

Field Report

Globalizing Tradition: The Changing Careers of the Café in Spain and China

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This report examines how Chinese entrepreneurs have reappropriated the forms and meanings of Spanish cafés in Barcelona and Qingtian (China) since the 2009 economic crisis. By looking at these cases, it seeks to understand the aspirations of the entrepreneurs and how they have used their own knowledge of cultures to succeed and adapt similar traditions in two distinct locations. The analysis of the production of these new spaces of consumption reveals the dynamics behind a large-scale transnational flow of capital and its impact on the built environment.

Accelerating economic growth in China has increased the presence of Chinese individuals and capital across the world, with resulting impacts on the built environment. Yet, to date, little scholarship has examined the influence of this flow in a European context, particularly how it has affected spaces of everyday consumption. To address this gap, this study examines Spanish cafés operated by Chinese entrepreneurs through a series of cases in Barcelona and Qingtian.¹ The study also raises larger questions on how the knowledge of other cultures has been used to reappropriate local traditions in contemporary cities. In such a broader context, it seeks to explore the alteration and legitimization of the café as a tool to ensure business prosperity, how this produces new spaces of consumption, and how this operates within a larger dynamic of urban transformation.

The report begins by looking at how, in Poblenou (Barcelona), Chinese entrepreneurs have purchased Spanish cafés and preserved the existing interiors, decors, menus and clientele to keep the businesses profitable. It then traces the career paths of some of these Chinese caterers who have returned to China, to examine the different trajectories of the café there. Specifically, the second part of the report explores how the city of Qingtian (in the eastern Chinese province of Zhejiang) has become an attractive location for returnees to invest in cafés influenced by their Spanish experience. These returnees typically succeed because they import names, food and layouts that offer alternative encounters for local urban dwellers. They thus cater to new customers who, as a consequence of

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the growing Chinese economy, have acquired the means to demand a more diverse choice of spaces of consumption. In this regard, the proliferation of cultural references offered by the café, with its connection back to Spain, reflects a cosmopolitan ideal. Moreover, as Nezar AlSayyad has written, historical and economic analysis reveals how Chinese customers provide another example of global consumers seeking “difference” and “hospitality” as economic goods.² By examining the Chinese entrepreneurs’ ambitions, however, the report challenges misconceived descriptions of the Chinese community in the Spanish media, and it contributes to understanding the extensive shifts there in the management of spaces of everyday consumption.

Overall, the study aims to outline the trajectory of Spanish cafés as Chinese-managed cultural institutions in Spain and China within a larger climate of global economic and cultural exchange. And by delving into the dynamics behind this phenomenon, it contributes to the discussion of tradition as a process of “transnationalization of economic and cultural life.”³ Specifically, it explores how the tradition of Spanish café culture has been “deterritorialized” in Barcelona and “reterritorialized” in Qingtian.⁴ At a time of changing power relations between China and the rest of the world, such an inquiry also enriches discussion of how globalized cultural representations of traditions flow, and it reflects on the anxieties instigated by China’s repositioning in the world.

FROM THE CHINESE RESTAURANT TO THE SPANISH CAFÉ

Many of the Chinese entrepreneurs managing Spanish cafés in Spanish cities today belong to an influx of migrants that began during the last quarter of the twentieth century, a time when the geopolitical realignment between China and Spain facilitated mutual business activities. In the 1970s Spain emerged from a three-decade-long fascist dictatorship to become an open, democratic regime actively seeking foreign relations and investment. During the same period, China’s development strategy changed from one based on self-sufficiency to one aimed at participating in world markets, promoting the increased circulation of Chinese individuals and capital around the globe for the first time since the founding of the People’s Republic.⁵ In particular, Franco’s political realignment with China in 1973 and Deng Xiaoping’s Open Door Policy in 1978 encouraged Chinese migrants to pursue business opportunities in Spain. Among other things, this allowed Chinese from the province of Zhejiang, with a long diasporic tradition and with family members already working in restaurants in other European countries, to gain access to the country.⁶ Taking advantage of opportunities in newly promoted tourist areas for Northern Europeans along the Spanish Mediterranean coast, these Chinese migrants soon established businesses there.⁷ Thus began a decade-long

transnational journey in search of an extended citizenship that granted them opportunities as well as exposure to European culture and education.

The clientele of the first Chinese restaurants reflected the new industrialization and prosperity of the late Francoist period. In addition, the 1977 Moncloa Pacts, which offered social reforms and greater parliamentary control over the economy, soon led to the emergence of a new middle class, which changed the shape of Spanish society and encouraged the spread of democracy.⁸ Consequently, in a shift that was to endure and expand in the coming decades (especially after the entrance of Spain to the European Economic Community in 1986), Spaniards gained access to consumer credit, which in turn triggered increased consumption.⁹ Chinese entrepreneurs, with scant knowledge of the local language but aware of the potential of this new social stratum through their experience in other European economies, saw this as an opportunity to open Chinese restaurants catering to a rising consumer-oriented middle class.

Meanwhile, the state, in the process of building a Spanish democratic nation and as part of political modernization, opted for policies of economic liberalism, reducing involvement in economic affairs, lessening regulations, decreasing trade barriers, and promoting the expansion of all sorts of new spaces of consumption.¹⁰ The adoption of a market-oriented economy in the 1980s by the ruling PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) also widened the nature of businesses operating in Spain and accelerated the opening of a more diverse range of enterprises, including Chinese restaurants.¹¹

In Barcelona, Chinese restaurants also benefitted from economic conditions surrounding the 1992 Olympics — as the abundance of advertisements at the time show. These advertisements sometimes stressed the ubiquity of Chinese food and its status as an ordinary feature of urban life. “You already have in your neighborhood new Chinese restaurant,” stated one 1991 promotional feature from *La Vanguardia* — as if a Chinese restaurant was meant to be located in every neighborhood.¹² Low-budget interiors, imported from Hong Kong or Taiwan and decorated with Chinese lanterns, dragons, and embroidered-silk artwork, further consolidated an image of the Chinese restaurant as a foreign space in the Spanish cityscape (FIG. 1).¹³

