conversations in the coffee seat with several bosom friends during twilight time, which is a kind of enjoyment that is more efficient and freer than doing painstaking writings. Besides, the joyfulness of conversations can only be obtained through the gathering among intimate friends and is unable to be popularized, especially the kind of conversation carried out in the coffee seat.

除了坐写字間，到書店漁獵之外，空閒的時間，差不多都在霞飛路一帶的咖啡店中消磨過去。我只愛同幾個知己的朋友，黃昏時分坐在咖啡座裡談話，這種享樂似乎要比彙盡腦汁作紙上談話來得省力而且自由。而且談話的樂趣，只能在私契朋友聚晤獲得，這絕不能普渡眾生，尤其是像在珈啡座談話

According to Zhang, the aura of refinement and the spiritual satisfaction brought by the gathering conversation in the coffee seat was unable to be enjoyed beyond a particular small group of people. Emphasizing the importance of intimacy among close friends during coffee seat talking, he created the distinction of the identity of gathered literati. Although the “Coffee Seat” column alleged to solicit articles from all readers of the newspaper, it in effect merely attracted those who cared much about modernist literary and artistic ideas and eagerly embraced the imported French salon culture, and most of these people were already acquaintances among themselves. Consequently, the column ultimately enlarged the cultural impact of particular literati. In this sense, “coffee” became a significant cultural metaphor in the “Coffee Seat” column, symbolizing the exclusiveness of the virtual salon gathering within the printed newspaper pages.

4.2 “Tea Talk Meeting” and the Journal of Literature and Art Tea Talk

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the “tea meeting” (茶会 chahui) culture from the West entered China and interacted with the indigenous tea drinking customs, infusing exotic elements for the traditional genteel meetings associated with tea drinking. The noun chahui had long existed in pre-modern China, but it was

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115 Zhang, 6.
endowed with modern definitions during the late Qing and early Republican era under the cultural impact from the West. Zhang Deyi 張德彝, the translator of the first Chinese ambassador to the United Kingdom, Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, recorded his experience of attending several “tea meetings” in London and Paris during the spring and summer of 1878, in his diary collection entitled Following Attendance to the United Kingdom and Russia 隨使英俄記, and he even complained about the frequency of those meetings:

[We] attended tea meetings day and night for social engagements, which [made us] so exhausted.

晝夜赴茶會應酬，疲憊不堪。116

Zhang’s diaries reflected Chinese people’s earliest contact with “tea meeting” in the modern sense. From his words, it can be perceived that at that time, the Chinese used the traditional word chahui to denote the notion of “party” and “salon” in the Western language context. Another relevant case can be found in the introduction remark that Chen Qubing wrote for the newly founded Grok Society (named the Southern Society later) in the late 1900s: “Our association is a little bit analogous to the literary genteel

gatherings organized by our predecessors, while also absorbing the tea meeting trend from the West.” (本社性質，略似前輩詩文雅集，而含歐美茶會之風。)\textsuperscript{117}

The concept of “tea meeting,” refreshed with Westernized connotations, was soon welcomed by many Chinese cultural intellectuals who championed Western new knowledge. Before the word “salon” was introduced to China, intellectuals had continued to use “tea meeting” to refer to gatherings among literate people up to the 1910s.\textsuperscript{118} Even though later the term “salon” prevailed among literature and art circles in Shanghai to often denote the cultural gathering among literati, there were a group of cultural intellectuals that were prone to adopt the word “tea meeting” which bear more indigenous Chinese elements to refer to their gathering activities.

The cultural group was named “Literature and Art Tea Talk” (文藝茶話 wenyi chahua; hereafter abbreviated as the Tea Talk Group). Most of its members were artists, while some of them were writers. The group activity of the Tea Talk Group was first advocated by Sun Fuxi 孫福熙. When he was the editor in charge of the literary and artistic journal Little Contribution (小貢獻 xiao gongxian), he raised a discussion on “what to do on Sundays” in the journal, in which he published a short essay suggesting to

