

ON THE BUSINESS OF SOCIALITY: A FIGURATIONAL EXPLORATION OF THE
ETIQUETTE INDUSTRY IN POST-REFORM CHINA

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Abstract

This research analyzes the rise of the etiquette industry and its auxiliaries in post-reform China. Methodologically, it adopts an Eliasian figurational approach and combines archival research with six months of ethnographic fieldwork. Each of the four analytical chapters analyzes a sub-phenomenon, to explore how etiquette was transformed into commodities with market value amid two streams of figurational changes that began since the early 20th century and in the post-reform era, respectively. The first two chapters are situated in the figurational developments along China's modernization process that has been recharting the relationship between the individual, society, and the state. The state-led "civilizing" initiatives for embodying civility to produce modern citizens are discussed in Chapter One by comparing the official doctrines from the New Life Movement (1934-1949) and public propaganda posters found in Chinese cities and towns during my fieldwork. Chapter Two furthers this line of investigation by following an etiquette business headquartered in Shanghai to explore profit opportunities in the top-down "civilizing" process, through strategically creating what I termed as culture scissors. The next two chapters analyze how etiquette-related businesses strive to carve out opportunities in the social stratification process in the post-reform era, by centering on two new professional roles. The first of these chapters (Chapter Three) presents a portrait of the new professional type of modern butler for China's High Net Worth Households. Its characteristic performativeness is interpreted figurationally by relating to the new economic elites' pursuit of social status. The second (Chapter Four) examines the particular functional role of etiquette professionals as advertised experts for self-betterment in the mainland. The features of functional integration and cultural differentiation observed in this sub-field are analyzed by identifying and comparing their projected images of the ideal self, situated within the background of China's path to individualization. Overall, this research showcases how figurational changes and the resultant tension with the one-party system were turned into a source of valuation by the etiquette industry and its auxiliaries in post-reform China through profiting from established sociocultural hierarchies founded upon the tensile equilibrium of power balances, risking reinforcing these hierarchical inequalities.

Keywords: post-reform China, cultural business, etiquette industry, modern butler, embodied civility, professional type, social distinction, self and individualization, sociocultural hierarchies, valuation, figurational, archival research and ethnography

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Introduction

1. Context and Approach

Great attention has been directed to behavioral norms in mainland China in recent years. It was reported that during his first official visit to The Maldives in September 2014, the Chairman of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping stated in the meeting with the staff at the Chinese embassy in Malaysia: "Let me note, we should educate our citizens travelling abroad. Don't throw plastic water bottles everywhere. Don't destroy other people's corals. Eat fewer instant-noodles and more local seafood."¹ One year prior, in 2013, the China National Tourism Administration (中华人民共和国国家旅游局) had issued a sixty-four-page behavioral guideline for outbound Chinese tourists to travel in a more civilized manner. Meanwhile, a slew of international media headlines appeared around the same time: "Chinese Wannabes Rush to Learn Etiquette" (Financial Times, 2012)², "More Chinese Aim to Learn Western Etiquette" (Bloomberg, 2013)³, "The Next Big Thing for China's Wealthy: Etiquette Classes" (CNN, 2014)⁴, "Western Manners: the Latest Chinese Status Symbol" (BBC, 2015)⁵, "China's Butler Boom" (The New Yorker, 2015)⁶

¹ Translations are mine. Source: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1267364

² Waldmeir, Patti. 2012. "Chinese Wannabes Rush to Learn Etiquette." *Financial Times*. (<https://www.ft.com/content/6dd3a0e6-4b1c-11e2-9650-00144feab49a>)

³ Larson, Christina. 2013. "More Chinese Aim to Learn 'Western' Etiquette." *Bloomberg*. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-05-30/more-chinese-aim-to-learn-'Western'-etiquette>)

⁴ Vasel, Kathryn. 2014. "The Next Big Thing for China's Wealthy: Etiquette Classes." *CNN*. (<http://money.cnn.com/2014/11/19/luxury/wealthy-china-etiquette/>)

⁵ Mangin, Virginie. 2015. "'Western' Manners: the Latest Chinese Status Symbol". *BBC*. (<http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20150219-the-latest-chinese-status-symbol>)

⁶ Bosker, Bianca. 2015. "China's Butler Boom." *The New Yorker*. (<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/chinas-butler-boom>)

and “Rich Chinese, Inspired by ‘Downton,’ Fuel Demand for Butlers” (The New York Time, 2017)⁷. Both streams of reports highlighted the elevated significance of behavioural norms in today’s Chinese society, yet from apparently varied perspectives. This research project intends to explore the phenomenon from the perspective of analyzing the rise of the commercial etiquette industry and its auxiliaries in mainland China. How was etiquette transformed into cultural commodities with market value in post-reform China? How did new professions emerge along this process and take on characteristics peculiar to the Chinese context, compared to their counterparts elsewhere? What are the social implications?

The sociological significance of behavioral modes has been analyzed in various social and historical contexts. Three most prominent theoretical frameworks are by Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu, and Erving Goffman. Norbert Elias’s thesis of the “civilizing” process emphasizes the socially-conditioned characteristic of behavioral norms. His comparative reading of etiquette manuals in Western European societies reveals a trajectory of behavioral and psychological change towards higher thresholds, a phenomenon analytically linked to long-term historical processes like state formation and elevated social interdependence due to the increasingly complex division of labor⁸. Linking individually embodied behavioral patterns to the social

⁷ Buckley, Chris, and Karoline Kan. 2017. “Rich Chinese, Inspired by ‘Downton,’ Fuel Demand for Butlers.” *The New York Times*. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/14/world/asia/rich-chinese-inspired-by-downton-fuel-demand-for-butlers.html>)

⁸ Elias, Norbert. 2000. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. 2 edition. Oxford; Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell. It should be noted that Elias’s historicized conceptions of ‘civility’ and ‘civilization’ are largely from the perspective of behavioural and emotional restraints, reflected by the subtitle of the first volume of *the Civilizing Process*: “Changes in the Behaviour of the Secular Upper Classes in the West”. The focal objective of Elias’s civilizing thesis is exploring the link between psychogenesis and sociogenesis in the western European context. Criticisms of Elias’s conception of ‘civilization’, often directed towards the connotation of western superiority or a teleological view of social ‘progress’ (e.g., Goody, Jack. 2002. “Elias and the Anthropological Tradition.” *Anthropological Theory* 2(4):401–12.) are not in line with Elias’s historicized view of ‘civilization’ as having emerged from ‘civilité’ first in France then in England and Germany, nor with his non-unilinear view of historical development, without discounting possible de-civilizing or informalization spurts (see

structure is also central to Pierre Bourdieu's sociological analyses, which additionally emphasize the relational feature of embodied behaviors in a given socio-historical context. In his view of social stratification as being determined by relational distribution of key forms of capital in a society, behaviors are embodied manifestations of varied habitus that is both structured by social stratification and continuously reproduce this structuring structure. Embodied behaviors therefore vary among different classes and class fractions. Physical embodiment of relational differences in his analyses is both facile and profound, for its ability to perpetrate symbolic violence by the state and the dominant groups. As the location of practical knowing, the body is deemed "capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as 'stand up straight' or 'don't hold your knife in your left hand'"⁹. Erving Goffman's work can be construed as following a similar line of inquiry, but with the emphasis on how moral ideals are maintained via embodied interaction as a form of ritual¹⁰. Interactional rules underlying facework, as manifested through showing deference to others by behaving with appropriate demeanors, have an important function of ceremonially affirming the shared moral ideal, where morality is defined in the Durkheimian manner through the dyad of the sacred and the profane. The moral ideal in American society, evidenced in his analyses of the condition of its absence in mental hospitals, is the sacred self. Apparently trivial interactional routines ceremonially performed by actors, often in a seemingly unreflective manner, yet serve the important function of maintaining the order of social relationships, and therefore that of a society. These three general qualities of embodied behaviors (i.e., socially-conditioned,

also: Dunning, Eric. 2002. "Some Comments on Jack Goody's 'Elias and the Anthropological Tradition'" *Anthropological Theory* 2(4):413–20.).

⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press. P. 94.

¹⁰ Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

relational, and moral) are also observed in the Chinese context in substantially varied forms for its contextual differences. But the contextual peculiarity also led this analysis to depart from these perspectives on one important front of turning away from actually embodied behaviors towards aspirational embodiment of behavioral codes, mediating through newly emerged commercial means.

Exploring questions on the rise of the commercial etiquette industry and its auxiliaries necessitates historical conditioning. The need for historical situatedness is not least because of the embeddedness of economic phenomena or activities in social relations. Their close ties were noted in early sociological analyses of capitalism and modern society by classic theorists like Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel. Today, the interplay of the economic, the social, and the cultural dimension is the starting consensus for sociological investigations, in particular in the sub-field of cultural-economic sociology¹¹. But, in addition to the idea of embeddedness, historical situatedness also has another temporal dimension that is highlighted by Elias's historical-processual sociology. Based on a critique of sociological analyses with an exclusive focus on social statics, exemplified by the works of Talcott Parsons, Elias argues for the importance of studying long-term processes, in particular from the figural perspective to better understand social changes by attending to the changing nexus of power balances¹². The emphasis on long-term processes by default acknowledges the intrinsic differences between societies, each with their own developmental trajectory and historical specificities. But more importantly, the processual emphasis promotes an alternative perspective for analyzing social

¹¹ Two examples of this stream of work are: Granovetter, Mark. 1985. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91(3):481–510.; Zelizer, Viviana A. 2013. *Economic Lives: How Culture Shapes the Economy*. Reprint edition. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press.

¹² "Postscript" in Nöbert, Elias. 2000: Pp.449-484.

development and changes without treating individual and society as two discrete entities that can be empirically separated. This approach marks an important departure for examining the relationship between social structure and personality structure, a question that concerned Parsons as well. Since behavioral norms, embodied or to be embodied, are located at the intersection of the individual and society, this research project also attends to the historical-processual aspect, both in data collection and analysis.

The newness of commercial etiquette in the mainland means a relatively short history to trace back. My fieldwork revealed that 2008 Beijing Olympics was the starting point, since around the time the commercial etiquette industry became institutionalized with its formally establishing professional certification systems, and shortly afterwards, that the butler training businesses suddenly sprang up. But some social trends that conditioned the emergence of these phenomena have deeper historical roots. While the analyses to be presented in following chapters are mainly situated within the past two decades, during which the phenomenon manifested itself, the general historical background could have a longer time span starting as early as the First Opium War (1840-1842), the emblematic beginning of the modern Chinese history, as will be shown in Chapter One. Historical occurrences from the mid-19th century on exerted great influence on how *wenming* (文明; civility, civilization) in the modern sense has become understood in the Chinese context, amid the contentious relationship between China and other more “developed” modern western nation-states and Japan. The 19th century was indeed China’s “century of humiliation”¹³. Internal unrests (e.g., Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1964;

¹³ Mühlhahn, Klaus. 2019. *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. P.12.

Boxer Rebellion, 1899-1901), as well as western and Japanese imperialist invasions (e.g., Second Opium War, 1856-1860; Sino-French War, 1883-1885; Sino-Japanese War, 1894-1895; Germany's occupation of Qingdao, 1897) during the second half of the 19th century aggravated the political and economic decline of the last Chinese imperial society. The Qing government thus initiated a set of social reforms and industrialization programs in response to deepening social crises, for example, the Hundred Days Reform in 1898 and New Policies during 1901-1911. Constitutional and legal reform, the introduction of the parliamentary system, the abolishment of the imperial examination system, and the establishment of a professional army were among the most significant social reforms carried out during this period. They unintendedly prepared the institutional ground for the first modern Chinese nation-state, the Republic of China, to emerge in 1912. The early 20th century that followed was the "golden age"¹⁴ of Chinese capitalism that also transformed Shanghai to a modern cosmopolitan center. Social development programs for modernizing the Chinese state and its new citizens devised by the Nationalist Party in the Republic era (1912-1949) were then interrupted by the Second World War (1939-1945) and the ensuing Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) between the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party. When the Chinese Communist Party founded the People's Republic of China in October 1949, the Socialist China arrived. Radical social and economic reforms (e.g., Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960; Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976) in the Mao era (1949-1976) resulted in a social condition of poverty and crisis. Soon after, in 1978, Deng Xiaoping's economic reform gradually opened China to the world market and legitimized the market economy as an element of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics". Exponential economic growth followed, while the

¹⁴ Ibid. P.13.

one-party political system persisted. During this period, amid economic prosperity many new commodity forms have emerged by riding the waxing and waning social currents and undercurrents with roots in the past.

2. Data and Analysis

The historical-processual perspective of this research project led to a methodology that combines archival research with field interviews and observations. A particular historical event, the New Life Movement (1934-1949), is included in this analysis for being the first state-led social movement for producing modern citizens by cultivating the body. Although it was led by the Nationalist Party during the Republican era, it began a mode of top-down “civilizing” initiative that has apparently persisted even to this date. Archival materials on the New Life Movement were collected mainly from two locations: the Hoover Institution at Stanford University (New Life Movement Archive, 6 reels) and the Second Historical Archives of China (Appendix). Since the majority of the archival materials cannot be reproduced because of restrictions, my notes taken on location are supplemented with secondary historical literature on this event and other original documents sourced from publicly-accessible digital archives online.

Ethnographic interviews and observations for this research project were conducted from July to December 2017. Weeks prior to my departure in early July, I sent out “invitation” emails to etiquette and butler training businesses for participating in my research project that was then broadly framed as a study of the etiquette industry in mainland China. With no prior connection to the professional field, I identified a spectrum of different etiquette and butler training businesses in media reports and through internet search on both Google and Baidu. Both Chinese

and English keywords such as “etiquette training (礼仪培训)”, “etiquette school (礼仪学校)”, “etiquette courses (礼仪课程)”, “western etiquette (西式礼仪)”, and “butler training (管家培训)” were used. The email response rate was not-unexpectedly low. For some “high-end” boutique businesses offering small-group or individualized etiquette training at comparatively higher costs, their clients’ concern for privacy was cited as the reason for their inability to participate, according to the courteous replies that I received. For native-Chinese etiquette businesses, email appeared ineffective for establishing initial contacts, although more often than not an email address was provided at their official websites.