The extended representation of Sinicism with native traditional elements in these restaurants aligned with the increasing commercialization of “tradition” in architectural production back in China.¹⁴ This contributed to the construction of a cultural identity of the Chinese in Spain as an imaginary and exotic “other.” As Shaun Tanaka wrote in his study on Japanese restaurants in Toronto, such forms of identity reflect the constant negotiation of staged authenticity through restaurant interiors.¹⁵ Beyond Edward Said’s discursive construct of the “other,” such authenticity may, according to Joaquín Beltrán, even be associated with a process of *auto-Orientalism*, driven by consumer demand for exoticism.¹⁶

FIGURE 1. Photo of the Shanghai restaurant in the Spanish city of Vigo in the 2000s. From the personal archives of the Shan family.



The establishment of the market economy in China in the 1980s, however, soon contributed to a stronger connection in the architectural realm between what “modern” and “Chinese” might mean.¹⁷ And in the construction push leading up to the 1992 Olympics, the first de-Sinicization of Chinese restaurants began to appear in Spain. At this time, marked also by a saturation of the market for Chinese restaurants, restaurateurs began to refurbish their interiors using furnishings and finishes that evoked a more “international design.”¹⁸ Earlier attempts to signify Chineseness in interior spaces — by mimicking motifs of traditional timber-framed structures with signature markers of exoticism such as green pitched roofs and red lattice motifs — were gradually replaced by simplified white walls, subtle lighting systems, and rectilinear, monochrome furniture (FIG. 2). Such new restaurants were less attached to a specific Orientalizing image and targeted a more refined audience, constituted of an established Spanish middle class. In the following years, as the Spanish economy continued to grow, some owners further distanced their restaurants from their Chinese origins and began to offer the Spanish middle class, now also more mobile, less-explored cuisines and interiors, such as Japanese or overall “Asian.”

The 2009 financial crisis was the final event leading to the adjustment of Chinese restaurateurs to Spain, facilitating their insertion into the business of the café. Though the early twentieth century, Spanish cafés had existed on the periphery of the European intellectual scene, aligned with the trend in Paris and Vienna for cultural meeting spaces. But this early bohemian model developed a more working-class identity as the economic, political and social norms of Spain changed after the Civil War.¹⁹ Until the arrival of Chinese owners,

Spaniards by and large therefore operated cafés as grassroots spaces of everyday consumption and sociability. However, one by-product of the early 2000s economic prosperity was a highly qualified generation of young Spaniards who, despite an elevated rate of unemployment, were unwilling to continue their family businesses, particularly those in the service industry. Chinese entrepreneurs frequently benefited from this gap in “handing down” family businesses. Paying in cash, they often took over existing cafés, leaving the interiors, services, menu and clientele unchanged. Today these cafés are so widespread and embedded in everyday social practices that they are the most important places of daily encounter between Chinese and Spaniards.²⁰



FIGURE 2. Interior of the Pekín restaurant in Barcelona, 2005. Source: M. Espinet et al., “Diseño y gastronomía: El Pekín ofrece una esmerada y policromática cocina china,” *La Vanguardia*, April 1, 2005.

Both under Spanish and Chinese management, these cafés today remain unaltered “third places” — neutral grounds that make informal relations possible among nearby communities.²¹ As spaces, the cafés are relatively small, but they provide a homey feeling, which they combine with long opening hours to serve a regular clientele outside of their work routines. The activities they accommodate include eating and drinking, but also such other social practices as watching soccer on TV or playing cards. Their new Chinese owners have largely preserved this former ambiance, retaining such features as nonpretentious interiors, and continue to serve local food and drink, including *tortilla de patata* and *cañas* at cheap prices.²² Overall, Chinese entrepreneurs have thus maintained the cafés as inclusive, conversational and simple places in which, as George Simmel once wrote, “pure sociability” provides the most democratic of experiences.²³

Yet distinctly Chinese cultural practices have also shaped how overseas Chinese initially managed restaurants in Spain, and more recently how they have managed cafés. Key among these is *guanxi*, a form of ethical practice essential to Chinese daily life and social obligations, and one particularly associated with prosperity in the restaurant business. *Guanxi* ethics promote a reciprocal exchange of favors between people in a hierarchically structured network of interpersonal connections. They thus build everyday obligations that tie in with friendships developed in daily life.²⁴ Despite *guanxi*'s everydayness, however, as Aihwa Ong has observed, the influence of these dyadic relationships has crossed over national boundaries as a moral economic understanding at the core of global business.²⁵ In the case of Spain, Chinese restaurateurs have thus combined *guanxi* claims of relatives and acquaintances with a simultaneous negotiation of the rules of Spanish markets.

ADAPTATION TO LOCAL PRACTICES: SPANISH CAFÉS OPERATED BY CHINESE IN POBLENOU

In Barcelona, the Spanish cafés managed by Chinese entrepreneurs stand as places of consumption where overseas Chinese have used their knowledge of culture to adapt to local business practices. Years of experience and observation of the restaurant industry as well as interaction with former owners thus allowed Chinese immigrants to both access and thrive in the management of such places. Nonetheless, as a result of the 2009 economic crisis and the great wave of unemployment that followed, some Spanish citizens came to view with distrust the sale and transfer of cafés to Chinese ownership. Thus, the Association of Restaurant Businesses estimated that in 2010 there were 1,500 Chinese-managed Spanish cafés in Barcelona. And despite the actual success of such cafés, critical media reports suggested an underlying anxiety and feeling of loss, leading to questions about the changing geopolitical relationship between Spain and China, in light of the rapid growth of the Chinese economy.²⁶

