

From Seed to Legacy: Cultural Mapping of Amadeo's Centennial Robusta Coffee Tree

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Abstract. This study addressed the limited documentation and cultural mapping of heritage trees as cultural and natural heritage assets in Amadeo, Cavite, Philippines. It aimed to document the Centennial Robusta coffee tree and examine its historical, ecological, and cultural significance in relation to the municipality's agricultural identity and local heritage. The study adopted the Cultural Mapping Methodology of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), using ethnography, semi-structured interviews, community immersion, and photo documentation to gather and validate data. Through these methods, the study gathered community perspectives and relevant information regarding the Centennial Robusta coffee tree. Findings indicate that the Centennial Robusta coffee tree is recognized by the community as part of Amadeo's agricultural heritage and is associated with the municipality's long-standing coffee farming history and cultural identity. Narratives from local stakeholders emphasize its connection to agricultural continuity and community awareness of cultural heritage within the locality. The tree is further understood as a reference point for the community's shared agricultural experience and cultural memory. The study provides baseline data that may support heritage documentation and future cultural resource inventory initiatives. In addition, the findings may contribute to the development of conservation strategies, sustainable tourism initiatives, and policy considerations for safeguarding local heritage assets. Overall, the study highlights the importance of systematically documenting culturally significant trees to strengthen cultural records and support heritage preservation efforts in Amadeo, Cavite, while reinforcing the value of local agricultural heritage within the community and its continuing cultural significance.

Keywords: Amadeo; Coffee heritage; Cultural mapping; Kabite Robusta coffee tree

Introduction

Cultural mapping is a systematic approach to identifying, recording, and classifying existing cultural properties or resources within a particular community. This process involves documenting, describing, visualizing, and understanding cultural assets, providing a comprehensive framework for cultural heritage management. It is an ongoing effort, with its effectiveness strengthened through continuous updating of cultural databases over time (Antonio, 2014). This aligns with the mandates of Republic Act No. 10066, also known as the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009, which emphasizes the identification, documentation, and preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The law highlights the importance of cultural inventories and mapping as essential tools in safeguarding heritage assets for future generations (Cruz et al., 2023).

In Amadeo, Cavite, the Kabite Robusta coffee tree represents an important element of local agricultural heritage, reflecting generations of coffee farming practices and community identity. Despite its cultural and historical relevance, there is limited systematic documentation of heritage trees such as the centennial Robusta coffee tree within formal cultural mapping studies. This lack of structured documentation presents a gap in preserving and understanding agricultural heritage resources in the locality. As climate change and land development continue to pose challenges to agricultural landscapes, there is a need to properly document and recognize such heritage assets to ensure their cultural significance is not lost.

The Kabite Robusta coffee tree, known for its resilience and distinctive robusta flavor, has become a symbol of cultural pride among Amadeo's farmers, reflecting both historical and economic aspects of coffee farming. Cultural expressions such as the Pahimis Festival and heritage landmarks like the Coffee Culture and Heritage Mural further highlight the municipality's strong connection to coffee farming and community identity (BusinessWorld, 2023). Beyond its agricultural importance, Robusta coffee beans are widely utilized in the coffee industry due to their strong flavor profile and practical use in instant coffee production (Mountain Brew Coffee Shop, 2025).

Despite these cultural and economic values, the absence of comprehensive documentation and cultural mapping of the centennial Robusta coffee tree limits its recognition as a formally recorded heritage asset. This study addresses this gap by systematically documenting its historical, ecological, and cultural significance through cultural mapping. The findings aim to contribute baseline data for heritage documentation and support conservation and cultural resource management efforts in Amadeo, Cavite.

Research Questions

This study aimed to culturally map the historical, social, and economic significance of the Kabite Robusta coffee tree in Amadeo, Cavite.