In order to seek as many research opportunities as possible, while in China, I conducted more focused online research on the Chinese search engine, Baidu, for the city or town where I was staying for research at that moment. Aware of the less formal business etiquette in the mainland, I also phoned local etiquette businesses and sometimes visited their listed business addresses, when such information was publicly available. During the research process, I also discovered that most of these businesses actively managed a WeChat public account for maintaining public relations and announcing course information. This channel led me to obtain interview opportunities that would be impossible to find otherwise; I was also able to attend two public events held by a boutique etiquette business that was beyond my reach through any other means. Public events like etiquette book talks and signings provided an informative third-person angle for me to observe how etiquette trainers present themselves to their fans and address etiquette-related questions during the Q&A period.

The six-month fieldwork in China brought me to many large cities and small towns. It appeared that most businesses agreeing to participate in my research project were curious to

find out about other businesses and my research findings thus far. Research ethics only permitted me to offer data analysis skills to assist their business activities and a copy of my dissertation upon completion¹⁵. Perhaps re-evaluating voluntary research participation from the perspective of market exchange, some businesses cut off further research opportunities abruptly or courteously. The vast majority of data collected during the six months were from nine businesses of various sizes, cultural origins, and operational models. While etiquette professionals working for these businesses spread across the country, most of these businesses were headquartered in first-tier Chinese cities and Hong Kong. The data collected during the fieldwork mainly includes:

- 1) 46 audio-recorded interviews: most of these interviews were in the one-to-one format and between one-to-two-hour in length, with the shortest one of half-an-hour and longest one lasting over four hours;
- 2) notes on informal chats: casual and unstructured conversations were either audio-recorded upon permission or manually noted down immediately afterwards; most of these encounters were with interviewees whom I had already interviewed but met with multiple times in different occasions, or with potential interviewing candidates with whom formally recorded interviews did not materialize;
- 3) observational notes taken during non-participant observation: these notes were taken in etiquette and butler training classes and sessions in different locations, either manually recorded on a notebook or laptop depending on the research environment;
- 4) notes on two public events: these notes recorded the settings, book talks, and interactions occurred during these book talks and signing events, including etiquette professionals' interactions with the host, guest speaker, and audience during the Q&A sessions;
- 5) digital

¹⁵ This project has been approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee of York University's Ethics Review Board, according to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

materials on the nine businesses: all available digital information on these businesses were collected, including their official business websites (multiple language versions if available), social media posts, and media reports and interviews; their web traffic was also checked digitally as background information; 6) around 2000 photographs: a part of these photographs were taken on the research sites, if not prohibited; and around 660 photographs were public propaganda posters photographed in places that I visited during this research trip. More detailed information on the collection of the empirical materials for each chapter will be discussed herein.

Data analysis of this research underwent two main stages. First, all of the audio-recorded materials were transcribed in their original language (Chinese and/or English). Hand-written notes were photographed to become codable input files. All textual and image materials collected for this research project were uploaded to NVivo and coded without referring to a pre-generated coding scheme. The hope at this stage was to let main themes emerge by organizing the generated codes into hierarchies to form thematic groups. Although this round of NVivo coding revealed some key topics, this approach appeared to be more problematic than informative for exploring the questions raised in this research project. By “flattening” data of different textures and layers to become equivalent inputs to be coded, some issues can hardly be addressed, therefore producing “distorted” results. Some examples of the problems are the varied amounts of data available for each of these nine businesses with different business models; historical-contextual information inadequately documented in the textual and pictorial materials collected; and less straightforward interviews with between-the-line messages needing to be interpreted in reference to the interviewee’s cultural and personal background that were inferred from other sources. The second stage of data analysis proceeded in a more “naturalistic”

manner, after a certain familiarity with the whole corpus of data had reached through the first round of transcription, coding, and analysis. Contextualized field observation guided this phase to organize the empirical materials into different chapters, with each centering on a sub-phenomenon. With loose reference to the coding scheme generated in the first stage, mostly as background information, all of the empirical materials for each chapter were analyzed through articulating a sub-phenomenon and analyzing it in relation to relevant theoretical discussions. These four analytical chapters therefore developed their own varied structures, according to the sub-phenomenon explored and the type of data the analysis based upon.

The overall analytical approach adopted throughout these chapters is informed by Elias's figurational perspective, central to which is a relational view of power. Such a view also attends to the flux of power balances that are mainly induced by the growing chains of (mutual) social interdependence, mostly, between different functional groups. The dynamism of the fluctuating distribution of power ratio is compared to that of a "game"¹⁶ or "social dance"¹⁷. The sensitivity towards contingencies that is inherent in this process-oriented view promotes a historicized perspective suitable for exploring the emergent roots of phenomena in their earlier social conditionings. Adopting a figurationally-inspired analytical approach therefore not only means the necessity of historicization of the phenomenon under investigation, but also the need to

¹⁶ Elias, Norbert. 1984. *What Is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press. Elias's comparison of figuration to a game is particularly revealing of his conception of 'figuration': "The 'game' is no more an abstraction than the 'players'. The same applies to the figuration formed by the four players sitting around the table. If the term 'concrete' means anything at all, we can say that the figuration formed by the players is as concrete as the players themselves. By figuration we mean the changing pattern created by the players as a whole – not only by their intellects but by their whole selves, the totality of their dealings in their relationships with each other. It can be seen that this figuration forms a flexible lattice-work of tensions. The interdependence of the players, which is a prerequisite of their forming a figuration, may be an interdependence of allies or of opponents." (P. 130)

¹⁷ Elias, Norbert. 2000.

examine the changing distribution of power differentials and possible conflicts bred¹⁸. These emergent conditions could give rise to a phenomenon and also shape its characteristics. The adoption of this analytical approach in this study consequently produces a “layered” analysis, where figurational developments serve as the historical background for better interpreting ethnographic data with a present focus and sensorial nuances. Although subject to criticisms on the reliability of causal inference¹⁹ or over-generalized manner in presenting historical trends, interpretations produced through this approach is promising for combining different perspectives: the macro socio-historical contextualization, individual actors’ own experiences and interpretations or “theories” obtained during fieldwork, and the researcher’s theoretically-backed reflections.

3. Structure and Chapter Outlines

The first two chapters concentrate on the link between civility and etiquette through the idea of “embodied civility” that emerged in modern China. They intend to show that the top-down “civilizing” process first initiated by the Nationalist Party in the Republican era appeared to persist in the CCP-led People’s Republic of China, even to this date. Behavioral codes obtained import through this mode of state-led social movements for producing “modern” citizens, a trend that

¹⁸ Featherstone, Mike. 1987. “Norbert Elias and Figurational Sociology: Some Prefatory Remarks.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 4(2–3):197–211. P. 202.

¹⁹ For instance, Layder (Layder, Derek. 1986. “Social Reality as Figuration: A Critique of Elias’s Conception of Sociological Analysis.” *Sociology* 20(3):367–86.) questions the explanatory power of Elias’s figurational approach and characterizes it as “sophisticated empiricism”, partially for its “extreme generality” and partially for what he observes as Elias’s tendency to explain figurations by other figurations through casual chains. Such criticisms appear to have misunderstood Elias’s view towards causality in sociological studies. For instance, Elias stated: “It may be useful to add that such sociogenetic connections between earlier and later figurations may be more appropriately expressed if concepts like ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ are avoided.” (Elias 1984: 160-161). In addition, equating criticism of generality to a lack of explanatory power is questionable, depending on the research question and the analytical role of figurational analysis in the overall study.

was later explored by commercial etiquette businesses by attempting to join in the process as assistant “civilizing” agents. Chapter One (“Embodying Civility”) begins with an observed parallel between posters from the Nationalist Party’s New Life Movement (1934-1949) in the Republican era and those produced by the Communist Party in recent years. The analysis compares two groups of ideological doctrines from these two moments of China’s modernization by extracting and scrutinizing the semantic networks around “embodied civility”: a discourse structured on “civility, lack, the grotesque”, “modern citizens, public morality”, and “four cardinal principles, daily activities”, versus one on “civility, the core socialist values, Chinese-socialist citizen”, “traditional Chinese morality, the socialist core values”, “everyday moral models, minute civilized behaviors”, and “I, people, nation, country”. While similarities between these two semantic networks evidence a persistent mode of producing modern citizens through cultivating the body, their differences reveal a discursive shift from a critical discourse of lack to that of patriotic pride in propagating citizen’s duty to become “civilized”, implying a different dynamism between the party-state and citizens at these two moments. However, this analysis shows a profound structural similarity to the positioning of the party-state as the civilizer, the ultimate moral authority, and the major agent for social change. This “civilizing” mode may be understood to be aiming to propel societal changes without endangering the existent distribution of political power appeared ineffective yet persisted, transforming the notion of “civility” in the Chinese context to be a bipartite amalgamation of an eclectic moral foundation and prescriptive behavioral codes, consequently leaving a gap that has come to be explored by commercial actors later.

Chapter Two (“Producing Embodied Civility”) extends this line of investigation by following an etiquette business headquartered in Shanghai to a southwestern ethnic minority

town to explore business opportunities. It unfolded within the background of the National Civilized City/Town/Village/District Campaign, supervised by the Central Guidance Commission for Building Spiritual Civilization since 2003. The nationwide campaign is among the latest top-down “civilizing” initiatives led by the central government. The remote town, then still bearing the official title of “Town below the Poverty Line”, had been struggling economically, so competing for the “Civilized Town” honorary title was its attempt to further develop its tourism industry to become a new economic backbone. This ethnographic case study explores how a commercial etiquette business strategically sought opportunities in this state-led “civilizing” initiative as assistant “civilizing” agent - by creating what I term as culture scissors in developing and marketing a variety of civility businesses to its target market. The top-down competition-style campaign assessing candidates by periodical inspections and according to an itemized evaluation system (i.e., the National Civilized City Assessment System) rendered the efficacy of civility business an attractive option to his clients. But this analysis intends to argue that top-down “civilizing” initiatives assisted by commercial actors could have the effect of producing a form of docile and sly civility, with the effect of reinforcing existent social hierarchies - such as that between economically developed and less developed regions - and of justifying the centralized allocation of symbolic resources.

The next two chapters examine how etiquette businesses carved out opportunities along with the process of social stratification brought by the rapid economic growth in the post-reform era. The rise of China’s new economic elites during the past four decades has impacted the social and regional relationships in Chinese society, led by the two co-existing, and at times competing, orders of the capitalist market and the “socialist” party-state. The etiquette industry and its

auxiliaries appeared to thrive within this figurational trend and also developed their own “Chinese characteristics”. Specifically, Chapter Three (“The New Performative Man”) analyzes the new professional type of modern butler for China’s new economic elites - High Net Worth Individuals. Based on ethnographic observation and interviews conducted at the Chinese campus of a butler training academy with an advertised headquarter in a European country, a portrait of the emergent professional type of modern butler is presented. Its characteristic “performativeness” is shown manifested through the costumed presence, courteous speech, communicative tact, professional pride, and the art of service. The emergence of this new professional type was explained figurationally by the HNWI’s pursuit of social status in a state capitalist society, in relation to the all-powerful politburo class as the managers of the state and society, and urban professionals with relatively high cultural capital obtained through formal education. The modern butler’s apparently excessively cultural and moral qualities are seen to be commercially transformed into simulacra of inward moral characters, and then projected unto his/her “principle” through the role’s intrinsic vicariousness. The ceremonial performativeness of an uprooted cultural symbol transforms pecuniary prowess into a form of social distinction based on cultural and moral quality in this social environs.

Chapter Four (“The Experts of Self-betterment”) focuses on a sub-group of etiquette professionals with different cultural backgrounds. They share a distinctive professional function that differentiates them from their peers elsewhere - acting as experts for self-betterment. This chapter analyzes a peculiar feature characterizing their professionalization process, summarized as functional integration and cultural differentiation, for projecting different images of the ideal self in individual etiquette training programs. Situated in the historical background of the

individualization process in modern China, this chapter presents five representative personal etiquette training businesses, based on interviews and field observations. It reveals that two distinctive images of the ideal self, gentleman with *sprezzatura* (i.e., studied ease and carelessness) and *junzi* (i.e., a man of virtue) with moral virtues, divided these individual etiquette professionals into two segments. This analysis further argues that these two apparently different images of the ideal self in fact reveal interesting parallels, in their embracing a collectivist notion of “I” and in projecting an ideologically-charged partial image of the social structure dominated by the market or the party-state. In a one-party state where lifestyle politics is severed from emancipatory politics, this observed trend of functional integration and cultural differentiation functions to culturally re-embed individuals with the freedom of choice into two competing sociocultural systems, offering the mirage of individual freedom.

Analyses presented in these chapters are then summarized in “Conclusions” to argue that two streams of figurational changes of varied scopes, one along the modernization process since the early 20th century and another since the economic reform, and their tension with the persistent one-party political system conditioned the rise of the etiquette industry and its auxiliaries in the post-reform era. These developments produced a structure of social relationships that is characteristically different from that of other urban industrial societies in the early industrial period. These structurally-related tensions were seen turned into the source of value/worth by commercial etiquette businesses through valuation practices, by drawing on external moral principles and often underlying various missionary guises such as cultivating public morality or assisting the pursuit of self-betterment as simulacrum of individual freedom. This analysis shows that these cultural commodities valorized by the tension between the changing

social distribution of power and the persistence of one-party system profit from the established sociocultural hierarchies, and therefore could also unintentionally reinforce these existing hierarchical inequalities.