Contradictory media portraits of Spanish cafés managed by Chinese have also reflected concern about immigration and wider fears about the ability of Spain to assimilate foreign cultures. “The Chinese leave in the cafés the calendar of the Depor[tivo] champion of The League, but they cannot tell you any story,” related one story in *El País*, referring to the continuity of the café as a space to watch and discuss soccer. And it stressed the language barriers that impede Chinese owners from participating in everyday chitchat, one of the most common practices in these spaces.²⁷ According to another report in *ABC*, underscoring the sentiments of local residents surrounding one newly transferred café, “[E]verything is precooked. . . . But, well, these [the Chinese owners] are very smart. Soon they take your recipe and they cook it in a way that you cannot tell if it was cooked by a Chinese.”²⁸

Critiques of this sort became so frequent in the wake of the economic crisis that the journalist Laura Quinto decided to name a 2011 photographic and documentary project “It has been taken by the Chinese!” — a phrase she was constantly hearing in reference to the storefront businesses bought by Chinese entrepreneurs.²⁹ In her work, Quinto thus explored the stereotypes of the Chinese community in Spain and how these were being projected into everyday urban space and street life.

To examine the role of Chinese business owners in preserving existing practices in the cafés, I approached several restaurateurs with establishments in Poblenou, an area in uptown Barcelona near Diagonal Avenue (FIG. 3).³⁰ The majority of the Chinese café owners here were from Qingtian, had been living in Spain for at least several decades, and could speak fairly fluent Spanish. Formerly, Spaniards had owned these cafés. When the new Chinese owners had taken them over they had in some cases renovated them, but the work had largely comprised small touchups to meet commercial ordinances. Moreover, the food and clientele largely re-

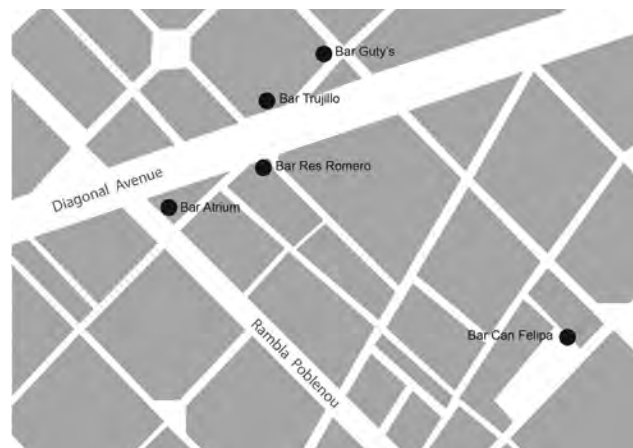


FIGURE 3. Map of the Chinese-owned cafés in Poblenou. Drawing by author.

FIGURE 4. Cheng in his Bar Guty's café in Poble Nou, Barcelona. Photo by author, 2016.



mained unchanged from the time of the former proprietors. Without formal training in the food and beverage industry, all the interviewees told me they had acquired their business knowhow through years of work experience — so much so that their familiarity with the model of a typical Spanish café enabled them to continue the practice.

Despite the cultural differences and the hard, learn-as-you-go process of assimilating foreign traditions, most of these Chinese restaurateurs expressed a much higher degree of satisfaction running a Spanish café than working at their former jobs. Many of them had previously worked in the food and beverage industry — however, they had either owned a Chinese restaurant that was too big to manage efficiently, or they had been employed in one without much say in business decisions. While they claimed they still had to endure long work hours, they also shared an appreciation of the café as a central social space that established a more neighborhood-grounded way of life for them and their families.

The sense of dignity and pride involved in running a café embedded in a community was clearly expressed by Cheng, the Qingtianese owner of Bar Guty's (FIG. 4). Cheng's life path was a typical story for a Chinese caterer in Spain, with *guanxi* ethics at the core of his translocal circulation within the market of the Chinese hospitality industry.³¹ He arrived thirty years ago, and was highly mobile for a period of time, working for other people in restaurants in Valencia, Madrid, Murcia and Zaragoza — until he reached Barcelona in 1991, just prior to the Olympic Games. All his immediate family, except his father, also continue to live outside of China — two of his siblings in New York, and two in Spain, including his sister, who also owns a café, in Badalona on the outskirts of

Barcelona. His migration, like that of other overseas Chinese, has thus been highly dynamic and mutable. However, for such individuals, the restaurant industry in Spain has created an employment network that has continuously evolved, both historically and geographically — first through Chinese restaurants, and more recently through the expansion of Chinese-managed Spanish cafés, which has even now reached smaller cities such as Badajoz, Navarra and Elche.³²

Cheng and other Chinese entrepreneurs, supported by extended family connections, have thus been able to change locations as they seek new opportunities. And although they often started out working for someone else, they soon managed to purchase their own businesses.³³ Like many of his compatriots, Cheng also initially possessed little knowledge of the food-service business. But by working for others, he acquired enough experience and capital to open his own Chinese restaurant in Vilanova i la Geltrú, a seaside village in the province of Barcelona. This restaurant, as he recalled, failed as a result of too many expenses, yet through it he became friends with a Spanish caterer who mentored him, and whose former café he ended up taking over.

The interior of Cheng's bar, which is roughly 50 square meters in size, has hardly changed since he bought it, except for the addition of a new toilet to comply with city regulations. Cheng is knowledgeable about his customers' tastes and preferences, knows what they want to eat or drink, and chats busily with them about their daily lives, comfortably mixing Spanish and Catalan words in his speech. Cheng says that he treats his clients well, offering extra tapas with the drinks. Through years of working in Chinese restaurants, he has come to comprehend different elements of the Spanish tradi-

tion, to the point where today he boasts that this is the secret for keeping his café full at any hour of the day.

