

## Abstract PhD project: Tian, Yuan

### **Small Business, Social Network and Neo-publicness: A Case Study on Mudanje Café Community in Changchun City**

This project explores the interactions between private individuals, interest-related groups, government entities, and non-governmental organizations in the running of small-business coffeehouses within an urban community in Northeast China, **thus investigating how various cultural activities and grassroots NGOs are spontaneously organized in these places.**

Found often in small-business coffeehouses are ‘interest-related groups’, consisted of people with various social strata yet sharing common interests, especially in various forms of art as Xiangsheng, photography, and folk music. Such groups, mostly amateurs, may perform regularly in certain stages in cafes, effectively breaking the ‘distinction’ in ‘judgment of taste’ as per Bourdieu. Also in the case of the cafe ‘Cats’ Utopia’, whose owner attracts customers with a cat-and-charity theme, money for helping stray-cats is collected via regular charity bazaars in cooperation with animal welfare NGOs. There are also coffeehouses involved in creative industry. Cafe owners co-organized with local government annually a ‘Creative Fair’ as a cultural event where people from interest-related groups may perform and hand-made articles are promoted and sold for commercial interest as well as charity donation, effectively bringing the public sphere to street-level.

Some works, including Ray Oldenburg’s *the Great Good Places*, examines the informal public life in hangout places and the importance of such ‘third places’ in rebuilding the community life in a tendency toward isolation in American culture. This project argues that coffeehouses are more than venues for informal public activities, instead, they contribute largely to formal public life as well. People not only talk but also act: they act literally by putting up performances, by charity work in helping stray animals, and by collective cooperation and confrontation with the local government.