Chapter 1. Embodying Civility

1. Introduction: A Parallel

These two figures created more than eighty years apart bear striking resemblance. The first set of illustrative drawings (Figure 1)¹ first appeared in the *New Life Weekly* (《新生活周刊》), a magazine published during Republic China (1912-1949) to promote the Nationalist Party's (Guomindang, also Kuomintang, 国民党) New Life Movement (新生活运动; hereafter NLM). Men and women, some still dressed in *changshan* (长衫; long shirt), *magua* (马褂; riding jacket), *qipao* (旗袍; mandarin gown)² and *douli* (斗笠; conical hat), were advised on public walking etiquette. The second (Figure 2) photograph I took in 2017 is a public poster on “the etiquette of walking (行走之礼)” fixed onto a construction barrier-board in Suzhou (苏州), a regional center to the west of Shanghai. These public posters are now hyper-visible in the mainland, seen everywhere in parks and community notification boards, on streetlamp poles, amid green-belt-separations, along sidewalks, and on airplane and taxi displays. Parallels are evident between these two figures from two different periods of modernizing China. To suggest a few, they were both produced by a party-state (i.e., the Nationalist Party's Republic China and the Communist Party's People's Republic of China, respectively); they were addressed to individuals by state representatives; accessible illustrations were explicated by a list of prescriptive etiquette codes;

¹ Contents of all posters included in this chapter were translated from Chinese to English by the author, if not noted otherwise. These illustrative drawings are publicly available at: <http://www.shz100.com/article-8-13393-1.html>

² *Changshan*, *magua*, and *qipao* are all of Manchu origin and were everyday attires in the late Qing period (late 19th century to early 20th century).

behaviours in public were targeted for implications for anonymous others sharing the same space. In these two cases, walking is accorded the significance of participating in a “new life” (Figure 1) or “practice[ing] *li* (禮; rites and etiquette) and cultivat[ing] *de* (德; moral virtues)” (Figure 2). Etiquette of mundane everyday action acquires elevated import through its embodiment.



Figure 1 Illustrating the New Life Movement (mid-1930s)

(Top Left) Keep to the left when walking

(Top Right) Speak in a friendly manner

(Middle Left) Say 'Sorry' when bumping into others on street

(Middle Right) Walk without eating; Walk without smoking; Walk without rushing; Walk without shouting

(Bottom Left) Enter and exit public places orderly, one after one

(Bottom right) Board and un-board the bus and wharf/ship in order; Queue orderly when buying tickets



Figure 2 One of a Set of Etiquette Posters on Construction Barrier-Boards (Suzhou, 2017)

(Left) Practice *li* (rite and etiquette) and cultivate *de* (moral virtues); Start with the minute China Dream; Kind and virtuous heart; Actions according to etiquette

THE ETIQUETTE OF WALKING

Respect traffic rules; Act courteously; Help the elderly and frail; Give out seats to those in need

1. Understand traffic signs, respect traffic rules.
2. Walk in designated lanes on the way to and from school.
3. Queue orderly to board buses, no pushing or rushing, no jumping the queue.
4. Keep to your right when going up or down stairs, no running up or jumping down, no walking side by side, no nudging others.
5. Stand to the right of the escalator, leave a passageway on the left.
6. Do not play with elevator buttons

(Right) (in picture: Rules and regulations in my heart)

Suzhou Spiritual Civilization Office, Suzhou Education Bureau

Viewing civility as comprising an embodied element is not a particularly Chinese view. Norbert Elias has shown that underlying what he coined as the “civilizing process” in Western Europe is gradual behavioural and psychological development towards higher thresholds of embarrassment. The behavioural and psychological aspects have become encoded into the notions of “civilité  ” and “civility” along with the bourgeoisie’s rise to political power in the West. As a consequence, “civilized” humans have distanced themselves from animalistic functions and

manners³. A recent civility campaign initiated by the Paris Transportation Company in 2011 makes the equation between animality and incivility explicit⁴. Its campaign posters portrayed “uncivilized” passengers as animal-headed human figures, for instance, in the images of a rooster-human talking loudly on phone or a frog-human jumping over the turnstile to skip metro fares. The campaign slogan reads: “Let’s stay civil all along the line (*Restons civils sur toute la ligne*)”. In addition to viewing the idea of civility as containing an embodied aspect, practices of cultivating civility through physical embodiment efforts have also been observed in non-Chinese contexts in various historical periods. Renlin Huang (黄仁霖; 1901-1983), a Nationalist Party general, observed first-hand the “Americanization” programs devised by the “Sociological Department” at the Ford Motor Company, during his studies in the United States in the 1920s. Supervised reform of working and hygienic habits of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and America’s South were to transform them into “American citizens”, modelled after the white middle-class. This experience was thought to inform Huang’s view of the NLM, in which he later played the important role of Director General (总干事), upon returning to China⁵.

It is therefore neither the idea of embodied civility nor proactive initiatives for embodying civility alone that defines the observed resemblance as a subject of investigation. Underlying their similarities appears a persistent mode of state-led social engagement for producing civility

³ Elias, Norbert. 2000. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. 2 edition. Oxford; Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell.

⁴ Pernau, Margrit, and Helge Jordheim. 2015. “Introduction.” Pp. 1-24 in *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe*, edited by Pernau, Margrit and Helge Jordheim. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 1. Posters from this civility campaign are available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2179450/French-admit-ARE-rude-stroppy-Paris-public-transport-bosses-launch-campaign-civility.html>

⁵ 深町英夫 (Fukamachi, Hideo). 2017. 《教养身体的政治: 中国国民党的新生活运动》 (*The Politics of Cultivating the Body: On Guomindang’s New Life Movement*). 生活·读书·新知三联书店 (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company). Epub edition: Chapter 1.

throughout China's modernization process. Hideo Fukamachi summarizes a similar observation as "molding modern citizens through 'cultivating the body' (通过'身体的教养'创造出近代国民)", a trend that emerged in Republic China (e.g., the NLM) and persisted through the Mao era (e.g., the Patriotic Health Movement/爱国卫生运动 in 1952, Four Pests Campaign/除四害运动 in 1958) to the post-reform days (e.g., Five Stresses, Four Graces, and Three Loves/五讲四美三热爱 from 1981, Voluntary Queuing Day/自觉排队日, recent cracking down on public pajama wearing and the "Chinese-style" jaywalking/中国式过马路 in the early 2010s)⁶. Both the NLM illustrations (Figure 1) and public etiquette posters (Figure 2) shown above were artefacts produced by similar top-down efforts during two different periods of this century-long process that is still in motion.

This chapter seeks to contribute to this line of inquiry by analyzing two moments from this long process, when these two figures with the observed resemblance were produced. The analysis is built on two sets of empirical data. On the one hand, archival materials on the New Life Movement were collected from the Hoover Institution at Stanford University (New Life Movement Archive, 6 reels) and the Second Historical Archives of China (中国第二历史档案馆)⁷. Supplementary materials were also sourced from various online digital archives, as well as from secondary historical research on the event. The vast majority of archival materials collected were official documents authored by members and representatives of the Nationalist Party for

⁶ Fukamachi, Hideo. 2017. Epub edition: Chapter 8.

⁷ All archival materials on NLM from the Hoover Institution and most original materials from the Second Historical Archives of China were not allowed to be reproduced due to restrictions. The list of archival documents viewed there is listed in the Appendix.

explicating and promoting the NLM, therefore representing the view of the party-state in the Republic China era. On the other hand, a second part of empirical data includes about 660 photographs of public posters that I took during my fieldwork in the mainland. Most of them were taken in Shanghai (上海), Nanjing (南京), Chengdu (成都), Suzhou (苏州), Chongqing (重庆), Taiyuan (太原), Liping (黎平), and Lhasa (拉萨), with a relatively smaller portion from Wuhan (武汉), Zhongjiang (中江), Chibi (赤壁) and Dujiangyan (都江堰). These posters collected from metropolitan cities to small towns were installed in public spaces by local governments at various levels, consequently, all mirroring the official view of the CCP-led party-state today.

These two sets of data of similar characteristics, as officially propagated doctrines, are analyzed inductively by extracting the semantic network⁸ around the key concept of “embodied civility”. It aims to situate the idea of “embodied civility” into a network of linked keywords embedded within a particular historical, sociopolitical and cultural context. The analytical focus of this proposed method is as much as on identifying keywords as the main building blocks constituting a semantic network, as on attending to the connections of these sets of thematic keywords that render the idea of “embodied civility” intelligible. The idea is to go beyond identifying a word-cloud, as a cluster of randomly arranged keywords, for the links amongst the thematically-congregated sets of keywords are of great significance to the formation of both the topological ecology and its underlying lexical structure of a semantic network. Without this intertwining web of ties, the idea of “embodied civility” would have appeared neither meaningful

⁸ Pernau, Margrit, and Helge Jordheim. 2015. P. 2. Constructing the semantic network (also referred to as semantic field interchangeably) is the shared method of all contributions of the edited book. The analytical method adopted in this chapter was based on this approach, but also extended it beyond identifying key concepts. Their relationships were also considered by grouping them into sub-sets of keywords and by attending to the relationships of these thematic sets that constitute the semantic network.

nor significant during these two moments of modern China. The analysis also takes the slightly varied textures of these two groups of official doctrines into consideration, by also attending to the visual aspect of public posters in extracting the semantic network underlying these materials.

The following two sections of this chapter detail the semantic networks of “embodied civility” at the two moments analyzed. They are further compared in the final section to show that these state-led civilizing initiatives similarly situated within the broad narrative of national revival or renaissance underwent a discursive shift - the imperative for Chinese nationals to become “civilized” modern citizens through embodiment was first propagated from above through a shaming critique of lack and later through a heartening call tinted with a sense of solidarity and patriotic pride. This analysis also suggests that the emphasis on embodied civility cultivated through the state-led civilizing initiatives persisted along China’s modernizing process with the socio-structural feature of having the party-state as the civilizer, moral authority, and major agent for societal transformation. Although apparently ineffective, this mode of molding modern citizens through cultivating the body persisted as a method for instigating sociocultural transformations without necessitating drastic socio-structural changes. The notion of “civility” has consequently been shaped into a moralized idea that encompasses a seemingly unbridgeable gulf between ideologized moral principles and modernized behavioural codes to be embodied by citizens.

2. The Semantic Network of the New Life Movement (1934-1949)

On 19 February, 1934, the *Generalissimo* of the Nationalist Party and head of the government, Chiang Kai-shek (also Jiang Jieshi, 蒋介石; 1887–1975) launched the New Life Movement in

Nanchang (南昌), the military headquarter at the time for combating the Communists in Jiangxi (江西) province and neighbouring areas. On 21 February, the first association for promoting the NLM was established. The guiding doctrine of the “Outline of the New Life Movement” (新生活运动纲要; hereafter Outline) was published in July, detailing the campaign’s “significance”, “interpretation”, “object”, “contents” and “procedure”⁹. There, Chiang Kai-shek presented a vision of the “new life” to be founded on traditional Chinese virtues of *li* (礼, “regulated attitude”; propriety/decorum), *yi* (义, “right conduct”; uprightness/righteousness), *lian* (廉, “clear discrimination”; integrity/honesty) and *chi* (耻, “real self-consciousness”; the sense of shame), which should be expressed through four “ordinary” aspects of *yi* (衣; “clothing”), *shi* (食; “food”), *zhu* (住; “shelter”) and *xing* (行; “action”) ¹⁰. “The Necessary Knowledge of New Life (新生活须知)” appended to the Outline listed succinctly-written prescriptive etiquette codes on these four everyday realms (examples of its contents are included in the illustrative drawings of NLM in Figure 1, e.g., “Keep to the left when walking; Speak in a friendly manner”). The General Association for the Promotion of the New Life Movement (新生活运动促进总会) was also established in July in Nanchang for orchestrating the movement to be promoted nationwide, with public posters created, promotional songs written (e.g., Figure 3), inspection teams assembled by adjoining local police forces and party organizations¹¹, and nascent professional groups and

⁹ The *Outline* was first published in Chinese and under the authorship of Chiang Kai-shek. Its English version was translated by Madame Chiang and first published in 1936. All cited contents from the *Outline* were from this English version, which is available at: <https://archive.org/details/outlineofnewlife00chia/page/n11/mode/2up>

¹⁰ The English translations within the quotation marks are from the English version of the *Outline* translated by Madame Chiang. Other commonly-shared translations, especially in historical studies, on the NLM are also added.

¹¹ Wakeman, Frederic. 1996. *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937*. University of California Press. Chapter 13. Pp. 229-243.

associations engaged. As reflected in the lyrics of its promotional song, the “Song of the NLM” (新生活运动歌; Figure 3), this state-led movement employed a method of starting from simpler matters of “cleanliness” (qingjie, 清洁) and “good manners” (guiju, 规矩) to the more complex issue of morality, from self to others, and from official organizations to the general public, in order to gradually realize the stated goal of “revitalizing” the nation. The quickly-built momentum of the movement was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), since when the NLM entered its second stage mainly managed by Madame Chiang, Song Meiling (also Soong May-ling, 宋美龄; 1898-2003). Wartime issues like child rearing and soldiers’ welfare¹² became the key concerns, and liaisons with churches and missionary organizations were mobilized for addressing them¹³. Although the guiding principles first presented in the Outline remained intact, the four traditional virtues of “*li*, *yi*, *lian*, *chi*” were again reinterpreted in 1939 for the modified wartime needs¹⁴. During the years followed, Chiang Kai-shek continued to deliver his annual public speech for assessing the movement’s progress on its anniversaries until the Nationalist Party’s retreat to Taiwan (台湾) in 1949¹⁵, when the CCP became the governing Party and founded today’s People’s Republic of China. The NLM started to attract

¹² Fukamachi, Hideo. 2017. Epub edition: Chapters 5-7.