A little farther along on the same block, Sun, the Chinese owner of the Bar Trujillo, told me a story that was similar in many ways. Also from Qingtian, she had moved to Spain with her family fifteen years ago. With the help of her daughter who speaks fluent Spanish, she explained, however, how she had decided to renovate her café slightly before opening it to the public. This involved changing the location of the entrance doors, painting the interior, and installing more lights to make the space look cleaner. Having only recently opened, she was still offering a free coffee to those who dropped by as a way to get to know people in the neighborhood. As a welcoming strategy, the tactic had been very successful, as people were still coming in to ask if the complimentary coffee was available and engage her in conversation.

For both Cheng and Sun, managing a Spanish café is not just a business opportunity; it encompasses a lifestyle where the relationship with the clients and the neighborhood is highly valued and essential to business success. Certainly, the location in a nontourist area is also relevant. Not only does this afford a lower rent, but it also provides for more localized and regular interaction with residents of the neighborhood, who make up the clientele. Despite their foreign roots, Cheng and Sun's analysis of the local environment and their personal experiences have thus given them insights into Spanish culture and café management, contributing to the continuity of a business practice that might otherwise have gone into to decline.

Beyond talking to and learning from their owner's experience, my conversations with the patrons of the cafés also contradicted media stereotypes of the Chinese café owner. There is a permanent sense of rush hour in Cheng's café, and at any time of day he appears deep in conversation. During the peak morning and afternoon hours, workers and retired people form the majority of his customers, while in the evening youngsters come to drink and play cards until late. For these people, Cheng does not represent an immigrant unfamiliar with the Spanish culture. On the contrary, his use of vernacular expressions, including Catalan slang, and his talkative character fills the café with atmosphere. His clientele generally believe Cheng is a natural replacement for the café's former owner, providing the same services and quality.

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the street, in Bar Res Romero, where Teng, a Chinese immigrant, works, most of the clients come to enjoy the lunch special. Their profile is similar to the people who frequent Cheng's café during the day. But among those with whom I talked, what mattered most is that the price, quantity and quality of the Spanish food is up to their daily standard.

Another nearby café, the Bar Plaza de Can Felipa, is also managed by a Qingtianese. The close proximity of this café to a local school makes it a meeting point for teenagers and mothers with toddlers. Many customers congregate on

the busy outdoor terrace, where some supervise children on the neighboring playground, while others sit down for a rest while walking their dogs. The patrons I talked to praised the new Chinese-managed cafés in Poblenuou because they were preserving Spanish café culture and its special conversational, culinary and spatial features.

In each of the cases described above, Chinese entrepreneurs have maintained existing neighborhood cultural practices to ensure business continuity, and the motivations and aspirations of the Chinese caterers, enhanced by their long-standing industry experience, enabled their enterprises to prosper as spaces of consumption. In the following section, I will illustrate this dynamic further by describing how Chinese entrepreneurs have recontextualized their cultural knowledge by exporting the idea of the Spanish café back to Qingtian.

KNOWLEDGE OF SPANISH CULTURE: THE DIVERSIFICATION OF THE CAFÉ IN QINGTIAN

With the rise of the Chinese economy and the economic downturn that resulted from the 2009 financial crisis, Chinese restaurateurs in Spain began to consider returning to their homeland to invest their capital and knowledge in new business and life opportunities there. In Qingtian, birthplace of approximately 70 percent of the Chinese community in Spain, some of these returnees have opened cafés that reflect a Spanish influence.³⁴ These Chinese returnees belong to a "middling" socioeconomic stratum with considerable professional experience managing food businesses.³⁵ Unlike other highly skilled Chinese workers who have been attracted back to China by a variety of incentives for foreign-trained nationals, many of these migrants decided to return to China because job prospects in Spain had deteriorated. As the European economic recession appeared to reach a low point, returning to China presented a more promising future, as well as offering an opportunity for both them and their children to reconnect to their Chinese roots.

Contrary to the case of the Spanish cafés in Poblenuou, in China the café developed a new career, following a new dynamic of urban change. Specifically, the first cafés that opened in Qingtian in the early 2000s signified a larger urban process of modernization, understood as progress through the adaptation to Western lifestyles. After their experience abroad, their owners were eager to showcase their transnationality and higher social status. However, as the Chinese economy kept rising, the transnational connection acquired new meaning, associated with China's own economic development and urbanization. Thus Chinese entrepreneurs in Qingtian, by participating in a process of transnational appropriation, have expanded both the geographic and spatial imagination of what a Spanish café might be. As Xiaomei Chen has argued elsewhere, instead of a reversed Orientalism, the adoption of the café as a Chinese construc-

tion of the “West” suggests ongoing discursive and spatial practices that can be understood as a form of Occidentalism in China.³⁶ Thus, the adaptation of cafés in Qingtian — from initially being spaces of consumption of strictly foreign spatial forms, to being a product of domestic characteristics integrated in everyday urban life — relates to the changing Chinese context and the way that working returnees are changing their homeland.

Despite the modest size of Qingtian, the town has an extended history of migration that lately has had a major influence on its environment. It is located in a mountainous area where farming is difficult, and where, as early as the twentieth century, the art of stone-carving prompted a tradition of migration to places outside of China, especially Europe.³⁷ Today this migration stream mostly focuses on Spain, Italy and Portugal, and in the last decade the impact of remittances and returnees has accelerated the city’s urban development. Bridges, museums and schools are now all tied in with this trend of infrastructure enhancement subsidized by overseas Chinese. Remittances sent back to Qingtian have also modified other spaces of everyday life in the city, including markets, restaurants, and other types of commercial facilities, which have started to alter consumption spaces for urban social interaction. In a city with a population of half a million people (not including the estimated additional one quarter of this amount who are emigrants scattered mostly throughout Europe), there exist several dozen cafés with imported names, layouts and traditions that capitalize on the Chinese imagination of the “West.”