Moreover, the study accomplished the following specific objectives:

1. To determine the background information about the Kabite Robusta coffee tree, including;
 - 1.1 Common name
 - 1.2 Scientific name
 - 1.3 Classification based on growth habitat
 - 1.4 Classification based on origin
 - 1.5 Habitat
 - 1.6 Site collected/sighted
 - 1.7 Visibility
 - 1.8 Seasonality
2. To provide a comprehensive description of the Kabite Robusta coffee tree, focusing on;
 - 2.1 Morphological characteristics
 - 2.2 Common uses and scope of use
3. To collect and analyze narratives and folklore surrounding the Kabite Robusta coffee tree.
4. To examine the socio-economic importance of the Kabite Robusta coffee tree to the Amadeo community.
5. To address the need for conservation efforts focused on the Kabite Robusta coffee tree.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study centered on the cultural significance of the century-old Kabite Robusta coffee tree located in Brgy. Talon, Amadeo, Cavite, within the context of Amadeo's identity as the "Coffee Capital of the Philippines." Through cultural mapping, the research explored the tree's historical, social, and cultural value to the local community, focusing on how it embodied traditions, agricultural heritage, and local identity. Data were gathered primarily through interviews with key informants such as local coffee farmers, farm staff, and community members connected to the Amadeo Artisan Coffee Farm. After the initial round of interviews, additional interviews were conducted outside the area to further deepen insights as new information emerged. The study was limited to qualitative data specific to this location and depended on the availability and willingness of participants to participate, which influenced the range of perspectives collected.

Literature Review

Cultural Mapping

Cultural mapping and inventory, often referred to as "community mapping," is a technique used in community development to identify and map the assets, resources, and narratives of a community, organization, or individual, providing a structured system that supports sustainable development and cultural continuity (Estacio, Gopez, & Parungao, 2021). This approach is strengthened by Republic Act No. 11961, which reinforces cultural heritage conservation and education by expanding the provisions of Republic Act No. 10066, emphasizing the documentation and preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage (Cruz, Marcelo & Tenebrancia Law Offices, 2023). While literature and policy consistently highlight the importance of cultural documentation, they largely focus on broad cultural assets and systems, with limited attention to specific natural heritage elements such as individual heritage trees, indicating a gap in object-specific cultural mapping studies.

Amadeo and Its Coffee Industry

Amadeo, known as the Coffee Capital of the Philippines, has a long history of coffee cultivation dating back to the 1870s and is widely recognized for its coffee culture, particularly through the Pahimis Festival (Perez, 2023). Although not formally declared by the Department of Tourism, its identity remains strongly associated with coffee production and cultural heritage, especially kapeng barako. Historical studies show that coffee farming in Amadeo developed during the Spanish colonial period with the introduction of Arabica and Liberica varieties, contributing to its agricultural significance (Philippine News Agency, 2019).

In addition, coffee production continues to support local livelihoods and cultural expression through community programs and festivals (Provincial Government of Cavite, 2019). However, while literature extensively discusses Amadeo's coffee industry in terms of history, economy, and supply chains (Win, 2023; Wallbank, 2022; Freitas et al., 2024), these studies generally focus on production systems rather than specific cultural-agricultural heritage elements, suggesting a gap in localized heritage-focused documentation.

The Kabite Robusta Coffee Tree

The Kabite Robusta coffee tree (*Coffea canephora*) is a resilient evergreen plant suited for warm, low-elevation areas and is widely used for instant coffee due to its strong flavor and high caffeine content (Philippine Coffee Board, 2024; RHS, 2024). In Cavite, it represents both agricultural livelihood and cultural identity (Torres, 2021). Its cultural value is characterized by its provenance, representativeness, rarity, and integrity, reflecting its historical roots in Cavite agriculture and its symbolic role in local traditions such as the Pahimis Festival (NCCA, 2019). While literature acknowledges its agricultural and cultural significance, most studies focus on general coffee varieties rather than specific heritage trees, indicating limited documentation of individual centennial trees as cultural heritage assets.

Socio-economic Importance of Coffee Farming

Coffee farming remains a significant source of livelihood in agricultural communities, with production influenced by consumption patterns, farming practices, and resource availability (Luat et al., 2022). Productivity is further affected by access to credit, land size, and agricultural inputs, emphasizing the importance of financial and technical support for farmers (Wambua et al., 2021). While existing studies highlight the economic importance of coffee farming, they primarily focus on productivity and income generation, with limited integration of cultural and heritage perspectives in understanding the socio-economic role of coffee-related assets.

Cultural Mapping as a Preservation Tool

Cultural mapping is recognized as an effective tool for documenting local practices and preserving community narratives, enabling communities to sustain and reclaim cultural identity (Chilton, 2019; Smith, 2020). It is widely used to safeguard agricultural heritage and traditional knowledge systems. However, literature generally applies cultural mapping at a community or system level rather than focusing on specific heritage objects such as individual trees, indicating a gap in targeted cultural documentation.