¹³ Dirlik, Arif. 1975. “The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 34(4):945–80. P. 948. Madame Chiang came from a Christian family and Chiang Kai-shek were converted to Christianity later as well, under her influence.

¹⁴ Chiang Kai-shek’s speech at the fifth anniversary is available at:

[http://www.ccf.org.tw/ccf001/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=571:0002-](http://www.ccf.org.tw/ccf001/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=571:0002-70&catid=216&Itemid=256)

[70&catid=216&Itemid=256](http://www.ccf.org.tw/ccf001/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=571:0002-70&catid=216&Itemid=256). The new interpretations in 1939 were: *li* (decorum) is stringent discipline; *yi* (righteousness) is selfless sacrifice; *lian* (integrity) is real frugality; *chi* (the sense of shame) is fierce struggle. These reinterpretations of traditional Chinese moral virtues in response to the changing historical context can also be read as a sign of the malleability and instrumentalization of moral principles in the NLM.

¹⁵ These speeches are available at the digital library at Zhongzheng Foundation for Humanities and Education (中正文教基金会): <http://www.ccf.org.tw/ccf001/index.php>

scholarly attention since the 1970s, in particular from historians, as “the first state-sponsored campaign to reform people’s everyday lives in modern China”¹⁶.

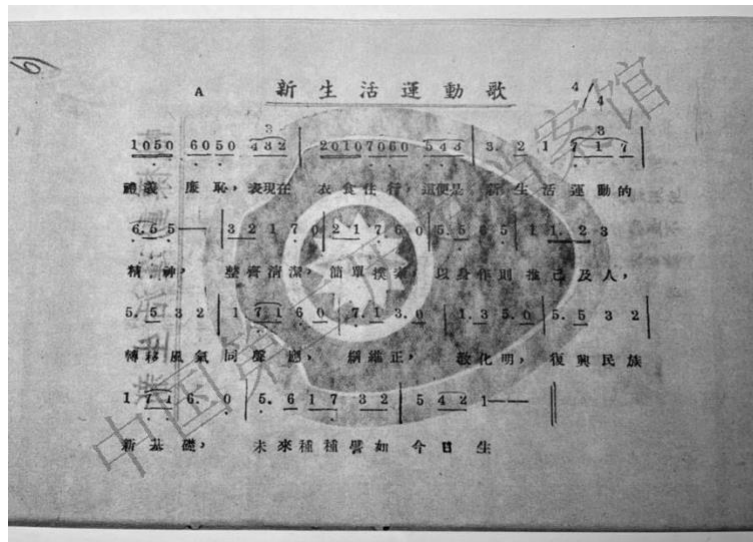


Figure 3 Song of the New Life Movement (新生活运动歌)¹⁷

(Lyrics:) Decorum, righteousness, integrity, the sense of shame/ Manifested in clothing, food, shelter, actions/ This is the spirit of the NLM/ Tidy and clean/ Simple and plain/ Make oneself exemplary/ From self to others/ Together we transform customs/ Righteous morality/ Enlightened teachings/ New foundation for revitalizing our nation/ The future is born today.

2.1 Civility, Lack, Grotesque

Chiang Kai-shek inaugurated the NLM with a speech entitled “Key Ideas of the NLM (新生活運動之要義)¹⁸”, in which the exigencies of creating a “new life” was argued through a contrast, mainly drawn between the “barbarically”- behaving Chinese nationals and “civilized” foreigners from “modern civilized countries”. The contrast painted a life that was characterized in the Outline as “*cuye beilou* (粗野卑陋; crude and savage)”, “rude”, “vulgar”, or simply “*feiren* (非人; non-

¹⁶ Liu, Wennan. 2013. “Redefining the Moral and Legal Roles of the State in Everyday Life: The New Life Movement in China in the Mid-1930s.” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 2(2):335–65.

¹⁷ Source: The Second Historical Archives of China.

¹⁸ The full speech in Chinese is available at: <https://zh.m.wikisource.org/zh-hans/新生活運動之要義>

human)”¹⁹. Then-prevalent yet unsightly behaviours like spitting and urinating in public were thought to be manifestations of moral decadence that dwarfed Chinese people in the early 20th century in the eyes of both their cultivated ancestors and civilized foreign peers. In charging the uncivilized state of Chinese society emerging out of its feudal debris and urging the Chinese people to be transformed to adapt to the changing social environment, a stigmatizing scene of the “grotesque”²⁰ was presented by the party-state to legitimate its leading role in civilizing the nation. Uncivilized behaviors were grotesque for revealing the “incomplete, exaggerated, boisterous, and desacralized”²¹ state of life, in other words, animalistic. The extraordinary and cannibalistic qualities of the grotesque imply the absence of civility, which was called upon by the modern world to contain the “non-human” animality. Manifestations of incivility were therefore to be eradicated by rational civilizing forces represented by the NLM. This grotesque surface of everyday life was denounced for showing the inadequacy of Chinese nationals, especially when contrasted against “civilized citizens” from other more developed nations at the time. The party-state attributed the absence of civility on display to a profound loss of inner moral virtues, resulting in grave consequences of humiliating disrespect, inequality, and imperialist invasions that once-prosperous China now had to endure:

Foreigners eat, dress, live and walk, in a manner following the standards of modern citizens; they show patriotism to their country and loyalty to their nation. That is to say, they conform to the standards of *li* (decorum), *yi* (righteousness), *lian* (integrity), and *chi* (sense of shame)! They neither eat or dress if *lian* (integrity)

¹⁹ The quoted adjectives were from both the Chinese and English versions of the *Outline*.

²⁰ 黃金麟 (Hwang, Jin-Lin). 1998. “丑怪的裝扮：新生活运动的政略分析 (The Power of the Grotesque and the New Life Movement, 1934-1937).” *台湾社会研究季刊 (Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies)* 30: 163 – 203.

²¹ Hwang, Jin-Lin. 1998.

and *chi* (sense of shame) are not followed, nor act if *li* (decorum) and *yi* (righteousness) are not met. They are ***disciplined*** in their habits, speech, and actions, therefore ***demonstrating the knowledge and morality befitting citizens of modern civilized countries*** [...] [Their knowledge and morality] are manifested in practice, in *yi* (clothing), *shi* (food), *zhu* (shelter) and *xing* (action). That's why people from other countries recognize them as coming from ***civilized countries and nations***, and therefore treat them with great ***respect***! ...Why has China not become ***equal*** to other countries and have to for long suffer from ***imperialist invasions***? It is because our nationals, unlike our ancestors or today's foreigners, do not follow *li* (decorum), *yi* (righteousness), *lian* (integrity) and *chi* (sense of shame), in *yi* (clothing), *shi* (food), *zhu* (shelter) and *xing* (action) [...] Spitting and urinating everywhere, never cleaning areas under beds or behind doors, these unhygienic practices are not at all tolerated by nationals of ***modern civilized countries***! Especially spitting and urinating at will, only for ***barbaric*** nations! We need a new life following *li* (decorum), *yi* (righteousness), *lian* (integrity) and *chi* (sense of shame). Let's start with eradicating spitting without any reserve!²²

Such a critical view expressed by the head of the government of its people might seem uncommon, but it was not unprecedented in the history of early modern China. The first president of Republic China and the founder of the Nationalist Party, Sun Yat-sen (also Sun Zhongshan, 孙中山; 1866-1925), had voiced similar critiques of Chinese nationals on various occasions. Some of them can be found in his influential lectures later published as *Three Principles of the People* (《三民主义》) in 1924, explaining his political philosophy on nationalism (minzu, 民族), democracy (minquan, 民权), and the livelihood of people (minsheng, 民生):

²² This quote is from Chiang Kai-shek's inauguration speech for the NLM. Translations and emphases are mine.

Why couldn't we **govern** ourselves? How could foreigners conclude that? In my view, foreigners do not quite understand our idea of *qijia* (齐家; managing the household, as a prior step for governing the country) and our family structure. But from the perspective of *xiushen* (修身; self-cultivation), we Chinese **fell behind**. Chinese are **not disciplined**. Foreigners would notice once they have interacted with Chinese. As for foreigners' impression of China, only if they have lived in China for two or three decades or they are like the great philosopher Bertrand Russell who has the insight to understand the superiority of Chinese culture to European culture upon his first visit, they would praise China. But average foreigners always say that Chinese are **not cultivated and barbaric**. That is because we **lack in xiushen (self-cultivation)**. Putting aside grand issues, our everyday actions are **not disciplined**. For instance, Americans first treated Chinese equally without discrimination upon their first arrival, but then large American hotels and restaurants started to refuse Chinese customers, for their **lack of self-cultivation**. Once I was talking to an American Captain on his ship. He said: "There was a Chinese official on my ship, spitting and sneezing everywhere, right on this expensive carpet, very annoying." I then asked: "What did you do then?" He replied: "I couldn't do much, so in front of him, I wiped off his spit on the carpet with my silk handkerchief. When I was doing that, he still seemed so carefree." Like that official spitting on the expensive carpet, most Chinese behave this way. It shows the **lack of self-cultivation**²³.

Sun Yat-sen's view was similar to that of Chiang Kai-shek in pointing out Chinese nationals' observed lack of refined behaviours that were attributed to insufficient "self-cultivation", a Confucian idea including both inner moral virtues and the manifested observance of these

²³ The quoted excerpt is from "Nationalism: Lecture Six" in *Three Principles of the People* (《三民主义: 民族主义第六讲》). The full Chinese texts are available at: <https://zh.m.wikisource.org/wiki/三民主義/民族主義第六講>. English translations and emphases in bold are mine.

principles. Trivial actions that were taken lightly, such as spitting in public in the example of the Chinese official accounted for by the ship Captain, was argued as having grave political significance. It was thought to be the evidence from which “foreigners” drew the conclusion that China was incapable of self-governance. This acute issue emerged since the First Opium War (第一次鸦片战争; 1839-1842) that was concluded by the first unequal treaty between and foreign imperialist powers: the Treaty of Nanking (南京条约; 1842), ceding Hong Kong to the British Empire. Imperialist invasions followed, the Second Opium War (第二次鸦片战争; 1856-1860) and the First Sino-Japanese War (甲午战争; 1894) that handed Taiwan over to Japan, further aggravated the issue of self-governance. Sun Yat-sen’s argument about the political significance of civilized behaviours had far-reaching impact that was evident in the NLM’s approach of starting with reforming “*yi* (clothing), *shi* (food), *zhu* (shelter) and *xing* (action)” for establishing “[a] new national consciousness and mass psychology”²⁴. This genealogical origin of the discourse of civility in modern China also colored it with “a deep sense of inferiority”²⁵. This sentiment had an exaggerated appeal at the time for the early modern international law did not recognize “barbarous” countries as legal subjects with sovereignty, therefore bestowed with the right to establish international relations with “civilized” others²⁶. The so-called “standard of civilization” defined by the European states in the 19th century was not only utilized as the criterion for recognizing the sovereignty of Asian and African governments, but also for legitimating the

²⁴ The quoted texts are from the English version of the *Outline*, translated by Madame Chiang.

²⁵ Messner, Angelika C. 2015. “Transforming Chinese Hearts, Minds, and Bodies in the Name of Progress, Civility, and Civilization.” Pp. 231-249 in *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe*, edited by Pernau, Margrit and Helge Jordheim. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 231.

²⁶ Pernau, Margrit, and Helge Jordheim. 2015. P. 5.

intervention in the latter's domestic affairs²⁷. Even towards the end of the 19th century, the distinction between the “civilized” and “uncivilized” status remained an important criterion for structuring colonial international law²⁸. This distinction in classifying nations in modern international law only became obsolete with the establishment of the United Nations in 1945²⁹. It is therefore not surprising that the emotional repulsion triggered by what was classified as sights of everyday incivility was not outwardly-directed disgust, as Elias observed in Western European context, but inwardly-pointed shame³⁰, a sense of deficiency reflected through the gaze of foreign others. The discourse of civility that emerged during China's forced modernity became one of lack, when being measured against the “civilized” behavioural standards that were thought to be shared by more developed European countries.

In the NLM, the discourse of lack conveyed through a rhetoric of the grotesque legitimized the party-state's self-appointed role as the civilizer. It also placed the party-state and its apparatus against Chinese nationals as the major targets to be civilized from above. This opposition is reflected in the statement from Chiang Kai-shek's 1934 speech for promoting the NLM: “Now there is only one Chiang Kai-shek in China. I hope all of you will together make thousands and tens of thousands of Chiang Kai-shek-s in the future”³¹. This distinctive mode of civilizing the society by the state emerged in a historical and social context with no social

²⁷ Thomas, Keith. 2018. *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England*. 1st edition. Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis. P. 5.

²⁸ Koskenniemi, Martti. 2001. *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 131.

²⁹ Thomas, Keith. 2018. P. 6.

³⁰ This point is also made in: 雷祥麟 (Lei, Sean Hsiang-lin). 2017. “以公共痰盂為傲？香港、紐約與上海的反吐痰運動 (The Pride of Public Spittoons? Anti-Spitting Movements in Hong Kong, New York, and Shanghai).” *中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 (Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica)*. (98): 1–47. P. 34.

³¹ Cited in: Fukamachi, Hideo. 2017. Epub edition: Chapter 1. English translations are mine.

censorship (shehui zhicai, 社会制裁) on “civilized” behaviours among peers already in place. It even resulted in an ambiguous condition where the police forces and public servants as representatives of the party-state had to shoulder the double-task of civilizing the masses and themselves simultaneously during the NLM. This civilizing trajectory differed from the top-down dissemination process unfolded in Europe and in America, from the bourgeoisie to the working class for the former and from the white middle class to immigrants for the latter³². The historical and contextual peculiarity of the NLM led to the emergence of a method of combining moral suasion and law enforcement in implementing its doctrine, therefore creating a “grey area”³³ between morality and law to enable the party-state to exercise its power in that historical context. An important implication of this new mode of state-led social movement that emerged since the NLM in modern China, as articulated by Dirlik Arif, is creating “a vision of good society”³⁴ and “new citizen”³⁵ founded on a fundamentally new relationship between the state and society, where the state’s power to organize the society reigns supreme. It broke away from the Confucian view of society as an independent entity governed by traditions and cultural norms³⁶, through subjecting society to the party-state’s attempt to nationalize and instrumentalize bodies of the masses for realizing its political agendas³⁷.