Although the presence of cafés in Qingtian is a relatively recent phenomenon, ongoing shifts in their location and social orientation suggest a new dynamic in the reappropriation and adaptation of foreign traditions. The cafés initially appeared in the area close to the river Ou popularly known as “European Town” (Oucheng), where their returnee owners aimed to cater to an emerging middle class tightly linked to the transnational influx of capital, members of which could afford the experience of consuming foreign products.³⁸ Today, nearly two decades later, the cafés have spread across Qingtian, to create a second cluster in the area of Yongjin Street (FIG. 5).³⁹

While the first cafés started as spaces showcasing the European experiences of the returnees and associations with high social status, they have now gradually transitioned into spaces that are more easily replicated, even by owners who have never been abroad. The cafés have also now evolved to target the specific, diversifying tastes of the Chinese market, in which the Spanish influences offer a desirable differentiation, but not the norm. What was originally a business model operated almost exclusively by returning overseas Chinese thus now includes Qingtianese owners who have never left China. Likewise, names that stressed the transnational connection of the returnees, like Prague Impression, are gradually being substituted by those that the Chinese customers find easier to remember. Such is the case of the former Barcelona

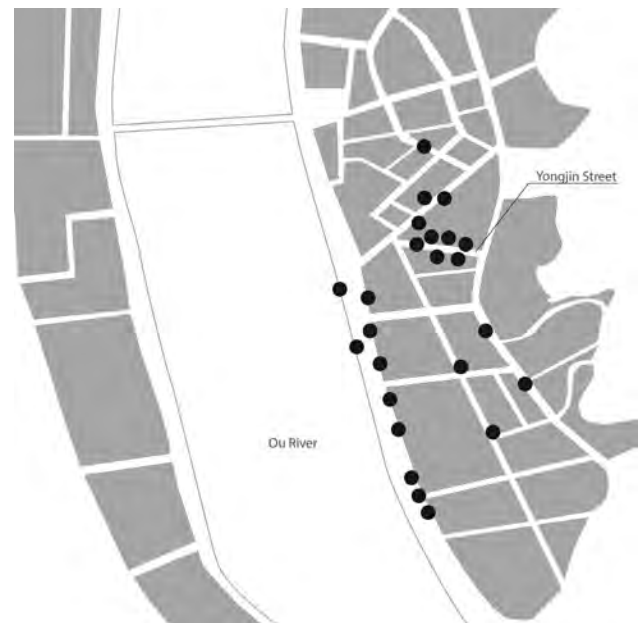


FIGURE 5. Map of cafés in Qingtian, clustered in two areas, near the River Ou and around Yongjin Street. Drawing by author.

café, whose owner, despite his ten years of experience in Rome, recently renamed Meishi Gongfang, loosely translatable as “The Delicacies Workshop.”⁴⁰

To better understand the changing forms and meanings of the cafés in Qingtian, I interviewed a series of Chinese entrepreneurs with experience in the restaurant business in Spain who are now operating cafés in their hometown and imprinting on them their acquired knowledge of Spanish culture. My interviewees had spent years, or even decades, working in Spain; and while their cafés share some similarities, each of them represents the preferences and ambitions of its owner, most of whom were migrants who, after decades in a foreign country, decided to return to China. All of these owners were highly pleased with their overseas past, but at the same time they shared some sort of relief to be finally back in China. Many told me they began by working for someone else in Spain in the late 1990s. They thus lived through the expansion of the Spanish economy before many of their businesses were forced to close with the crisis and aftermath of the economic downturn in 2009. After years of working long hours, the rise of the Chinese economy, however, offered them an attractive alternative: they could reinvest their capital and knowledge to open their own business in Qingtian, allowing for a more relaxed lifestyle while also getting to raise their children in the familiarity of China.

The satisfaction of operating a café in Qingtian after several decades spent in Spain was conveyed by Wang Weifen, currently the owner of the Bali café (FIG. 6).⁴¹ Her



FIGURE 6. *Weifen in her café in Qingtian.*
Photo by author, 2016.

experience was typical of that of other migrants who had returned to Qingtian to manage and operate their own restaurants. Weifen first arrived in Barcelona in 1992, and by 1994 she had opened her own Chinese restaurant. She then ran it until 2012, after which she transferred the business to another Chinese who has now turned it into a Spanish café. All of Weifen's family lives in Spain, except her husband, a civil servant, who, even during her years as a migrant, never moved out of China. In Barcelona, she and her family have been engaged in different businesses in addition to Chinese restaurants, including Spanish bakeries, wholesale retail stores, and the import-export trade. However, while still working in Spain, in 2007 she decided to open a hotpot restaurant in Jinhua, a town not far from Qingtian. Spain had given her many opportunities, but conditions there, in which she “worked like a bull and lived like a dog,” were not as desirable as in Qingtian. So, although she ended up selling the hotpot shop, the experience set in motion her final move back to China, and gave her the idea of starting a café in Qingtian, where she could utilize some of the aspects of culture that she had embraced while in Spain.

Weifen's aspirations for a better quality of life were projected onto her café and reflected how she aimed to merge the significance of Chinese cultural values with elements of the Spanish tradition. She decided to name the place Bali, agreeing with her husband that in Chinese it sounds like “come in” — or perhaps “let the money come in.” She also incorporated several mahjong rooms in order to target middle-aged customers. However, inside the café, one can not only hear Spanish being spoken, but also enjoy some ham, paella, and other Spanish tapas. The interior, designed by Weifen

herself, is decorated with fake brick walls, leather sofas, and a large picture of a London double-decker bus, which also works well as a backdrop for evening concerts that attract a younger clientele. Her diversified cultural capital has thus enabled her to contend with the increasing number of cafés in Qingtian and allowed her to offer a space that blends her Spanish experience with the specific requirements of the Qingtianese customers.⁴²

