CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Thailand has a relatively long coffee cultural history, but in the last eight years, after the introduction of Starbucks, this coffee culture has undergone significant and profound changes. One of these changes is the newly emerged modern-style coffee houses. This study aimed at analyzing this change in order to answer two research questions, what is the style of the newly emerged coffee houses and what is the new style of coffee consumption.

After an introduction in chapter 1, chapter 2 set forth a brief history of coffee and coffee houses in Thailand along with a discussion of the Starbucks operation in Thailand. This provided the social context of the coffee culture in Thailand.

In chapter 3, a description was provided of the five different types of coffee houses characterized by the Starbucks-like local coffee houses, the coffee-stands, the independent coffee houses, the coffee houses established by the restaurant chains, and the new business style of coffee houses. This provided an answer to the first research question about the style of the newly emerged coffee houses in Thailand. In addition, Coffee Banking, certain Internet Cafés and coffee houses at petrol stations were described, showing a new business style of coffee houses.

The analysis in chapter 4 was devoted to answering the second question about the new style of coffee consumption in Thailand. Analysis revealed that two types of coffee cultures co-exist in Thailand, modern/new coffee culture and traditional/old coffee culture. This has led to the emergence of diversity in the coffee business, reflected in the variety of coffee items offered, the wide range of pricing, the many different locations of coffee houses and the many different types of coffee houses.

In the modern coffee culture, one can see an intermixing of the traditional and modern as well as the local and global resulting in hybrid features. These hybridization features can be categorized into two groups, the hybridization of coffee (drink) and hybridization of coffee houses (operation).   The former can be found in the drink items such as the fresh machine brewed coffee but served in the traditional manner, the use of sweetened condensed milk and served with a cup of Chinese tea along with the coffee.   The latter can be found in various coffee house operations.   Thai traditional elements such as traditional-style architecture, coffee beans produced in Thailand and Thai traditional coffee items are found at some modern-style coffee houses.   It is likely to get increasingly more difficult to delineate between what is modern and what is traditional; and what is local and what is foreign.

The strategy of *Ea Sae Coffee* is noteworthy as it shows the co-existence of the traditional and modern coffee cultures.   The two brands, *Ea Sae* Original and *Ea Sae* Plus operated by *Ea Sae Coffee*, are characterized by the traditional style and the modern style, respectively.   In addition, *Ea Sae* Plus's operation and strategy shows hybridization of the coffee culture as represented by the offering of two types of drink menus, namely the Plus menu and the Original menu.   The concept of *Ea Sae* Plus "the Old China theme with modern taste" itself is an intermingling of the traditional and the modern.

Additionally, a distinctive phenomenon can be seen in customers' new consumption style at the modern style coffee houses.   The customers who consume expensively priced coffee at a modern style coffee house show the appreciation of sign value more than the functional value of coffee.   The sign value is constituted by something extra along with coffee such as a brand, a logo-mark and modern decoration offered by the coffee houses.   The element constituting sign value is dependent on what the customers need.   The customers are not just consuming 'coffee', but they are also identifying with the image that a particular coffee house offers, which is its differential logic of sign value.

There are global and local factors that have caused the hybridization of the coffee culture in Thailand. First, the global factor is globalization. Hybridization is part of the process of globalization, so the advent of global cultural flows plays a part in the emergence of cultural hybridization.

Second, the local factor that has caused hybridization has two aspects, the survival of local coffee businesses and the emergence of a new coffee image. Some local coffee houses use the Thai traditional elements in their operation to distinguish themselves from other coffee houses. The hybridization features where the traditional and modern elements are intermingled can be found in the local coffee houses as their strategy for survival. This distinct feature appeals to not only the "Thainess" and traditional elements, but also its uniqueness that is "Thainess" and modernity blended.

To fight in the severely competitive coffee business, especially against the international super power Starbucks, the local coffee houses need special weapons that are new, unique and appealing to the national sentiment in order to attract customers. Hence, their efforts at survival have led to the emergence of hybridization.

Another cause of hybridization is the emergence of a new coffee image. The novelty introduced by Starbucks and other modern style coffee houses created the new coffee image. The new image promotes a new capitalist dynamic motivating the coffee consumption. There are three related phenomena at work; a new coffee image, generation and growth of coffee demand, and the growth of coffee business. That is, the new coffee image creates coffee demand and stimulates coffee business to grow, this then generates a more colourful and creative coffee image. Therefore, the new coffee image is the motivation not only for the emergence of new coffee houses, but also for the hybridization of coffee culture.