2.2 Modern Citizens, Public Morality

³² Fukamachi, Hideo. 2017. Epub edition: Chapter 3.

³³ Liu, Wennan. 2013. P. 352.

³⁴ Dirlik, Arif. 1975. P. 954.

³⁵ Dirlik, Arif. 1975. P. 957.

³⁶ See also: Dirlik, Arif. 1975. P. 968.

³⁷ 黃金麟 (Hwang, Jin-Lin). 1998; Yen, Hsiao-peí. 2005. “Body Politics, Modernity and National Salvation: The Modern Girl and the New Life Movement.” *Asian Studies Review* 29(2):165–86.

The NLM was an initiative during the political tutelage phase (训政; 1928-1949) of Republic China, after the Nationalist Party has reached its goal of national unification in the prior stage of military rule (军政; 1912-1928), and before its entering the third of constitutionalism (宪政; 1947-1949) that was delayed by the Second Sino-Japanese War. This major objective of the political tutelage stage was to train the masses for self-governance, since the majority of the populace at the time were deemed unprepared for political participation in the newly-founded modern polity, due to the forced start of China's modernity. But the call for remaking Chinese people for joining in the modern world can be traced to an earlier period of the late 19th century. One influential figure was the intellectual leader Liang Qichao (梁启超; 1873-1929), who famously described the state of the late-Qing society as "a sheet of loose sands (yipán sǎnshā, 一盘散沙)". Underlying this characterization was his assessment that Chinese culture tends to overemphasize private morality (sīde, 私德) over public morality (gōngde, 公德), yet these two types of morality are both ontologically symbiotic and dialectically linked in fostering modern public life³⁸. In a sociocultural context where secularized religious teachings, political principles, and moral rules have long been greatly overlapping without clearly-marked boundaries, as articulated by the Chinese philosopher Li Zehou (李泽厚; 1931-2021), the majority appeared to be preoccupied with practical matters and private affairs of their own³⁹.

³⁸ Liang Qichao's ideas on morality were discussed in the collection of essays entitled *On New People* (《新民说》; 1902-1906), available at: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=900281&remap=gb>

³⁹ 李泽厚 (Li, Zehou). [2001]2019. "两种道德 (Two Forms of Morality)." In 《人类学历史本体论(上卷)伦理学纲要》 (*The Anthro-po-Historical Ontology: Ethics*). 人民文学出版社 (People's Literature Publishing House). Epub edition.

The Nationalist Party's efforts for molding modern citizens grew out of this intellectual trend that began in the late-Qing period. Civics textbooks in primary and secondary schools since the 1920s were produced as a result of the "public turn"⁴⁰. Curriculum reforms were meant to update the traditional Confucian idea of self-cultivation with teachings of necessary civics knowledge, therefore assisting transforming privately-minded people into modern citizens. Earlier textbooks such as the *New Citizens' Reader* in the mid-1920s were largely based on Sun's political ideology of the "Three Principles of the People" (i.e., nationalism, democracy, people's livelihood) and included "four fields of physical, moral, economic, and political trainings"⁴¹, to ideologically counter imperialist invasions that had greatly weakened China. Additional lessons were also offered on private and public morality, as well as on hygienic habits in everyday life. Since the mid-1930s, the civics textbooks started to explicitly promote the NLM⁴² that exclusively propagated the importance of developing public morality, as defined by the party-state. This emphasis is also clearly reflected in the extra "preface" added into the English version of the *Outline* that was disseminated internationally at the height of the NLM:

The struggle of China to emerge from the revolution which in 1911 began successfully by overthrowing the Manchu Dynasty has been hampered by the unpreparedness of the people for **the responsibilities of public life**, and by the age-long influences of apparently sanctified customs. For hundreds of years the people of China were **discouraged from interesting themselves in the affairs of government** and were taught, even with the executioner's sword, that the administration of the country was **the exclusive concern of the official class**. The people consequently, through the centuries, gradually ceased to have any interest

⁴⁰ Zarrow, Peter. 2015. "Chapter 4: Good Citizens." in *Educating China: Knowledge, Society and Textbooks in a Modernizing World, 1902–1937*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 113–146: p. 143.

⁴¹ Zarrow, Peter. 2015. P.120.

⁴² Zarrow, Peter. 2015. P.139.

in government and lapsed, as the rulers desired, into ***complete disregard of national affairs, confining themselves to seeking the welfare of the family and the clan, and knowing nothing, and caring nothing, about the responsibilities of citizenship, the requirements of patriotism, or the urge of loyalty to the country or its flag.*** In forced conditions such as these the habits of the great population of China developed along lines quite contrary to those characterizing the peoples of other countries, with the result that when the political window opened they were, in a sense, blinded by the light that suddenly and unexpectedly poured in upon them. They found themselves ***without understanding of political or official life,*** bewildered owing to lack of universal education, and hampered by age-long aloofness and habits that are of little consequence to a small country which may be confined and self-contained within its own boundaries, but which have a tremendously suffocating effect upon a great country flung, willy-nilly, into the wide-sweeping economic and political currents of the world⁴³ [...]

Madame Chiang forcefully presented a condition of moral decadence caused by both the sanctification of traditional customs and the “unpreparedness of the people for the responsibilities of public life” because of the “forced condition” in China at the turn of the century. Aside from pointing out the lack of training on public morality, these remarks also reveal a peculiar definition of “public morality”, as well as the related idea of “modern citizenry”. Madame Chiang’s, and therefore Chiang Kai-shek’s, view in fact greatly resembled that of Liang Qichao in defining public morality largely based on the citizen’s duties toward their polity, to be manifested through proactively engagement in governmental and national affairs that are beyond the limited scope of “the welfare of the family and the clan”. This call for participation in public affairs was closely associated with that of patriotism and the “loyalty to the country”, at a

⁴³ The quote is from the English version of the *Outline*, translated by Madame Chiang. Emphases are mine.

time when threats of imperialist invasions still loomed large. The emphasis on the citizen's responsibilities over individual-based rights was also observed by Peter Zarrow in civics textbooks for adults in the same period⁴⁴. Modern citizens were defined along a similar line both in the NLM and in the *Civics Textbook* published in the 1930s. "In terms of the nation, the citizen is one member of the entire nation; in terms of the state, the citizen is one member of the state; in terms of society, the citizen is one member of society. Therefore, insofar as we are citizens, our identity is a public one"⁴⁵. The publicness of modern citizens at the time of the NLM was based on their group membership to the nation, state, and society. It is therefore better to describe this passive identity by "national"⁴⁶ or "subject"⁴⁷ in the late-Qing and early Republic period, than by "citizen", as employed in various official doctrines of the NLM. This peculiar vision of modern citizenry produced a set of contradictions. It led the historian Dirlik Arif to characterize the NLM as a modern conservative counterrevolution, by arguing that while people were politically mobilized from top to actively participate in the state-led mass movement, they were simultaneously denied of any genuine bottom-up political initiatives on their own. This vision of patriotic and obedient modern citizens underlying this state-supervised social movement, rather than its apparent "superficial" focus on everyday behaviours, could perhaps better account for both the NLM's ineffectiveness and its long-lasting impact as a mode of social movement initiated from above.

2.3 Four Cardinal Principles, Daily Activities

⁴⁴ Zarrow, Peter. 2015. P.130.

⁴⁵ Zarrow, Peter. 2015. P.137.

⁴⁶ This differentiation discussed by Tsuchiya Hiroshi was cited in Zarrow, Peter. 2015. P.144.

⁴⁷ Wakeman, Frederic. 1996. P.243.

Given the NLM's ardent call for citizens of the new modern nation to attend to governmental and national affairs as the quintessential manifestation of modern public morality, according to the party-state's definition, four traditional virtues were selected as the moral foundation for reviving China. "Li (decorum), yi (righteousness), lian (integrity), and chi (sense of shame)" were first raised in the legalist classic *Guanzi* (《管子》), a collection of writings attributed to the philosopher and statesman Guan Zhong (管仲; 720 BC - 645 BC) in the Spring and Autumn period. A distinct logic underlying these "four cardinal principles (四维)" was that since they were proposed as the highest moral principles for governing everyday conduct and social relations, they are consequently of fundamental importance to the good governance of a country. Guanzhong even claimed: "If the four cardinal principles are not observed, the country will be destroyed (四维不张，国乃灭亡)!" Interpretations of these four moral virtues were updated in the Outline, to better fit to the NLM's goal of national regeneration in the early 20th century and its approach of starting from "simple" issue of everyday activities as the means towards realizing the more "complex" objective of cultivating moral virtues:

"Li" means regulated attitude, (mind as well as heart).

"I" means right conduct, (in all things).

"Lien" means clear discrimination, (honesty, in both personal, public, and official life).

"Ch'ih" means real self-consciousness, (integrity and honor)⁴⁸.

But the peculiarity of these four moral principles is not limited to their inherent affinity and therefore unhampered translation to everyday behavioural dimensions of "attitudes",

⁴⁸ The quote is from the English version of the *Outline*.

“conducts”, “discrimination”, and “self-consciousness”. These traditional virtues were selected to fulfil two paradoxical functions, of distinguishing the “Chineseness”⁴⁹ of the Republic China’s cultural root in past traditions and simultaneously, of signaling their universality by presenting them as the shared principles of all civilized nations (as Chiang Kai-shek claimed in the NLM inauguration speech that “foreigners” from civilized countries all confirm to *li*, *yi*, *lian*, and *chi*). The lack of public morality, as defined by the party-state, was therefore treated less as a political question of citizenship than a moralized issue of self-cultivation. The issue was to be addressed by the Nationalist Party through imbuing these “four cardinal principles” in people by training them on modern behavioural discipline and body aesthetics. It placed these selected moral virtues as the basis of a new “rational life”, rationalized through the party-state’s complete organization of the society. Observing these moral virtues in daily activities meant disciplinary practices supervised by the party-state apparatus on the four aspects of *yi* (clothing), *shi* (food), *zhu* (shelter) and *xing* (action) in people’s everyday activities, in order to mold them into modern citizens with “docile bodies”⁵⁰, in the sense of internalizing the codes of conduct disseminated from above. Public morality was implied as be the logical result following trained bodily docility.

The proposed intrinsic link between the four moral virtues and their “natural” expressions in daily activities had long been a matter of doubt and critique since the time of the NLM. Ambiguities surrounding the proposed tie between inner moral virtues and outward behaviours according to westernized body aesthetics abound, as the Outline “gave no clear answer”⁵¹. “Did

⁴⁹ Dirlik, Arif. 1975. P. 964.

⁵⁰ Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books. In particular: Pp. 135-169.

⁵¹ Dirlik, Arif. 1975. P. 956.

Confucius spit (孔子曾吐痰吗)?” Hideo Fukamachi asked, for example⁵². But questions on the unarticulated link between inner moral virtues and modernized behavioural rules in the NLM’s official documents did not undermine, but in fact highlighted, the NLM’s moralist framework. Publicly disseminating modernized behavioural codes - such as “walking to the left of the road” and “speaking in a friendly manner” (Figure 1) - and supervising their embodiment by the party-state apparatus were the means for realizing the end of cultivating the moral virtues of *li* (decorum), *yi* (righteousness), *lian* (integrity), and *chi* (sense of shame) in modernizing citizens. These disciplinary practices for producing docile bodies were Confucian in its pedagogy, in viewing ritualizing behavioural patterns as the key method for internalizing moral values⁵³. The greater significance of this approach lies in continuously emphasizing the “centrality of individual morality to politics”⁵⁴. As quoted in the *Outline*, “water always flows over a wet surface; while fire goes wherever it is dry (水流湿，火就燥)”. State-led social movements like the NLM were compared to as preparing “the wet surface for water and the dry place for fire”⁵⁵. Social movements for renewing outdated customs were also presented there as a common practice in all countries at the time of societal transition, as the necessary precondition for deeper social transformation. This questionable argument was intended to legitimize the mode of the state-initiated social movement as a potent alternative to bottom-up political initiatives that could threaten the existing social and power structure headed by the Nationalist Party, while self-appointing the party-state as the major, if not only, agent for societal transformation.

⁵² Fukamachi, Hideo. 2017. Epub edition: Chapter 2.

⁵³ Zarrow, Peter. 2015. P.142.

⁵⁴ Dirlik, Arif. 1975. P. 970.

⁵⁵ This statement is originally from the *Book of Change* (《易經·乾卦·文言曰》). Quotations are from the English and Chinese versions of the *Outline*.

3. The Semantic Network of Public Propaganda Posters (2017)

Anyone visiting mainland China today would notice the omnipresence of public posters, as the one photographed in Figure 2. While following etiquette trainers around for interviews and observational opportunities, from early on during the research trip, I started to photograph public posters in all large cities and small towns I tripped to. But public posters, also referred to as propaganda posters in particular outside of the mainland China, were no novelties. In a society where “[t]he moral education of the people has been viewed historically as a function of good government” and “[c]orrect ideas (orthodoxy) were believed to follow automatically from this proper behavior (orthopraxy)”⁵⁶, public/propaganda posters have been continuously deployed as a key form of top-down public communication medium by the party-state throughout the history of PRC. After decades of political turbulence, in the gradually “depoliticized” post-reform era where economic development had replaced political movements as the major content of social life, the key function of officially-produced public posters is to “nudge” people towards the desirable directions, as envisioned by the party-state⁵⁷. While conspicuous omnipresence could be an ironic sign of ignobility and therefore ineffectiveness, also echoed in my formal conversations and informal chats with locals during the research trip, these posters’ normative characteristic nevertheless renders them rich empirical fabrics for extracting the semantic field in which “embodied civility”, the focus of a stream of public posters (e.g., Figure 2), is embedded in today’s mainland.