The presence of cafés in Qingtian is also a marker of urban development. Isabel, a Qingtianese who spent fifteen years in Spain and now owns the PengyouQ café, has thus observed the city's rise through her experience as a café owner.⁴³ Today she finds Qingtian and Hong Kong alike, “especially the neon lights and the raising prices.” In relation to the accelerating transformation of the city, she recalls not wearing sandals in the past because the lack of proper sidewalks made her feet filthy. But her former dissatisfaction with the backwardness of Qingtian has now been replaced by optimism about the growing opportunities for her business — and consequently for her daughter who is still in primary school, and who, if she succeeds in her exams, might have the chance to go to Lishui and access a better education. Although Isabel owned a 1-euro shop in Spain that she had to sell during the financial crisis, she still manages a wok restaurant in Madrid that, together with the café, are her two main sources of income, and which provide the basis for her hope for an improved future in Qingtian. She acknowledges the summer influx of younger overseas Chinese who visit Qingtian to learn Chinese, and mocks those who do not already know their own language. Now that her daughter is back in China, she will not have to worry about her neglecting her Chinese origins.

When I asked Isabel why she had decided to open a café, she replied that she was passionate about drinking coffee. With great excitement she offered me a cup of an imported brand, a similar reaction to those of the other café owners I interviewed. She serves mostly coffee and small dishes of food, and she mentioned that occasionally she prepares Spanish tortillas, but she complained that is too tiresome. The interior of her café resembles that of Lorena, a returnee who spent twelve years in Spain and who owns the Douni Xicanting, where the brick walls with wooden latticework are vaguely reminiscent of the traditional Castilian architecture (FIG. 7).⁴⁴ Lorena also talked about her café with enthusiasm, and she briskly identified it as “her life, her place.” Many family pictures scattered around the café help establish an overall homey feeling. But she mentioned that she had decided not to include mahjong rooms, as they may become too busy for the type of space she wanted to create. While she explained this, her toddler was running around the establishment.

Despite the domesticity that Weifen, Isabel and Lorena have tried to imprint on their spaces, other cafés in Qingtian have become grounds for enacting the gendered identity of the modern Chinese man. Although the cafés are open to anyone, and even families with children spend their leisure time there, in cafés such as Yufei a majority of men, either alone or in groups of friends, gather for hours to drink coffee, smoke, and play mahjong.⁴⁵

Ruzhong, a retired Qingtianese with whom I spoke, has had experience with both Spanish cafés managed by Chinese in Barcelona as well as gendered cafés in Qingtian, since he

is a regular frequenter of both. He explained that most of his family still live in Spain, where they own a café in Mollet (Barcelona). This means he allocates part of his time to visiting Spain, while he enjoys his retirement in Qingtian the rest of the year. He owned a Chinese restaurant in Mollet for nineteen years, until the local municipality refused to grant him a renovation license in 2011. As a result, he decided to close the restaurant, while he arranged for his sons to take over running the café.

We met in the Olive café, where the rest of the tables were occupied by single males with whom Ruzhong exchanged a few words and some cigarettes.⁴⁶ He reflected on the gender differences between the cafés in Barcelona and Qingtian, and admitted that men are happier when they are not working. He said this was one of the reasons the cafés have a larger male clientele. Cuiyan, his cousin who joined us briefly, agreed. She is also retired, and was formerly the owner of a Chinese restaurant in Spain. She added that women are busy working at home, while men have more free time.

Ruzhong also attributed the boost in the number of cafés to the combination of European coffee and Chinese food, a mix that he claimed is much preferred by the Chinese. He added that the price of the coffee, which is much more expensive there than in Spain, induces customers to stay longer. My conversation with Ruzhong came to an end in the Maoqiang Shengcha, a café in which everything, and everyone but me, was Chinese. It was also where I left him to play mahjong with his male friends.⁴⁷



FIGURE 7. Interiors of the Douni Xicanting. Photo by author, 2016.

BEYOND CAFÉS: THE IMPACT OF EVERYDAY SPACES OF CONSUMPTION IN LARGER URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS

My interviews with a diverse set of Chinese owners of cafés in Poblenou and Qingtian illuminate some of the transnational and cultural processes behind the appropriation of café traditions and the impact that these processes have in the production of new spaces of consumption.⁴⁸ These interviews reveal the nuanced dynamics at play in the large-scale flows of transnational capital and the local-scale impacts that Chinese entrepreneurs have on a given neighborhood's built environment. Moreover, the interviews also reflect on the cultural phenomenon of "essentializing," whereby the café tradition becomes a translocal practice and generates new fluid spaces of globalization constructed by the specific social practices of cross-border Chinese entrepreneurs.⁴⁹

Although the interviews reveal differing individual motivations, collectively they indicate how these various individuals may use the knowledge from one culture as a strategy to operate their businesses in another. The highly mobile trajectories of the Chinese entrepreneurs thus greatly affected their acquisition of knowledge of Spanish culture, resembling that process by which, as the anthropologist David Howes has suggested, "foreign goods are assigned meanings and uses by the culture of reception."⁵⁰ This capacity for decontextualization and recontextualization stresses the ability of Chinese entrepreneurs to assimilate to new milieus, to adapt, and to improve the business. In the case of Poblenou this involves following the existing local practices; but in the case of Qingtian it may bring an imported experience that upgrades and differentiates the respective businesses of existing cafés.⁵¹ Furthermore, examining these specific stories challenges Spanish media stereotypes, and more importantly unveils Spaniards' growing anxieties and narrative of loss with regard to China's global economic repositioning and cultural influence at an everyday level.