Challenges in Coffee Farming and Cultural Preservation

Urbanization, economic shifts, and changing livelihoods threaten coffee farming communities, leading to reduced agricultural land and declining traditional practices (Santos, 2023). The commercialization of agriculture and reduced interest among younger generations further contribute to the erosion of cultural heritage tied to coffee farming. Without proper documentation and education, valuable traditional knowledge may be lost, as highlighted by studies emphasizing the role of cultural mapping in knowledge preservation (Chilton, 2019; Smith, 2020). However, these challenges are often discussed broadly, with limited focus on specific heritage agricultural elements such as centennial trees.

Conservation Efforts and Sustainable Practices

Conservation initiatives are essential for maintaining the sustainability of coffee farming and protecting biodiversity. The preservation of native coffee varieties like Kabite Robusta supports ecological balance and agricultural heritage (Delos Reyes, 2020). Sustainable practices such as organic farming, agroforestry, and efficient irrigation systems further contribute to environmental preservation (Flores, 2022). Community-based conservation efforts involving farmers, local governments, and organizations have also demonstrated success in integrating sustainability with cultural tourism and livelihood support (Guerrero, 2023). While these efforts are effective, literature still shows a general focus on farming systems rather than specific cultural-natural heritage assets, reinforcing the need for targeted documentation.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used in this study to understand the meanings and experiences of individuals in relation to the centennial Kabite Robusta coffee tree. This approach focuses on contextual and in-depth understanding of phenomena through real-life perspectives, commonly using interviews, observations, and field data (Del Siegle, 2019; University of Nebraska, 2019). In this study, the qualitative approach was applied to explore the cultural, historical, and socio-economic significance of the centennial

Kabite Robusta coffee tree. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the experiences and narratives of local stakeholders such as coffee farmers and community members. Focus group discussions were considered when applicable to gather shared perspectives on cultural identity and heritage. This design allowed a detailed understanding of how the coffee tree contributes to local culture and livelihood.

Sampling Design

Purposive sampling was used in this study, where participants were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2019). The study focused on individuals from Amadeo Artisan Coffee Farm who have direct knowledge and experience related to the centennial Kabite Robusta coffee tree. The selection included local workers and farm owners who could provide relevant narratives and insights regarding the tree's cultural and agricultural significance. This ensured that the data gathered was rich, relevant, and aligned with the objectives of the study.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in Barangay Talon, Amadeo, Cavite, specifically at the Amadeo Artisan Coffee Farm, where the centennial Kabite Robusta coffee tree is located. Amadeo is known as the "Coffee Capital of the Philippines" due to its long history of coffee cultivation and cultural association with coffee farming. The study was conducted from September 2024 to June 2025.

Research Participants

The participant of this study was a knowledgeable individual from Amadeo, Cavite selected for their understanding of the cultural, agricultural, and socio-economic significance of the centennial Kabite Robusta coffee tree. The participant was identified based on active involvement in coffee farming and familiarity with local cultural practices and community dynamics. This ensured that the information gathered reflected informed and experience-based perspectives.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was the NCCA Form 1C, a standardized cultural mapping tool used to document tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This form guided the structured recording of the Kabite Robusta coffee tree's historical, cultural, and ecological significance, including its location and associated community practices. The instrument included three components. First, documentation of the local name and physical characteristics of the tree, including habitat, leaves, flowers, fruits, trunk, and crown. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participant to gather narratives on cultural significance, experiences, and challenges in preservation. These interviews were video-recorded to ensure accuracy. Third, photographic and video documentation was used to capture visual records of the tree and related cultural context, supporting interview and observational data.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study followed a systematic process beginning with a literature review to refine the research focus and guide data collection using the NCCA Form 1C framework. Field visits were conducted in Barangay Talon, Amadeo, Cavite, where the researchers coordinated with the selected participant and local stakeholders to gather contextual information. Semi-structured interviews were conducted after informed consent was obtained from the participant. The interviews were guided but flexible to allow detailed responses, and all sessions were recorded and supported with field notes to ensure accuracy. After data collection, interviews were transcribed and analyzed using narrative analysis, while field notes were reviewed to capture contextual and non-verbal information. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes related to the cultural, historical, and socio-economic significance of the centennial Kabite Robusta coffee tree. Finally, findings were synthesized into a structured report and shared with local stakeholders to ensure that the documentation could serve as a reference for cultural heritage preservation and future initiatives.