Hybridity is a distinctive feature not only in the case of coffee culture, but also in other cultural realms in Thai society. In terms of hybrid feature can be found with respect

food, Thai green curry spaghetti in BCC, *Mc Kapraow Muu* (spicy pork burger) in McDonald's, and Thai-style green tea (sweetening added) are a few examples. In the case of popular music, *Morlam Sing*, which is a blend of traditional Northeastern folk music and Western string music, represents an instance of cultural hybridity in Thai music.[1] *Hanuman Chansamon* is a 3-dimentional (3D) animated cartoon which presents the classic epic Ramayana of Ramakien (in Thai) serves as an example of hybridity in popular culture style.[2] Moreover, Thai instruments and music used for hymns in some Christian churches in Thailand can be found.

Continuity, similarity and difference

New coffee culture did not come out of nowhere but developed from the traditional coffee culture. Thus, there is a continuity of traditional style in the new culture. However, throughout the process of development, the impact of several factors led to the emergence of new features. These distinctive features enable one to recognize the difference between traditional and modern coffee cultures in Thai society.

In terms of continuity, the traditional and newly emerged coffee culture shares certain similarities. Coffee houses, past and present, offer people social gathering space to drink coffee and spend time. Some of them spend hours at the shop after they order one drink, and this phenomenon can be seen today at both types of shops: traditional-style coffee houses and modern-style coffee houses. For example, *Sapha Kafae*, one of the features of traditional coffee culture, had a significant role especially in the period after World War I to the end of World War II.[3] At that time, information technology was poorly developed, therefore, *Sapha Kafae,* located at the center of the community, was where people gathered for collecting and exchanging any kind of information. People were eager for information because of the war, and the coffee houses, some of them offered newspapers for free, were the ideal place to get

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[1] Phakdeephasook. 2005
[2] ibid.
[3] Ratjaroenkhajorn, 2001

information especially since they were opened from early morning.   In addition, buying a cup of coffee to stay at the shop for hours was reasonable for people.   This type of community can still be seen at the traditional coffee houses today such as Ea Sae Original in *Yaowarat.*   The customers gathering at the shop are most likely long-time acquaintances, and many of them spend hours there chatting with friends.

Modern-style coffee houses also offer a place where the customers can stay for a long time, for example, 'the third place' concept of Starbucks.   The 'third place' means the place expanded from the customers' living room, office room or classroom which customers can use as they like.   Many modern-style coffee houses offer such space, which are usually beautifully or luxuriously decorated, as drinking or meeting space to customers.

As for the differences between the traditional and modern coffee cultures is consumption style.   The customers of modern coffee culture, including some who do not drink or dislike coffee, go to the modern-style coffee houses for specific purposes including drinking, reading, chatting with friends, doing homework and so on.   Their behaviour, as can be seen at the outlets, can be characterized as being individualized.   The drinking space of modern-style coffee houses is relatively quiet without much loud talking because the customers gathering at the modern-style coffee houses are usually not acquaintances.   However, they share the sign value offered by the coffee houses such as a company's brand, an image and expensively priced drink items.   The customers are using coffee consumption to signify who they are and to which social level they belong in order to differentiate themselves from others in society.

The cause of the emergence of a new consumption style in the modern coffee culture is mainly due to the changing lifestyle of the Thais.   Urban Thais, especially, tend to rely more on a modernized social system.   Today, people use many kinds of mass-media and

communication tools such as telephone, mobile phone, newspapers, radio, television and Internet to provide easy access to information. Hence, people no longer need to go to the coffee houses for information, and the previous role of coffee houses as the center of the community has diminished. Moreover, development of the market economy has generated commercialism. The branding strategy is one of the key factors that have led companies to success. The location of modern style-coffee houses, which is one of the important aspects to support the companies' branding, is also a cause of the new consumption style. Many of the modern-style coffee houses are located in prime or hip places where many people come. These places are mostly commercial areas and tourist spots which are most likely situated away from communities. The location distinguishes the customers who constitute the modern coffee culture, which is characterized as a different sort of community than can be seen at the traditional coffee houses and *Sapha Kafae.*

The co-existence of the two types of coffee culture offers a diversity of coffee and coffee houses in Thai society. Hence, coffee is recognized not only as the traditional drink item such as Oliang, but also as Cappuccino. Also, the recognition of coffee houses is diversified depending on the customer's need and the image of coffee/coffee houses.

The dynamic features that can be seen in the coffee culture in Thailand today can be described in terms of two seemingly opposite movements. One tends to preserve the tradition, and the other tends to intermingle with something influential such as modernity and novelty.