Exploring such shifts in the cafés of Barcelona enables a better perception of the growing presence of Chinese individuals and capital, and therefore how this prompts the modification of other niches in everyday businesses that compose the built environment. Such is also the case of the

real estate agencies and drugstores operated by Chinese entrepreneurs in Barcelona, a rather recent phenomenon in the market. In both cases, Chinese entrepreneurs may be seen as capitalizing on their acquired knowledge of Spanish culture and Chinese connections to further enhance businesses: thus, their customers are not only the neighbors of the area but also Chinese citizens living in China who value Spanish products. For instance, walking into any of their drugstores during the day, one might run into local residents, yet late in the evening, one might just as easily stumble upon hundreds of boxes bound for shipment back to China.⁵²

In both Spain and China, the reorganization of existing spaces of consumption is also linked to the larger investment dynamics of transnational capital and its impact in urban transformation. As one Chinese interviewee shared with me, part of the capital he acquired in Spain through his restaurant was reinvested in Qingtian, but another part was invested in a massive highrise housing development called Madrid Royal Garden in the northern Chinese province of Heilongjiang.⁵³ This case stresses the multifaceted connection joining transnational actors — who include Chinese and Spanish migrants, investors and policy-makers — and geographically specific points of origin and destination. Moreover, in Barcelona and Madrid Chinese entrepreneurs are also participating in housing developments specifically targeting a Chinese market, in urban redevelopments at the city level, and in territorial infrastructure connecting to the One Belt One Road strategy.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, in Qingtian, urban redevelopment is best appreciated in some of the urban spaces and residential developments funded by returnees, as well as in new territorial infrastructure that is linking city to city with high-speed railways and international airports.⁵⁵

As Michael Smith, a scholar of transnational urbanism, has suggested, such practices form abstract networks of economic agency at multiple spatial scales, which have specific impacts on particular cities and particular people's lives.⁵⁶ Moreover, the deep intertwinement of everyday spaces and larger investment projects with a transnational logic reflect on urban transformations at a global scale, suggesting new impacts from capital flows and flows of knowledge and culture between China and Spain that needs further examination.

REFERENCE NOTES

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1. For this article I have used the term café as a translation for what in Spanish is usually referred to as “cafetería” or “café-bar” — what Joaquín Beltrán has referred to as “bares and cafeterías autóctonas.” See J. Beltrán and A. Sáiz, “Del Restaurante Chino al Bar Autóctono: Evolución del Empresariado de Origen Chino en España y su Compleja Relación con la Etnicidad,” in M. Barros and H. Valenzuela, eds., *Retos y Estrategias del Empresariado Étnico: Estudios de Caso de Empresarios Latinos en los Estados Unidos y Empresarios Inmigrantes en España* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2013).
2. N. AlSayyad, “Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism: Manufacturing Heritage, Consuming Tradition,” in N. AlSayyad ed., *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
3. K. Robins, “What in the World’s Going On?” in P. du Gay, ed., *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, in association with the Open University, 1997).
4. Ibid.
5. G. Huan, “China’s Open Door Policy, 1978–1984,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.39 No.2 (1986), pp.1–18.
6. For more on the Chinese family business system, see F. Yu, “The Chinese Family Business as a Strategic System: An Evolutionary Perspective,” *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, Vol.7 No.1 (2001), pp.22–40.
7. European nations with remaining colonies provided the most common track for Chinese individuals to enter the euro region. The last colonies with connections to other European countries were Hong Kong, as part of the British colonies until 1997; Vietnam, which the French ruled until 1954; and Indonesia, which the Dutch only exited in 1942. For more on the migratory tracks of overseas Chinese from Northern Europe to Spain, see J. Beltrán, “Comunidades Asiáticas en España: Movilidad Transnacional en un Territorio Frontera,” *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 92 (2010), pp.15–37.
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10. For more on the liberalization of the Spanish economy, see J. Aram, “Economic Liberalization and Social Values: Spain in the Decade of the 1980s,” *Journal of Socio-Economics*, Vol.24 No.1 (1995), pp.151–67.
11. B. Murphy, “European Integration and Liberalization: Political Change and Economic Policy Continuity in Spain,” *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.4 No.1 (1999), pp.53–78.
12. This slogan belonged to the restaurant Oriente Europa. It appeared in the newspaper *La Vanguardia* on September 28, 1991. There is a grammatical mistake in the original Spanish that I have not corrected in the translation. The original text in Spanish is “Ya tiene en su barrio nuevo restaurante chino.”
13. Details about the origin of the interior decors were gathered by means of personal interviews with Chinese restaurant owners. The interviews took place between 2015 and 2016.
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15. S. Tanaka, “Consuming the ‘Oriental Other’: Constructing the Cosmopolitan Canadian: Reinterpreting Japanese Culinary Culture in Toronto’s Japanese Restaurants,” Ph.D. diss., Queen’s University Kingston, Ontario, 2008.
16. For more on Orientalism as an institutional by-product, see E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978). For more on the relationship between Chinese restaurants and auto-Orientalism, see Beltrán and Sáiz, “Del Restaurante Chino al Bar Autóctono.”
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18. Ibid.
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20. I. Masdeu, “Mobilities and Embodied Transnational Practices: An Ethnography of Return(s) and Other Intersections between China and Spain,” Ph.D. diss., Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 2014.
21. R. Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1997).
22. *Tortilla de patatas* is a typical Spanish dish made of potatoes and egg, similar to a big omelet. *Cañas* is the Spanish name for draft beer.
23. G. Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, D. Levine, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).
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27. “Els xinesos deixen als bars el calendari del Dépor campió de Lliga però no ens poden explicar cap història.” Translated from the original Catalan by the author. For more, see T. Polo, “Bars de Sempre . . . Bars de Mai Mes?” *El País*, January 6, 2015, accessed March 13, 2017, at http://cat.elpais.com/cat/2014/12/30/cultura/1419938172_626234.html.
28. “Es precocinado todo. . . . Pero vamos, estos son muy listos. En seguida te cogen la receta y te lo preparan que no te das ni cuenta que lo ha hecho un chino.” Translated from the original Spanish by the author. For more, see N. López, “Bares de Comida Española Regentados por Chinos,” *ABC*, May 26, 2012, accessed March 13, 2017, at <http://www.abc.es/20120526/local-madrid/abci-chinos-comida-espaola-201205251902.html>.

