That resilience and pragmatic creativity remind me of the long and intriguing history of coffee in Shanghai — one of an imported product packed with mix-and-match, innovation and a strength to bounce back whenever possible.



The Four Sisters Café made headlines in January 1945. — Courtesy of Shanghai Library

The Kentucky native came to the city at the end of the 19th century and worked in a variety of hotels before starting his own business — the Carlton Café on Ningbo Road. It was said to be the first place in Shanghai to offer regular performances of jazz music and dances.

Later he built Carlton Café on Bubbling Well Road (now Nanjing Road W.), right across from the racecourse. The Carlton Café, or more accurately a cabaret as its Chinese name suggests, often made it into local English newspapers when it had special shows or invited celebrity musicians or dancers.

When the café was shut down in September 1928, the China Press wrote a sensational article that called it a "famous amusement resort so widely

known throughout the Far East and always one of the cynosures for tourists from abroad."

"The happy days of the Carlton," the newspaper continued, "which reigned for so long as Shanghai's most luxurious downtown cabaret are ended."

Nobody knew what was to become of the famous café at the time, as its manager denied all rumors on the final night. Three months later, the Grand Theater cinema opened on the same site.

The cinema was demolished in 1931 after screening the film "Welcome Danger" that portrayed the Chinese as drug dealers and robbers. Architect Laszlo Hudec was commissioned to design a new theater on the site, one of his most challenging projects on a narrow, irregular lot sandwiched between tall shops.

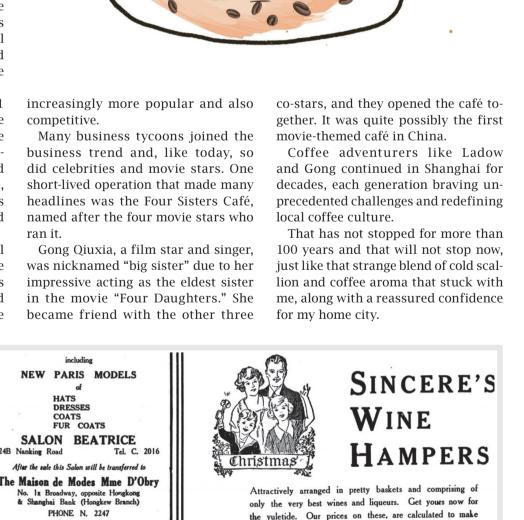
The archives also show that local Chinese began opening Western-style restaurants and cafés as early as around 1880. That trend accelerated in the 1920s, when such venues became

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it cheaper than if you were to buy, separately.

C'est Shang

The Carlton Café made it into local English newspaper The China Press in 1926, when it had special shows featuring seven American musical comedy artists. — Courtesy of Shanghai Library