Results and Discussions

Background Information

The Kabite Robusta coffee tree was identified as *Coffea canephora* under the Rubiaceae family and classified as a perennial tree crop suited for tropical agricultural environments. Field identification confirmed its presence in Barangay Talon, Amadeo, Cavite, where it grows in specific agricultural zones rather than being widely distributed across the municipality.

Based on origin and habitat characteristics, literature describes Robusta coffee as a crop adaptable to tropical lowland environments with moderate rainfall and well-drained soil conditions (Philippine Coffee Board, 2024). The findings are consistent with this description; however, the study reveals that in Amadeo,

its distribution pattern is more localized, indicating that environmental suitability alone does not fully explain its presence. Instead, cultivation patterns are also influenced by historical farming practices and community-based agricultural continuity. This suggests that while Robusta coffee is widely classified as an adaptable commercial crop in literature, its actual presence in Amadeo reflects a more place-based agricultural identity shaped by local farming decisions.

Description (Morphology, Uses, and Scope of Use)

Field observations show that the Kabite Robusta coffee tree has oval green leaves, small white to yellowish flowers, and fruits that transition from green to deep red when ripe. The plant produces coffee beans commonly used for processing due to its strong flavor and high caffeine content.

Literature describes Robusta as a hardy plant resistant to pests and suitable for instant coffee production (RHS, 2024). The findings support this description; however, the study highlights that in Amadeo, its importance extends beyond commercial production. It is also embedded in local farming identity, where its cultivation is linked to long-term livelihood practices rather than purely industrial use.

Stories Associated with the Plant

The centennial Robusta coffee tree in Amadeo, Cavite is not only an agricultural crop but also a living representation of the municipality's historical development and coffee farming tradition. Based on the key informant's account, the historical spread of coffee in the Philippines is linked to colonial trade routes and agricultural movement across regions. The informant explained that coffee is believed to have been introduced through historical trade connections, stating:

"it was through Mexico that coffee was introduced to the Philippines,"

This indicates that coffee cultivation in the country was shaped by historical exchange systems, which eventually influenced local agricultural practices in Cavite. The narrative suggests that Amadeo's coffee industry developed through both historical introduction and local adaptation. The study also found that coffee variety transition played a major role in shaping local farming systems. The informant described the decline of Arabica coffee due to plant disease, stating:

"nagkaroon ng sakit yung kape na hindi siya nagamot... nagkukulay kalawang yung dahon ng kapeng tagalog o arabica kaya nagkandamatay yung puno ng arabica."

This reflects the impact of Coffee Leaf Rust disease, which significantly reduced Arabica production in the area. In response, farmers shifted to Robusta coffee due to its higher resistance and adaptability. This finding aligns with agricultural literature on crop vulnerability and adaptation but adds a localized perspective by showing how farmers directly experienced and responded to plant disease through crop substitution rather than abandoning coffee farming altogether. According to the key informant, this transition demonstrates the resilience of Amadeo's farming community, as they continued coffee production despite agricultural challenges. Instead of shifting to alternative crops, farmers maintained coffee cultivation by adopting Robusta varieties. This adaptive decision reflects long-term livelihood protection strategies embedded within the community's farming culture. The informant further emphasized that coffee farming is deeply rooted in local identity, describing how agricultural life in the past was shaped by limited infrastructure and dependence on farming as a primary livelihood. Over time, modernization introduced new economic opportunities, which gradually affected youth participation in agriculture. This reflects broader rural transition patterns observed in agricultural communities. Despite these changes, the centennial Robusta coffee tree remains a symbol of continuity and collective memory. It represents generational farming practices, survival through agricultural challenges, and the sustained identity of Amadeo as a coffee-producing community. Unlike general historical accounts found in literature, the findings of this study highlight the tree as a localized cultural marker that embodies lived experience, adaptation, and community resilience.

Significance

The centennial Robusta coffee tree holds both historical and socio-economic significance within Amadeo. Historically, it serves as a living representation of long-standing coffee cultivation practices and agricultural resilience in response to environmental and economic challenges.

This finding aligns with literature emphasizing coffee farming as a critical rural livelihood source (Luat et al., 2022). However, the study expands this understanding by demonstrating that its significance is

not limited to economic productivity but also extends to cultural identity formation and community cohesion. Based on key informant accounts, coffee farming supports not only direct agricultural income but also indirect benefits through agritourism and community participation. This indicates that the tree contributes to both material livelihood and symbolic identity, reinforcing Amadeo's recognition as a coffee-centered locality.