29. The journalist Laura Quinto and the producer José García developed this photographic and documentary project in 2011. It was exhibited initially in the Cultural Centre Sagrada Família, Barcelona, and later in other locations.
30. Joaquín Beltrán's study examined the Eixample District, another area of Barcelona where the phenomenon of Chinese-owned cafés is taking over. For more details, see Beltrán and Sáiz, "Del Restaurante Chino al Bar Autóctono."
31. N. Sorensen, "Narrating Identity Across Dominican Worlds," in M. Smith and L. Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998); and M. Smith, *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).
32. For more on the Chinese-owned cafés in smaller cities like Badajoz, Navarra and Elche, see "Los Inmigrantes Chinos Expanden sus Negocios a la Hostelería Local," *Hoy*, June 10, 2010, accessed January 16, 2018, at <http://www.hoy.es/v/20100610/badajoz/inmigrantes-chinos-expanden-negocios-20100610.html>; I. Vicente, "Tapas Españolas Made in China," *Información*, July, 6, 2012, accessed January 16, 2018, at <http://ocio.diarioinformacion.com/hosteleria/noticias/nws-95979-tapas-espanolas-made-in-china.html>; and I. Benítez, "Hosteleros Chinos Regentan ya los Bares de Siempre," *Diario de Navarra*, December, 9, 2008, accessed January 16, 2018, at <http://www.diariodenavarra.es/20081209/navarra/hosteleros-chinos-regentan-ya-bares-siempre.html>. The cafés have also reached other cities, including Valencia and Zaragoza. See "Bares regentados por chinos en Valencia," *Las Provincias*, February, 3, 2010, accessed March 13, 2017, at <http://www.lasprovincias.es/videos/plato-lp/programas/680216635001-bares-regentados-chinos-valencia.html>. In Zaragoza, there were 300 cafés operated by Chinese registered in 2011. For more details, see P. Figols, "Más de 300 Bares en Zaragoza Están Dirigidos por Chinos," *Heraldo*, September, 29, 2011, accessed March 13, 2017, at http://www.heraldo.es/noticias/zaragoza/mas_300_bares_zaragoza_estan_dirigidos_por_chinos.html.
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34. J. Beltrán, "Comunidades Asiáticas en España: Movilidad Transnacional en un Territorio Frontera," *Revista CIDOB d'Affers Internacionals*, 92 (2010), pp.15–37.
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36. E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978). For more on Occidentalism, see X. Chen, *A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
37. M. Moore and C. Tubilewicz, "Chinese Migrants in Czech Republic," *Asian Survey*, Vol.41 No.4 (2001), pp.611–28.
38. The name of the River Ou (in Chinese, 瓠) is a homophone with Europe (in Chinese, 欧). The area close to the river is verbally called Oucheng, which can be translated as "town of the river Ou" (in Chinese, 瓠城), or "European town" (in Chinese, 瓠城), a reference to the number of "European" cafés.
39. In Chinese, 涌金街.
40. In Chinese, the names of the first "European" cafés were the direct translation of the English name, being Prague Impression café (布拉格) and Barcelona (巴塞罗那).
41. In Chinese, 巴里.
42. P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
43. The name of the café in Chinese, 朋友Q, is unrelated to the transnational past.
44. The name of the café in Chinese, 豆妮西餐厅, references the Western food that is served there.
45. The name of the café in Chinese, 与非咖啡, is unrelated to the transnational past.
46. The name of the café in Chinese, 橄榄树, is unrelated to the transnational past.
47. The name of the café in Chinese, 贺羌生茶网吧, is unrelated to the transnational past.
48. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash have suggested that "everyday experiments reflect the changing role of tradition, and as is also true of the global level, should be seen in the context of the displacement and reappropriation of expertise." See U. Beck, A. Giddens, and S. Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
49. N. AlSayyad, "Global Norms and Urban Forms"; and Smith, *Transnational Urbanism*.
50. D. Howes, *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).
51. Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier redefined these phenomena with a global quality as assemblages or sites for the formation and reformation of values of individual and collective existence, entanglements of global and local logics, whose outcomes cannot be determined in advance. For more, see A. Ong and S. Collier, "Global Assemblages, Anthropological Problems," in A. Ong and S. Collier, eds., *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).
52. The Spanish administration, well aware of the potential of this human and economic flow, is now starting to engage in inclusive policies such as the project Xeix in the area of Fort Pienc in Barcelona, which was awarded the European Best Initiative of Social Actuation for its effort to bring together Chinese and local entrepreneurs.
53. From personal interviews November 2015. The Chinese name of the development is 马德里皇家花园.
54. Some of the real estate projects include Jilong and Sweethome's construction of new apartment buildings in metropolitan Barcelona that targets Chinese seeking golden visas; urban redevelopments such as Wanda's investment in the España Building; and territorial infrastructure including the railway between Yiwu and Madrid and Hutchinson Whampoa's port enlargement via the Barcelona East South Terminal (BEST). In Chinese: Jilong (吉隆地产), Sweethome (温馨之家), Wanda group (万达集团), and Hutchinson Whampoa (和記黃埔有限公司).
55. Since the 1990s, with the strengthening of the economic situation of many overseas Chinese, these investments have become more considerable and frequent. See Z. Xiuming, "Remittances, Donations and Investments in Qingtian County since 1978," in M. Thuno, ed., *Beyond Chinatown: New Chinese Migration and the Global Expansion of China* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2007). Some of the projects in Qingtian include the Oujiang and Taihe Bridge, the Museum for Qingtian Overseas Chinese History, and Qingtian Imported Commodity City (a foreign goods commercial and residential development in the outskirts of the town). In Chinese, Oujiang (瓠江), Taihe (太鹤), and Qingtian Imported Commodity City (侨乡进口商品城).
56. Smith, *Transnational Urbanism*.