⁵⁶ Landsberger, Stefan R. 2001. “Learning by What Example? Educational Propaganda in Twenty-First-Century China.” *Critical Asian Studies* 33(4):541–71. P. 541.

⁵⁷ Landsberger, Stefan R. 2001. P. 567.

3.1 Wenming, the Core Socialist Values, Chinese-Socialist Citizen

The most prevalent thread of public posters was the Core Socialist Values (CSV hereafter), comprising twelve values on three levels: “the national values of prosperity (fuqiang, 富强), democracy (minzhu, 民主), civilization/civility (wenming, 文明) and harmony (hexie, 和谐); the social values of freedom (ziyou, 自由), equality (pingdeng, 平等), justice (gongzheng, 公正) and the rule of law (fazhi, 法治)” and the individual values of patriotism (aiguo, 爱国), dedication (jingye, 敬业), integrity (chengxin, 诚信) and friendship (youshan, 友善)” (e.g., Figure 4, Figure 5). This set of values was formally introduced as “the shared national moral foundation” in Chinese society during the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012. Then in 2013, the General Office of Chinese Communist Party (中共中央办公厅) published “Suggestions on Cultivating and Practicing the CSV (《关于培育和践行社会主义核心价值观的意见》)” to be promulgated nationwide⁵⁸. This document proclaimed that cultivating and practicing the CSV is pivotal to the “great renaissance of the Chinese nation (中华民族伟大复兴)”, in a condition of moral crisis casted in euphemized terms of “worldwide rivals on values amid cultural encounters and exchanges (世界范围思想文化交流交融交锋形势下价值观较量)” and “the growing ideological diversity brought by the economic reform and the socialist market economy (改革开放和发展社会主义市场经济条件下思想意识多元多样多变)”⁵⁹. It suggests that today’s “moral crisis” mainly manifested as individualism and hedonism was an unintended

⁵⁸ Governmental source (in Chinese): http://www.mod.gov.cn/jmsd/2019-12/01/content_4856014.htm

⁵⁹ The full text (in Chinese) of “Opinions on Cultivating and Practicing the Core Socialist Values (《关于培育和践行社会主义核心价值观的意见》)” is available at: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2013-12/23/content_5407875.htm

and undesirable by-product of the economic reform. Moral campaigns were therefore called upon on all administrative levels, and educational programs were also recommended, to be incorporated in programs on citizen education, economic practices, and societal administration. As the most up-to-date articulation of the guiding principles for the construction of the socialist spiritual civilization (社会主义精神文明建设)⁶⁰, the CSV is foundational to the party-state's ideological blueprint. The importance was clearly indicated both by a comparatively large number of public posters exclusively devoted to propagating or explicating this set of values, and by the proportion of posters incorporating the CSV in their background. The CSV's ideological centrality is also often visually accentuated by employing the bold red color and recognizable symbols closely associated with the power of the CCP-led party-state, for example, the hammer and sickle, the national flag of PRC, the Tiananmen Square (天安门广场) and *huabiao* (华表)⁶¹, as illustrated by the propaganda board erected at the tourist destination of Qingchengshan, in southwest China (Figure 4).

The three sets of values included in the CSV are normative principles presented by the party-state as structuring its vision of the ideal Chinese-socialist nation-state, society, and citizen. *Wenming* (civility, civilization), together with prosperity, democracy and harmony, is listed as one of the four “normative objectives (价值目标)”⁶² on the national level. The quintessential importance of *wenming* (civility, civilization) as a key value is clear through observing these public propaganda posters photographed. For example, the public poster found at a tourist destination

⁶⁰ For the idea of “the construction of socialist spiritual civilization”, refer to Chapter 3.

⁶¹ *Huabiao* (华表) is a form of traditional Chinese architecture in the shape of a column. It is often erected in front of the palace and has become a symbol of Chinese culture.

⁶² Source: “Opinions on Cultivating and Practicing the Core Socialist Values (《关于培育和践行社会主义核心价值观的意见》), 2013.

in Figure 4 had an additional section placed on top of the main poster for propagating the CSV: “*wenming* (civility, civilization) is the most beautiful landscape”. In another public poster presented in Figure 5, four four-character lines occupied the center: “speak civilized words; act in a civilized manner; be a civilized person; build a civilized city”, above the CSV listed in comparatively smaller fonts. The apparently broad scope of *wenming* (civility, civilization), employed to describe the advanced developmental state of a nation, city, district, word, action, and person, is partially due to a linguist peculiarity. When *wenming*, understood in its modern sense, first reached China by way of Japan around the turn of the 20th century⁶³, it encompassed both senses of civility and civilization that were not clearly differentiated from each other, with both signalling linear societal progress from a social Darwinist perspective that was embraced by many intellectuals at the time. The duality of this term was reflected by a public poster on *wenming* found in Nanjing: “*Wenming* is the sign of societal development. It faces toward modernization, the global world, and the future. *Wenming* is broader than the culture that each individual has, and it is the backbone behind our Chinese nation’s path towards its great renaissance⁶⁴.”

⁶³ More discussions on the origin of *wenming* in modern China can be found in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴ The original texts in Chinese: “文明是社会进步的标志，它是面向现代化，面向世界，面向未来的，文明概括了属于每一个人的文化，支撑着我们中华民族走向伟大的复兴之路。”



Figure 4 A public poster at Qingchengshan (2017)

Wenming is the most beautiful landscape

Only if the people have belief, the nation would have power

Core Socialist Values (CSV) are the essence of the Socialist value system. The CSV reflects the nature and characteristics of the Socialist value system; they are the concise and central expression of the CSV. The CCP News Network and the General Office of the Chinese Communist Party published "Opinions on Cultivating and Practicing the CSV" in 6 parts and 23 items. These parts include: implications and guiding principles for cultivating and practicing CSV; integrating cultivating and practicing the CSV in the full spectrum of nationals' education; materializing the cultivation and practice of the CSV in economic development and societal governance; enhancing the propagation of the CSV; carrying out practical activities on the CSV; strengthening the organization and leadership for cultivating and practicing the CSV.

[the list of the CSV]



Figure 5 A public poster outside of a magazine stand in Chongqing (2017)

Yubei: National Civilized District; “Speaking Wenming, Forming New Customs” series public service advertising
 Speak civilized words; Do civilized things
 Be a civilized person; Build a civilized city
 [the list of the CSV]

The entangled relationship between *wenming* (civility, civilization) and the CSV shapes the imagery of the ideal Chinese-Socialist citizen imagined by the CCP-led party-state. On the one hand, clearly, the ideal Chinese-Socialist citizen is mainly defined in moralistic terms. “Patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship” were presented in the CSV as the “value guidelines (价值准则)”⁶⁵ on the individual level. Roots of these four normative principles could be traced to the idea of the Socialist Citizen’s Morality that is thought to be including four aspects of “public morality, professional morality, familial morality, and personal virtues”. This moralized conception of citizenship was first articulated in the “Programme for Implementing the Construction of Citizen’s Morality (《公民道德建设实施纲要》)” published by the Central Committee of the Communist

⁶⁵ Source: “Opinions on Cultivating and Practicing the Core Socialist Values (《关于培育和践行社会主义核心价值观的意见》), 2013.

Party (中共中央) in 2001⁶⁶; and then, these four pillars of the socialist citizen's morality was recently reiterated by the State Council of the PRC (中华人民共和国国务院) in its 2019 publication, entitled the "Programme for Implementing the Construction of Citizen Morality in the New Age (《新时代公民道德建设实施纲要》)"⁶⁷. Yet, on the other hand, this moralized framework of the ideal Chinese socialist citizen is complemented with an emphasis on embodying the civilized appeal to cultivate public morality, a longstanding issue that was also a central concern at the time of the NLM. As clearly suggested in the poster (Figure 5) that "a civilized person" should "speak civilized words" and "do civilized did" in a country that esteems *wenming* (civility, civilization) as one of its core value objectives on the national level. The individual-level "value guideline" of "patriotism" from the CSV also obligates the socialist citizens to become 'civilized' for building a "prosperous, democratic, civilized, and harmonious" nation under the leadership of the Party. These intertwining relationships between *wenming* (civility, civilization) and the CSV, as discussed above, reinforced the moralized imperative for individuals to become "civilized" to measure up to the ideal of the Chinese socialist citizen that was pictured by the party-state.

3.2 Traditional Chinese Moral Virtues, the Core Socialist Values

A significant proportion of public posters presented images and/or teachings of Confucius as the symbolic tokens of traditional Chinese culture. In a back-lit poster at the *Chengdu* International

⁶⁶ The full text (in Chinese) of the "Programme for Implementing the Construction of Citizen Morality (《公民道德建设实施纲要》)" is available at: http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2001/content_61136.htm

⁶⁷ The full text (in Chinese) of the "Programme for Implementing the Construction of Citizen Morality in the New Age (《新时代公民道德建设实施纲要》)" is available at: <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1028/c1001-31422612.html>

Airport (Figure 6), Confucius emerged from a background of the Great Wall of China (changcheng, 长城) to greet passengers yet in a voice of propaganda-style proclamation: “Forget not China as the nation of li (rite and etiquette); Always keep in mind this image of China”. This reminder of China as one among the most prominent ancient civilizations mixed a sense of cultural pride with a demand for embodied civility in an authoritative tone. Most public posters on the theme of traditional moral virtues featured Confucian teachings for its great influence on shaping the Chinese cultural and social traditions. In a community park in Chengdu (Figure 7), “*de* (德; moral virtue), *jian* (俭; frugality), *li* (礼; rite and etiquette), and *xiao* (孝; filial piety)” were spotlighted in a public poster that was designed in conspicuously traditional-Chinese aesthetics, in the exemplary forms of fan-shaped outlines, Chinese calligraphic works in *zhuan*shu (篆书; Seal Script)⁶⁸, and gold-color hollowed-out carvings. Returning to classic teachings in search for a cultural foundation for societal regeneration or national revival was not an uncommon practice in the history of modern China, as in the examples of Sun Yat-sen’s promotion of “eight virtues (八德)”⁶⁹ in the early Republic period and Chiang Kai-shek’s endorsement of “four cardinal principles (四维)” during the NLM. Nevertheless, the traditional moral virtues propagated in today’s public posters also displayed a distinctive feature of stressing their perfect harmony with the Core Socialist Values that have been promulgated by the CCP.

⁶⁸ Zhuanshu (篆书; Seal Script) is an ancient style for writing Chinese characters. It emerged in the Zhou Dynasty (周朝; 1050–771 BC).

⁶⁹ The bade (八德; eight virtues) are zhong (忠; loyalty), xiao (孝; filial piety), ren (仁; benevolence), ai (爱; love), xin (信; honesty), yi (义; justice), he (和; harmony), and pin (平; peace). They first dissed in Sun Yat-sen’s *Three Principles of the People: Lecture Six* (《三民主义: 第六讲》; 1924). The full text (in Chinese) is available at: <https://zh.m.wikisource.org/zh-hant/三民主義/民族主義第六講>



Figure 6 Figure 6. A poster at the Chengdu International Airport (2017)
 Forget not China as the nation of li (rite and etiquette); Always keep in mind this image of China
 (Bottom) Chengdu International Airport Advertisement and Media Ltd.



Figure 7 A public poster inside a community park in Chengdu (2017)
 (Center) De (moral virtue), Jian (frugality), Li (rite and etiquette), Xiao (filial piety)
 (Right) Traditional Chinese Moral Virtues
 (Bottom) Propaganda Department of Chengdu Municipal Party Committee

The implied commensurability between traditional Chinese moral virtues and the CSV was often suggested by placing these two sets of values side by side in the same poster (e.g., Figure 8, Figure 10). As shown in the public advisory board planted in a community green space in

Chongqing (Figure 8), traditional moral virtues, in particular the Confucian ideas of “*ren* (仁; benevolence), *yi* (义; righteousness), *li* (礼; rite and etiquette), *zhi* (智; wisdom), and *xin* (信; trustworthiness)”, were presented at the center and in larger fonts, next to the full list of values included in the CSV and surrounded by slogans for promoting the National Civilized City/Town/District Campaign⁷⁰. The visual aesthetics of the poster also combined traditional and modern elements, as shown in the realistic photographic image of modern skyscrapers encircled by abstractly-designed traditional Chinese “lucky clouds (祥云)”. In addition to co-presence as an indicator of affinity, the implied commensurability between traditional Chinese moral virtues and the CSV were also sometimes rendered in more subtly-integrated manners, one method of which was excavating ancient cultural roots for the CSV values through supplying relevant, although oftentimes tangentially-related, quotes from classics. An example is the set of four posters printed onto a subway passageway in Shanghai (Figure 9), the CSV’s national-level values of “prosperity”, “democracy”, “civility/civilization”, and “harmony” were artistically illustrated through traditional water-color paintings and calligraphic works, in addition, elaborated with quotes of classic sources. For instance, the modern notion of “*wenming* (civility, civilization)” was related to the Confucian teaching that “self-cultivation prepares a gentleman (文质彬彬，然后君子)” from the *Analects* (《论语》). Another technique employed to suggest commensurability between traditional moral virtues and the CSV in public posters was enlivening the past in present social context to demonstrate its sustained relevance. A public poster (Figure 10) retold the well-known anecdote of Yue Fei’s (岳飞; 1103-1142) mother tattooing “*jingzhong baoguo* (精忠报国;

⁷⁰ The National Civilized City/Town/District Campaign is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

serve the country with unreserved loyalty)” in great detail to propagate the traditional moral virtue of “*zhong* (忠; loyalty)”, whose continued relevance to today’s society was implied through presenting the story in a background with the full list of the CSV. Another public advisory painting (Figure 11) adapted this familiar storyline further to promote a different moral virtue of “*lian* (廉; integrity)” in today’s context where the anti-corruption campaign had reached a new height during past decades. In this lively illustration where “*lian* (integrity)” was personified as a resolute man with an iron fist punching at “greediness and corruption (贪腐)”, Yue’s mother was also brought back from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) as the honorary guest to perform a similar task - this time, of tattooing the character of “*lian*” on the back of a government official.