\textsuperscript{117} Chen Qubing 陳去病. “The Introductory Remark for the Grok Society” (神交社例言). Quoted from Luan, 33.
\textsuperscript{118} Both Liang Qichao 梁啟超 and Hu Shi’s 胡適 letters and diaries had recorded the “tea meeting” with modernized meanings. Please refer to Fei, 17.
set up a “literature and art tea talk meeting” (文藝茶話會 wényì chahua huì). The first gathering was hosted in Sun’s home and was recorded on Little Contribution, and the second one was held in Sun Ya. Later, China Times: Green Light (時事新報·青光) published a special issue entitled “Weekly Tea Meeting” (一星期茶會 yìxīngqī chahuì), and since then, each gathering of the Tea Talk Group would be announced on the printed media beforehand. After the seventh meeting, the group came out with its own journal entitled Literature and Art Tea Talk (hereafter Tea Talk). Zhang Yiping 章衣萍, one of the earliest editors in charge, explained the purpose of the publish of the journal in the first issue:

We hope that our oral literature and art tea talk can have some achievements. So, we publish this tiny Literature and Art Tea Talk, which functions as the only venue for the free expression of our peers … We also hope that this can draw the attention of our friends within the country or even all over the world, so that they can accept or understand some of the literary and artistic tastes of our free expressions.

我們要口裡的文藝茶話有點成績，所以我們刊行這個小小的文藝茶話，這是

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119 Fei, 28-29.
According to Zhang, the journal was set up with the aim to substantialize the gathering activity of the Tea Talk Group, transforming it from the concrete gathering to a symbolized version within the printed product. In this way, the group was not only able to produce reliable records of its group activities, but also to reinforce the influence of its aesthetic principles and ideals, which were disseminated in a large scale within the literature and art circles. He delineated a relaxing and elegant aura of the tea talk meeting, asserting that participants could enjoy tea and desserts under the sunset or the bright moon and refreshing breeze when discussing literature and art through delivering carefree chatting. In addition, he also revealed that the tea talk meeting was inclusive in essence – it welcomed everyone who was fond of literature and art, regardless of which “-ism” he or she belonged to.

Although the cultural gathering of the Tea Talk Group bore many similarities with the Western salon, the group took its name from the term “tea meeting,” emphasizing the concept of “tea” which seemed to be more tradition-oriented when compared with the exotic “coffee.” Tea drinking was deeply appreciated by the group, through which the members strived to construct a kind of refined cultural atmosphere that was disparate

from the exotic sentiment associated with the coffee seat gathering centering on coffee drinking. When defining the literature and art teak talk as “pure” and “free,” Zhang referred to examples such as the genteel gathering of Orchid Pavilion and the banquet in the Peach and Plum Garden recounted by Li Bai 李白. At the same time, he also mentioned the Literary Club in London and the salon in France. This suggests that the Tea Talk Group positioned itself as modeling after both the long-lasting tradition of genteel gathering in Chinese history and the newly introduced Western salon culture. Hua Lin 华林, another principle member of the Tea Talk Group and the major contributor to *Tea Talk*, made a comparison between tea and coffee in his article when introducing the literature and art tea talk:

The famous tea in the East is also a good item in the world. Compared with the Western “jiafei,” its taste is light and pure … China has a long history of genteel gathering that featured “tasting tea.” But the coffee has a thick and strong taste and is stimulating. These two can represent the differences between the Eastern and Western cultures.

東方名茶, 亦世界佳品, 較西方之“佳妃”, 其味淡而清……中國素有“品茗”之雅集，不過佳妃濃而豔，富刺激性。此二佳品，亦可代表東西文化之不同
Instead of adopting the common translation of “coffee,” 咖啡 (kafei), he invented a new term, 佳妃 (jiafei), which could be simply translated to “the beautiful imperial concubine” and was infused with distinct Chinese cultural characteristics. Besides, he referred to the tradition of genteel gathering in China that featured tea drinking, implying the deep cultural root of the meeting organized by the Tea Talk Group. Hua also mentioned that the activity of the group was inspired by the literary and artistic gatherings in Western Europe, such as activities hosted by the museum and art gallery in Italy and France. Consequently, he wished that through the efforts of the Tea Talk Group, the ethos of literature and art could also prevail in China. Just like Sun Ya Teahouse which absorbed both elements of the traditional teahouse and the modern coffeehouse to achieve self-transformations, the gathering of the Tea Talk Group emphasized the combination of the gathering rituals of both the traditional genteel gathering in China and the European salon. Defining itself as a literary and artistic association gathered on the basis of communal aesthetic tastes, the group intended to associate literati by means of “tea drinking,” which had long been valued as an important constitutive element of the cultural gathering among traditional Chinese literati. In the meantime, it also emulated

the coffee gathering among writers and artists in Florence and Paris and usually held its tea talk meetings in venues located in the French concession, so its gathering was not an entire reproduction of the traditional literati gathering.122