Conservation

Findings show that conservation efforts for the centennial Robusta coffee tree are focused on ecological restoration and sustainable farming practices, including replanting of native flowering species to support pollinators, shade-grown farming systems, and climate adaptation strategies. These practices are consistent with conservation literature emphasizing agroforestry and biodiversity-based approaches to sustainable coffee production (Flores, 2022; Delos Reyes, 2020). However, the study reveals that in Amadeo, conservation is not only ecological but also socio-cultural, requiring active participation from the farming community to maintain both environmental health and heritage continuity. Identified threats such as climate change, declining pollinator populations, and reduced agricultural labor highlight the vulnerability of both the crop system and its associated cultural practices. This underscores the need for integrated conservation strategies that address both environmental and cultural dimensions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained before the study was conducted, and all procedures followed established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave informed consent prior to data collection. The study ensured that no harm was caused to participants, whether physical, emotional, or psychological. When tools such as cameras, video recorders, or GPS were used, participants were properly informed and gave permission beforehand. Indigenous practices such as storytelling were respected, and participants were given the opportunity to review documentation before it was shared to ensure accuracy and transparency. All data were securely stored, properly handled, and objectively analyzed, while conflicts of interest were disclosed and institutional guidelines were strictly followed to uphold ethical integrity throughout the research (NCCA, 2019).

Conclusion

This study examined the cultural, historical, and socio-economic significance of the centennial Robusta coffee tree in Amadeo, Cavite through cultural mapping and local narratives, revealing that coffee farming in the municipality dates back to the late 1800s, initially centered on Arabica coffee which declined due to Coffee Leaf Rust disease and was subsequently replaced by the more resilient Robusta variety, with the centennial tree serving as a living representation of this agricultural transition and the continuity of local farming practices; the findings further identified continuing challenges in the coffee sector, including the decline of pollinators, the impacts of climate change, and reduced youth participation in agriculture, although the community responds through adaptive practices such as replanting native flowering trees, adopting improved farming techniques, and exploring coffee hybridization to sustain production; overall, the study highlights that the centennial Robusta coffee tree functions not only as an agricultural resource but also as a cultural symbol embedded in Amadeo's identity, reflecting historical continuity, community livelihood, and collective memory, thereby contributing to cultural mapping literature by providing an object-based documentation of a heritage tree that integrates ecological, cultural, and socio-economic dimensions and serves as baseline data for conservation and local heritage planning; finally, the study recommends that future research expand cultural mapping initiatives to other agricultural communities for comparative analysis and conduct longitudinal studies to further examine the sustainability of heritage trees and the effectiveness of conservation strategies under changing environmental and socio-economic conditions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study on the challenges faced by the coffee industry in Amadeo, Cavite, it is recommended that native flowering trees be actively replanted and maintained in coffee-growing areas to restore pollinator populations, particularly bees, through coordinated initiatives led by the Local Government Unit (LGU), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and community-based environmental groups, supported by school-based environmental awareness activities to sustain long-term ecological engagement; in response to climate-related risks, it is recommended that climate-resilient farming practices such as coffee hybridization and drought-adaptive cultivation techniques be strengthened

through research support, technical training, and extension services provided by the Department of Agriculture (DA) in partnership with local farmers and agricultural institutions; to address financial constraints among coffee farmers, it is recommended that agricultural credit and support programs be improved by simplifying loan application processes, expanding access to low-interest financing, and strengthening coordination between LGUs, rural banks, and national agricultural agencies to ensure timely financial assistance; to reduce youth disengagement in agriculture, it is recommended that structured programs such as school-based agriculture education, community farming internships, mentorship programs with local coffee farmers, and scholarship or incentive schemes related to agricultural studies be implemented to encourage youth participation in coffee farming and heritage preservation; finally, to ensure the protection of the centennial Robusta coffee tree, it is recommended that a formal community-based conservation program be established involving regular monitoring of the tree's health, soil maintenance activities such as composting and mulching, installation of protective measures, documentation and historical marking, and continuous collaboration among the LGU, heritage agencies, academe, and local stakeholders to safeguard its long-term ecological and cultural value for future generations.

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