Figure 8 A public poster-board in a community green space in Chongqing (2017)

(Center) Traditional Chinese virtues well-known in the world;

Ren (benevolence), yi (righteousness), li (rite and etiquette), zhi (wisdom), xin (trustworthiness) always in heart.

(Central-Left) [the list of the CSV]

(Left) Construct the National Civilized District

(Right) Together we build a green homeland



Figure 9 Inside a subway station in Shanghai (2017)
Fuqiang (prosperity), Minzhu (democracy), Wenming (civility), Hexie (harmony)



Figure 10 A public poster in Nanjing (2017)

(Left) Socialist Core Values

(Center) Zhong (Loyalty)

Serve the country with unreserved loyalty

Yue Fei was diligent and studious as a child, excelling in martial arts and scholarly learning. When he was 20, the Jin army stormed to the central plain, and looted and destroyed wherever they went. Yue Fei was a patriotic and passionate young man, so he decided to fight against the enemies and defend his country. His mother understood him well and encouraged him to show his loyalty to the country. She tattooed "serve the country with unreserved loyalty" on his back. Yue Fei remembered her mother's words and battled ferociously at the frontline. He excelled on the battlefield and became a great general feared by the enemies.

(Right) [the list of the CSV]



Figure 11 A public adversary wall-painting in Chengdu (2017)
 (Left) Lian (integrity) [punching] Greediness, Corruption
 (Center) Transformation
 (Right) Inviting Yue's mother for the honor to tattoo the word (integrity)

Implicitly propagating the commensurability between traditional moral virtues and the CSV defining the modern socialist state has implications beyond transforming traditional Chinese culture into a form of soft power with distinctive 'Chineseness' and into the cultural foundation of patriotism⁷¹. The profound similarity between these two sets of values was evidently revealed in a speech given by Xi Jinping (习近平) at Peking University in 2014: "The Core Socialist Values in fact are a form of *de* (德; moral virtue). They are the *de* of individuals, and also on a larger scale, the *de* of a nation and of a society. A country cannot be prosperous without *de*, a person cannot be called so without *de*."⁷² This discourse with an exclusive emphasis on the moralized nature of the CSV highlighted the centrality of moral virtues in social governance, suggesting a vision of politics bearing great resemblance to the Confucian view that places individual morality

⁷¹ For the point of strategically propagating traditional culture and the foundation of patriotism in the post-reform era, see: Landsberger, Stefan R. 2001. Pp. 558-559.

⁷² The full speech in Chinese is available at: <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0505/c1001-24973097.html>. Translations are mine.

at the center of sociopolitical governance. Viewed from this perspective, the commensurability on the vision of politics echoes the spirit of Guan Zhong's proclamation from the Spring and Autumn period: "If the four cardinal principles are not observed, the country will be destroyed!" Decades after the NLM and long since the extended debate on the rule of virtue and/or rule of law in the history of China, this persistent moralizing framework of modern citizenship again points to ambiguities on the definition of citizenship in relationship to the Party's self-accorded role as the ultimate moral authority, and on its underlying state-society relationship that shapes the modern notion of "civility" in this context.

3.3 Everyday Moral Models, Minute Civilized Behaviours

Unarguably the individual-level values of "patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship" included in the CSV sets a moralized undertone in picturing the ideal Chinese socialist citizen by the party-state. But this picture would be incomplete if two other streams of public posters are not attended to. Historically, propaganda posters have been utilized by both the Nationalist Party in the Republic China era and the CCP in the history of PRC to communicate to the masses from above⁷³, but featuring moral models appeared to be particularly favoured by the CCP, as presenting embodied exemplars of morally-laudable citizens. Over the past few decades, the predominant types of moral exemplars spotlighted in public propaganda posts have been changing along with the shifting political priorities of the party-state. An expert on and collector of propaganda posters in China, Stefan R. Landsberger, has observed that "military martyrs" were the prototype of moral icons before the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), but new models

⁷³ Landsberger, Stefan R. 2019. "Creating China Visually: Collecting Chinese Propaganda Posters." In *Harvard International Review*. Available at: <https://hir.harvard.edu/creating-china-visually/>

emerged in the post-reform era (1978-): “The new idealized icons strove to improve their country; they valued learning; they contributed greatly to the urgent task of building a socialist spiritual civilization; and they sacrificed their lives while combating negative social influences.” And more importantly, these post-reform icons appeared to be “less perfect and free from shortcomings and errors than earlier models”⁷⁴. This observed trend continued to develop during the past two decades. Since 2007, a few departments of the central government, in particular the Propaganda Department (中央宣传部) and the Central Office for Building the Socialist Spiritual Civilization (中央文明办), have been soliciting nominations for “Moral Models (道德模范)” nationwide. Five sub-categories of self-sacrificial virtues on “helping others (助人为乐)”, “public bravery (见义勇为)”, “honesty and trustworthiness (诚实守信)”, “professional dedication (敬业奉献)”, and “filial piety (孝老爱亲)”⁷⁵ were focused. These selected moral virtues echoed the CSV’s individual-level value principles and countered individualism that was officially deemed as an undesirable by-product of marketization. Exceptional nominees who excelled in performing these five officially-acclaimed self-sacrificial virtues in everyday life were awarded with the honorary title of “Haoren (好人; good person)”. The collection of similar honorary titles has been expanding quickly. “Contemporary Lei Feng (当代雷锋)”⁷⁶, “Model of the Time (时代楷模)”, and “the Most Beautiful Person (最美人物)”⁷⁷ were added and celebrated

⁷⁴ Landsberger, Stefan R. 2001. Pp.551-552.

⁷⁵ English translations of these five categories are mine.

⁷⁶ Lei Feng (雷锋; 1940-1962) was a soldier who coined the term of the “spirit of the screw”, which compares a person to a screw of the machine of society. He has become a moral model for self-sacrifice for the sake of the social good. He has been one of the most popular subjects to be featured in propaganda posters from the pre-reform era to this date.

⁷⁷ Source: http://www.wenming.cn/ddmf_296/ (a website hosted by the Propaganda Department and the Central Office for Constructing Socialist Spiritual Civilization)

in official ceremonies. During the past two decades, this trend of devising more refined categorization of moral exemplars based on their “specialized” virtues was observed with a concurrent tendency of portraying them with reduced aura of idealized perfection. As illustrated by one public poster (Figure 12), aimable photographic images of approachable “Good Persons around us” colored morality with a down-to-earthly hue. Haughty moral virtues have been brought closer to the realm of the mundane and near.



Figure 12 A public poster in Chongqing (2017)

(Top-Left) Yubei, National Civilized District

(Center) Salute Moral Models;

Praise Good Persons around us

(Bottom) [the list of the CSV]

The Party Working Committee and Office of Longxi Road, Yubei District

Returning “Moral Models” for public emulation to the realm of everyday seems to be one side of the coin with the other side emphasizing minute practical actions. In recent years, another type of public adversary posters appeared, specializing on recommending specific and learnable steps for embodying abstract moral virtues on the ideational plane in individuals’ everyday life. For instance, a series of public posters on *xiao* (filial piety) in Chongqing elaborated “New Twenty-

four Forms of Filial Piety (新二十四孝)” (i.e., title of the series). Each poster from the collection explicated a specific action for performing filial piety, pictorially illustrated with cartoonish depictions in a realistically-rendered modern background containing symbols such as modern skyscrapers and arenas (e.g., Figure 13). These clear behavioural prescriptions even contained refreshing recommendations for adapting the traditional moral virtue of filial piety to the changed social context. Some taboo topics of yesterday, such as remarriage and open expression of love, were seen normalized as recommended behavioral expressions of the virtue with an origin in the distant past. The set of posters recommended:

cook for parents; hold birthday parties for parents; take photographs for parents frequently; express your love to presents; make “care card” for parents; console parents; bring parents for health check-ups regularly; accompany parents to visit their friends; bring your nuclear family to visit parents; bring parents to travel and revisit old places; make efforts for spending holidays with parents; do exercises with parents; discuss your thoughts with presents; call parents every week; give parents sufficient amount of pocket money; bring parents to important events; invite parents to visit your workplace; support parents’ hobbies; watch an old movie with parents; teach parents to surf online; listen to parents’ stories of their past; support parents to remarry; buy suitable insurances for presents; participate in your parents’ activities sometimes⁷⁸.

⁷⁸ The majority of public posters from this set feature one of the twenty-four forms of filial piety, such as Figure 13.



Figure 13 A poster from the “New Twenty-four Forms of Filial Piety” series (Chongqing, 2017)

Teach parents to surf online
Act out the culture of xiaodao (filial piety); Pass down traditional Chinese moral virtues
Guanyin Road, Jiangbei District

Nevertheless, the great attention to details through listing behavioural rules was most evident in another stream of public posters aiming for cultivating citizens’ public morality. The verbose style of these posters was distanced from a tone of criticism and accusation, as adopted by the NLM. Long lists of items to be followed by citizens became the medium, through which moral principles were brought closer to their embodied forms. Their close tie was clearly argued in a poster (Figure 14) stating that “self-cultivation is displayed through each word and every action; civility manifests in the tiniest of all details”. More often, these etiquette-style posters for cultivating public morality bore a name of “Public Pact” (公约) of a certain sort, catering to various administrative levels and for different audiences. Behavioural rules for acting in public places, such as on walking (e.g., Figure 2), talking (e.g., Figure 15), inhabiting in a community (e.g., Figure 16) and travelling (e.g., Figure 17) were detailed, sometimes to an excessive extent. one exemplary etiquette instruction read: “do not dirty or damage objects inside hotel rooms; do not

damage public facilities; do not be greedy about small favors; save water and electricity; do not waste food” (Figure 17). By naming these posters as “Public Pacts”, “civilized” behavioural codes issued by the party-state apparatus (e.g., Offices under the Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization and the Commission of Tourism Development) took on an illusory appeal of voluntary agreements from below, yet their norm-like etiquette rules are to be embodied by ideal citizens for public morality and civility to manifest.



Figure 14 A public poster in a park in Chongqing (2017)
Self-cultivation is displayed through each word and every action
Civility manifests in the tiniest of all details
(Bottom) Chongqing Huguang Huiguan Development Ltd.
Liziba Anti-Japanese War Heritage Park



Figure 15 Civility Pact (Nanjing, 2017)

Promote public morality; Eradicate uncivilized behaviours

No noise pollution

Do not make noises in public spaces. Do not talk too loudly when conversing with others. Use headphones for listening audio recordings or for watching videos in public. Control the volume of your voice when talking on the phone. No uncivilized actions such as booing when attending public shows or sports events.

(Right) Fuzimiao District



Figure 16 Xuhui Denizens' Pact (Shanghai, 2017)

Love the beautiful Xuhui; Construct a first-class district

Respect public orders; Act out civilized standards

Care for the environment; Be clean and hygienic

Respect teachers and care for the old and frail; Treat neighbours friendly

Help those in hardship and poverty; Contribute to the social good

Be dedicated to work and honest; Enhancing professional skills

Unite with and help each other; Participate in voluntary services

Everybody spreads civility; Together build a civilized district

(Bottom) Office of the Spiritual Civilization Commission of Xuhui District

The Spiritual Civilization Commission of Caohejing



Figure 17 Civilized Tourism Pact for Chinese Citizens (Shigatse, 2017)

Creating a civilized and harmonious environment benefits everyone. Being a civilized tourist is our duty. Please abide by the pact below:

- 1) Maintain a hygienic environment. Do not spit, throw gums, litter, or smoke in public places.
- 2) Respect public orders. Do not be noisy; queue in order; do not block the way; do not talk loudly in public.
- 3) Protect the environment. Do not step on lawns, pick flowers or fruits, run after, hit or feed animals.
- 4) Protect cultural heritages. Do not carve on, climb up, or touch cultural heritages; photo according to rules.
- 5) Care for public facilities. Do not dirty or damage objects inside hotel rooms; do not damage public facilities; do not be greedy about small favors; save water and electricity; do not waste food.
- 6) Respect others' rights. Do not force foreign guests to take photos; do not sneeze at others; do not occupy public facilities for an excessively long period; respect service personnel and different religious customs.
- 7) Treat others with courtesy. Dress in an appropriate and clean manner; give priorities to the old and frail; lady first; do not swear.
- 8) Promote healthy entertainment. Reject feudal superstitions, pornography, gambling, and narcotics.

(Bottom) Tourism Development Commission of Shigatse

3.4 I, People, Nation, Country

In the decades following the foundation of the PRC, the party-state's efforts for molding modern citizens have been relentless. Bearing much resemblance to the Nationalist Party's NLM, the state-led social movement remained the predominant mode of intervention for attempting to initiate sociocultural changes from above. Large-scale top-down movements continued to be carried on till this date, such as the National Civilized District/Town/City/Village competition under the umbrella project of building the socialist spiritual civilisation to be discussed in detail in next Chapter. The shared mechanism of these movement-style initiatives is to engage individuals via the administrative or professional collectives that they belong to. It is therefore the membership(s) of these collective units that compelled individuals to hop on the bandwagon of these top-down civilizing projects designed and supervised by the central government. But in recent years, another rationale for motivating individuals to voluntarily participate in these top-down initiatives emerged, reflected by a stream of public propaganda posters that have gained greater visibility recently. A roadside poster-installation read: "I participate in building the civilization; I benefit from a civilized *Jiangbei*" (Figure 18); another proclaimed: "Motherland prosperous and powerful; my own life peaceful and happy" (Figure 19). Common to these similar discourses was an implied relationship of symbiosis, between individuals and their collectives of various scopes. To borrow Abraham Lincoln's words, the state-led "civilizing" projects were suggested by these posters as "of the people, by the people, for the people". It was also notable that these posters on the individual-collective symbiosis almost exclusively adopted a utilitarian tone, suggesting individuals as the ultimate beneficiaries of these state-led projects. The pragmatic framing recast the citizen's duty to become "civilized" in a different light, transforming a chore to endure into a rational course of action worthy striving for. As vividly illustrated by a

public poster through a visual metaphor of mother and child, a content boy enjoying a “peaceful and happy” life was comfortably nested on the back of his “prosperous and powerful” mother (Figure 19).