*Tea Talk* also embodied the Tea Talk Group’s principle of integrating the Eastern and Western cultures. The short essays, argumentative articles, and literary works published on the journal encompassed contents related to classical poetic writings as well as modernist artistic and cultural ideas. For example, the first issue of the journal published two old-style *ci* poems composed by Zhang Yiping and Zeng Zhongming 曾仲鸣 relatively, while Xu Zhongnian’s “Sentiment and Beauty” (情與美 qing yu mei) and Wang Yachen’s 汪亞塵 “The Life of the Eastern Art” (東方藝術之生命 dongfang yishu zhi shengming) were also contained in the same issue. In his article, Xu promoted a kind of “life value centered on emotionalism” (惟情的人生觀 weiqing de renshengguan), suggesting that everyone should strive to liberate his/her “self” (自我 ziwo) and people’s lives should be decorated by beauty, which indicated a strong philosophical inclination towards Western aestheticism.123 Both Xu and Hua Lin majored in literature and art in France and were familiar with Romanticism, and as major contributors, their aesthetic

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122 Chen, 133.
orientation had deeply affected the aura of *Tea Talk*. However, unlike the “Coffee Seat” column that strive to advocate exoticism exclusively, *Tea Talk* welcomed both old- and new-style cultural intellectuals regardless of which “school” they were associated with. But the writers who contributed to the journal did share a common principle: they all struck to a kind of life value advocating love and beauty and were fascinated about those literary and artistic works that delivered lyrical and aesthetic sentiment. It is noteworthy that Zhang Yiping defined the literature and art tea talk as “a kind of noble entertainment that is beneficial to knowledge or emotion” (一種高尚而有裨於知識或感情的消遣。) in the opening remark for the first issue of *Tea Talk*. Hua Lin also claimed that the founding of the tea talk meeting aimed at promoting a “noble entertainment of literature and art” (文藝之高尚娛樂) which endeavored to rectify the existing despicable and degrading entertaining forms such as gambling and smoking. It seems that members of the Tea Talk Group were striving to refine the entertainment environment of the Chinese society, and the tea talk meeting as well as the associated journal organized by them appeared to be effective attempts to accomplish their goal. Just as Michel Hockx has insightfully indicated, the collectivity of the group “established image of gentility.”

Fashioning themselves as representative producers of sophisticated cultural ideals, they constructed the mutual recognition of literary and artistic tastes shared among cultural

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124 Chen, 131.
125 Michel Hockx, “Gentility in a Shanghai Literary Salon of the 1930s,” in Berg and Starr, 67.
elites, and the journal could also be regarded as the means by which they were able to establish a series of aesthetic principles that played a leading role in guiding the future development of the literature and art circles. The coexistence of traditional roots and Western salon culture within the cultural practices of the Tea Talk Group also indicated its members’ endeavor to borrow advanced cultural elements from the West to refresh the Chinese literature and art.

4.3 The “Imagined Community” and Symbolic Cultural Capital in Print Media

In the case of the “Coffee Seat” column, “coffee” projected urban literati’s admiration and imagination of French exoticism embodied by the salon culture prevalent within the coffeehouse. But in the envision of the Literature and Art Tea Talk Group, “tea” functioned as the link through which its members were able to establish an interaction with the long-lasting tradition of literati’s genteel gathering when simultaneously absorbing essential modern cultural influence from the West, revealing their nostalgia towards the gradually declining literati tradition under turbulent social transformations. While “coffee” and “tea” as two significant cultural symbols embodied different dimensions of cultural intellectuals’ active contribution to China’s cultural modernity, both embodied a particular kind of sophisticated cultural taste that distinguished itself from other much vulgar popular culture thereat.

When discussing the origins of national consciousness in modern Europe, Benedict Anderson emphasizes the significant role that the development of print capitalism had played in engendering people’s perception of the “nation.” He argues that
capitalism, in conjunction with print technology, lay “the bases for national consciousness.”126 Print media such as the book and newspaper provided people a sense of recognition when they realized that they were sharing a kind of homogenous print language with numerous strangers, and the time and date published on the newspaper made them be aware that they were living within the same chronotype with millions of others, with whom they had never met in person before but were able to perceive their existence through imagination. This constituted the pivotal root for the birth of modern nationalism. Therefore, Anderson defines the nation united through nationalism as an “imagined community,” stating that “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage of the modern nation.”127 Likewise, in the era of reform in China, the emergence of modern print media provided a platform for the formation of dispersed intellectuals in the urban space, just like the public space such as the teahouse and coffeehouse that functioned as the venue for sociality. Through participating in the construction of “tea” and “coffee” within the newspaper and literary journal, a large group of Shanghai’s cultural intellectuals managed to gather like-minded persons within the same “imagined reading and writing community.” When “coffee” and “tea” as important cultural symbols were circulated

127 Anderson, 46.
through the assistance of print media, they enabled the reinforcement of mutual recognition and self-identification among a group of urban cultural elites.

Additionally, the cultural practices manifested in the “Coffee Seat” column and Tea Talk also reflected urban intellectuals’ ambition to retrieve their authority in the realm of cultural production and knowledge construction. Those intellectuals endeavored to legitimize their exclusive competence to (re)define the literary and artistic connotations embedded within “coffee” and “tea.” This corresponds to the notion of “cultural capital” coined by Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, capital has three forms of embodiment, and cultural capital is one of them. Compared with economic capital, the most common presence of capital, cultural capital function as symbolic capital, which is “to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence.”

When editors of the “Coffee Seat” column and Tea Talk solicited joint contributions from interested writers, they organized a group of literati under the symbolic term “coffee” or “tea,” all of whom were capable of literary writing and longing for the development and popularization of refined artistic taste. In this way, they were also able to win the “cultural capital” that sustained them to establish reputation and to achieve the construction of a communal image which suggested that they were significant in setting up noble aesthetic ideals during the period of social modernization in China, when intellectuals were facing severe identity crisis and were seeking for alternative sources for gaining cultural authority.

5. Conclusion

According to Jürgen Habermas, the public sphere, which is a central feature of modern capitalist society, emerged in Western Europe in the eighteenth century, within which a new concept of public opinion was able to form. Widely separated people were linked in the public sphere for open discussions, wherein they exchanged ideas and shared views with others. The public sphere could be both a physical one – drawing rooms, coffeehouses, and salons – that held face-to-face gatherings, and it could also be one constructed by the print media – books, pamphlets, and newspapers circulated among the educated class. 129 Charles Taylor further illustrates that the public sphere could be divided into two categories – the “topical common space” and “metatopical common space” or “nonlocal common space.” The “topical common space” refers to the tangible space such as the salon, pub, square, street, and school, which usually embraced the local gatherings that organized the public based on the same topic. The “metatopical common space,” on the other hand, denotes the intangible and imaginary community formed by public media including the newspaper, magazine, and book. It organized strangers dispersed in different regions through a common understanding, transforming them into an “imagined community,” which was a crucial part of modern social imaginaries. 130

The teahouse and coffeehouse in Republican Shanghai functioned as the “topical common space” where sociality among modern cultural intellectuals were achieved,
because they both hosted the gathering activities through which civil conversations on literary writings and most recent artistic trends were delivered. It was within the cultural gatherings that the common aesthetic taste was formulated among a particular group of literate people, which formed an interactive relationship with the public space that they frequented. When they resorted to the pages of newspaper and popular journal to advertise their literary and artistic activities within the public space and solicited more people with similar aesthetic orientation to join in, they successfully created a “metatopical common space” which could be regarded as an “imaginary gathering” within print media, and extended their cultural influence to a larger scale. Even though they asserted that they did not set up particular criteria for potential participants of both their actual and virtual gatherings, it was still implied that their entertainment was an inclusive one which was merely to satisfy a minor group of urban cultural elites who was self-claimed as the “leisure class” (有閒階層). In this sense, they were able to gain the so-called “social capital.” According to Bourdieu, the cultural capital can be objectified in materials and media such as writings, and it can win respect for its processors because of its scarcity value. It is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are

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131 Chen, 120.
linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”¹³³ In other words, membership in a group or the sociality under the application of a common name enables the formation of cultural capital. As a result, through fashioning the tea and coffee culture, which were closely associated with genteel gatherings within the teahouse/coffeehouse and the cultural practices within the “Coffee Seat” column and the *Literature and Art Tea Talk* journal, as sophisticated and refined, Chinese cultural elites attempted to distinguish themselves from the masses in regard of their competence of leading the development of noble literature and art and cultural modernity in China.

¹³³ Bourdieu, 248.
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