Figure 18 A roadside installation in Chongqing (2017)
 I participate in building the civilization; I benefit from a civilized Jiangbei
 (Left) Everyone participates; Civilize Jiangbei
 (Top-Right) Promote harmony



Figure 19 A public poster in Chongqing (2017)
 Motherland prosperous and powerful; My own life peaceful and happy
 [the list of the CSV]
 (Bottom) Guanyinqiao Street, Jiangbei District

One of the most popular propagandic slogans expressing the symbiotic relationship stated: “People have belief; Nation has hope; Country has power”. A bright LED-display at the *Chongqing* airport delivered this message in solemn simplicity: bolded characters on a brightly-lit background in the symbolic color of red (Figure 20). One of the top-ten Chinese neologisms in 2018 appeared apt for describing the implicit image underlying by the slogan: “the community of common destiny (命运共同体)”⁷⁹. The term first mentioned in the 17th National Congress of the CCP in 2007 was initially deployed for characterizing the entangling relationship between mainland China and Taiwan⁸⁰, but since then it has become a popular term in officially-propagated discourses to emphasize the connectedness, in most cases, between China and other countries constituting the global political order. The “community of common destiny” is conceptually different from “fate community” that spontaneously emerge during the time of public emergencies, but the two appear to share the commonalities of “moral density” and “an axis of convergence”, as termed by Peter Baehr⁸¹. These communities are similarly unique for having an intense sense of social connectedness (i.e., moral density) that is often expressed through shared rhetoric and symbols (i.e., an axis of convergence). In this popular slogan, the base of moral density was laid upon the implied strong identification among “people”, “nation”, and “country”; and the axis of convergence was their shared destiny or fate together actualized by people’s “belief”, nation’s “hope”, and country’s “power”. The slogan attributed a foundational importance to people’s “belief”, in the omitted yet obvious object of the Party’s

⁷⁹ Source (in Chinese): https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2699444

⁸⁰ Source (in Chinese): https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/24/content_6204564_11.htm

⁸¹ Baehr, Peter, ed. 2017. *Caesarism, Charisma and Fate: Historical Sources and Modern Resonances in the Work of Max Weber*. 1st edition. Routledge. Pp. 139-159.

leadership. The shared fate viewed from this perspective perhaps ceased to be “fate” proper, for implying a teleologically ordained path largely within the Party’s “will and comprehension”⁸². Framing this slogan with highly emotionally-charged vocabularies like “belief” and “hope” not only rendered the power of the party-state appear almost absolute, but also discursively united the “civilizer” played by the party-state and the mass populace to be “civilized” through binding their future together with a sense of solidarity and patriotic pride, discursively.



Figure 20 A display-poster inside the Chongqing Airport (2017)
People have belief; Nation has hope; Country has power

4. Embodying Civility

These two state-led “civilizing” initiatives along China’s modernization process were from its early period and the latest stage, extending from the Republican era to today’s PRC. Through observing these two moments of the state-led “civilizing” process in modernizing China, we could detect a prominent feature common to this mode of top-down efforts: being situated within a general discourse of national revival or renaissance. It suggests that since the late 19th century,

⁸² Simmel, Georg. 2007. “The Problem of Fate.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 24(7–8):78–84. P. 79.

defining “wenming (civility, civilization)” in the modern sense in the Chinese context cannot bypass the issue of bridging the past and the present, or, of rationalizing the link between China as a renowned ancient civilization and as a modern polity, an equal member to others in constituting the global political order. Even during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when traditional culture, in particular Confucianism, was officially denounced as the feudal-passé⁸³, functionally, it remained a significant reference point for charting China’s own form of modernity. This analysis has shown that in both the NLM’s official doctrines and recent public propaganda posters, traditional Chinese culture was similarly embraced as the moral foundation. However, the choice of traditional Chinese moral virtues for defining “Chineseness” at both moments appeared arbitrary. Whether in the Nationalist Party’s re-interpretations of “*li* (decorum), *yi* (righteousness), *lian* (integrity), and *chi* (sense of shame)”, or in the CCP’s emphasis on “*ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (rite and etiquette), *zhi* (wisdom), *xin* (trustworthiness)”, the intrinsic connection between selected moral principles and behavioural codes to be embodied by individual citizens appeared too ambiguous to be comprehensible, if no official justifications were supplied. The observed ambiguity suggests that the significance of these selected traditional Chinese moral virtues is more instrumental than substantive, for acting as the ground to legitimize the party-state’s role as the ultimate moral authority. The ostensible gap between a curated moral foundation with its root in traditional Chinese culture and the state-prescribed behavioural codes was attempted to be bridged discursively in both cases, but its insufficiency

⁸³ The most prominent campaign on this theme, during the Cultural Revolution, was the “Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign (批林批孔运动)” (1973-1976).

was reflected by the lack of responsiveness from below. But emphasizing a moral foundation for defining “civility” had the effect of turning it into a largely moralized notion.

During these two top-down “civilizing” projects, to become “civilized” was similarly argued by the party-state as the moral imperative of modern citizens. But the keyword-network analysis in this chapter (summarized in Table 1) reveals a significant discursive shift. Central to the NLM was a discourse of grotesqueness and lack, representatively shown in Chiang Kai-shek’s inauguration speech for the movement. The animalistic state of life observed among Chinese nationals was unreservedly criticized as the manifested sign of moral decadence, to be reformed by the NLM. As a top-down social movement, the NLM remained elitist. Built on the momentum of societal transformation started in the late-Qing and early Republic period, yet it replaced intellectuals with political elites as the leading force. The movement’s central discourse of lack further amplified the gulf between the party-state as the “civilizer” and Chinese nationals as the main targets of top-down “civilizing” practices. By contrast, the public propaganda posters in recent years projected a different dynamism between the CCP and Chinese nationals through a heartening discourse of duty that was propagated with a sense of solidarity and patriotic pride. The implied total commensurability between traditional Chinese moral virtues and the CSV, between the modern notion of civility and China’s ancient civilization (linguistically reinforced by the peculiarity that both “civility” and “civilization” are translated to *wenming* in Mandarin Chinese), and between individual citizens and the party-state, was captured in the projected image of the community of common destiny. The moral density of the community was further enhanced through disseminating increasingly desacralized prototypes of “Moral Models” to engrain moral virtues deeper into the fabrics of everyday life, and through transforming the

performance of moral virtues into guided exercises. This strategic shift at times presented in a pragmatic tone attempted to engage individuals to proactively participate in these top-down projects through following trainable steps, not only to fulfill their citizen's duty, but also to benefit from these undertakings.

Semantic Networks of "Embodied Civility"	
The New Life Movement (1934-1949)	Public Propaganda Posters (2017)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civility, Lack, Grotesque • Modern Citizens, Public Morality • Four Cardinal Principles, Daily Activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civility, the Core Socialist Values, Chinese Socialist Citizen • Traditional Chinese morality, the Socialist Core Values • Everyday Moral Models, Minute Civilized Behaviours • I, People, Nation, Country

Table 1 Semantic Networks of "Embodied Civility"

Given this observed discursive shift, the effectiveness of these state-led efforts for molding modern citizens through cultivating the body appeared limited. The NLM failed, both in the mainland and later in Taiwan⁸⁴. Popular reception of public propaganda posters, as a form of most frequently adopted medium for public communication throughout the history of PRC, also has been questionable. For instance, even till recent years, critiques on the lack of public morality and Chinese tourists' less-than-desirable behaviours have been making international and national media headlines from time to time⁸⁵. The general lack of responsiveness to these omnipresent public posters in public spaces was also observed during my research trip. As a few

⁸⁴ After the Nationalist Party's retreat to Taiwan in 1949, the NLM was continued across the strait. On 1 May 1968, a similar document to *the Necessary Knowledge of New Life* (新生活须知) in the NLM, *the Necessary Knowledge of Nationals' Life* (国民生活须知) on ninety-nine behavioral rules, was published in Taiwan. See: Fukamachi, Hideo. 2017. Epub edition: Chapter 8.

⁸⁵ An example of these media stories: "Chinese briefly banned at White Temple." 2015. Bangkokpost. (<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/469276/chinese-briefly-banned-at-white-temple>)

of my interviewees remarked, “nobody really looks at those things.”⁸⁶ On the day of the *Zhongyuan* Festival (中元节)⁸⁷, when strolling in Chengdu, I first noticed an “Action Proposal” for “civilizing” the commemoration ritual on a community advisory board (Figure 21). Residents in the neighborhood were advised to discard “outdated” customs like joss-paper burning in public places for the stated environmental and safety concerns. Yet not far away, a middle-aged woman with two young adults were absorbed in carrying out the local ritual of commemoration. On the sidewalk, a few candles were lit up for the visiting spirits coming from the other realm. Then joss-papers flamed up and quickly turned into dancing ashes. This ceremonial display was unfolding in front of two large public posters fixed on the sidewalk wall: one showcased the 2015 “Morals Models” of Chengdu city and their applaudable deeds to be emulated by other denizens, the other presented the popular slogan in symbolic red: “People have belief; Nation has hope; Country has power” (Figure 22). The contrast permeated through the scene viscerally illustrated some common critiques of this mode of centralized production of citizens through the means of moral suasion to embody the codes of “civility”. Manifested “theatricalization” (戏剧化) and “hollowing-out” (空洞化) of these state-led projects therefore were often criticized as staged “political show[s]” (政治秀)⁸⁸ that failed to effect genuine sociocultural transformation.

⁸⁶ Similar remarks observed in China were documented in: Landsberger, Stefan R. 2001. P. 544.

⁸⁷ The *Zhongyuan* Festival (中元节), also referred to as ‘*Qiyueban*’ (七月半), is a traditional Chinese festival on the 15 July in the lunar calendar. It is thought to be the day when the deceased come back to the realm of the living for a visit. The commemoration ritual for the festival varies regionally, but mainly includes practices like setting lit paper-lanterns afloat on rivers and burning joss paper for the visiting spirits, the former for guiding their paths and the latter for supplying them with money to be spent in the other realm. As shown in Figure 22, people also burn joss paper for wandering ghosts at street intersections for these homeless souls, for the purpose of safeguarding their own ancestors’ spirits during the visit and protecting themselves from potential harm from wandering souls.

⁸⁸ These are characterizations of the NLM, as seen in: Fukamachi, Hideo. 2017. Epub edition: Chapter 8.

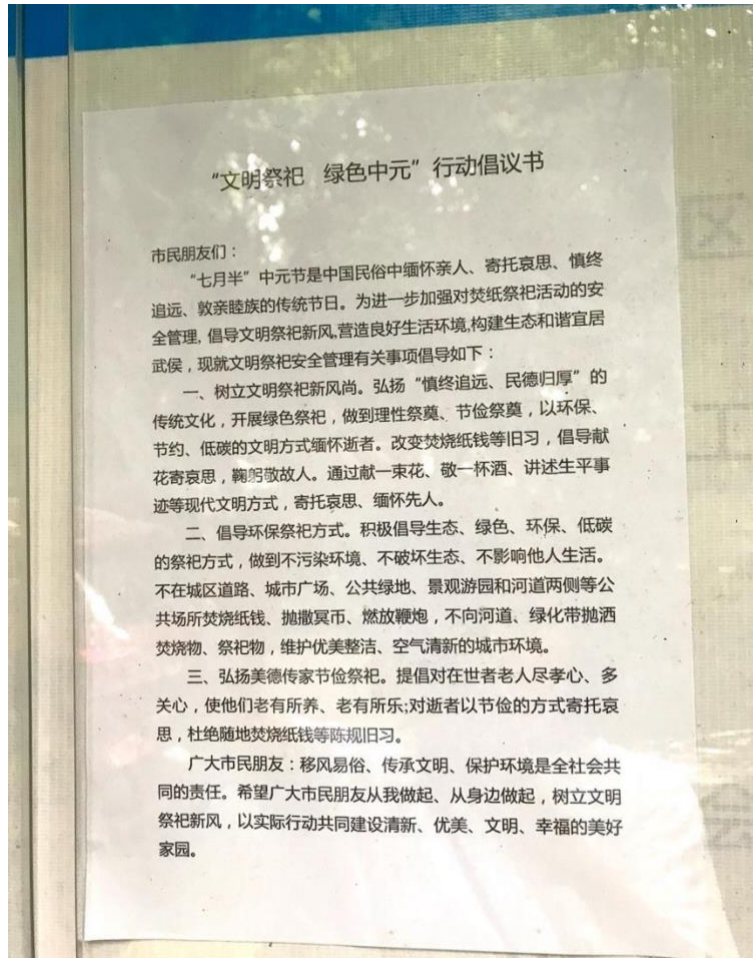


Figure 21 “Civilize commemoration rituals, Green Zhongyuan” Action Proposal (Chengdu, 2017)
Denizen-friends:

“Qiyueban”, the Zhongyuan is a traditional Chinese festival for commemorating deceased family members and expressing our longing and sorrow. In order to strengthen the security management of joss-paper-burning in the commemoration ritual, to promote new civilized customs for commemoration, to create a better living environment, and to build a green and habitable Wuhou [district], this action proposal on civilizing the commemoration ritual and safety management includes the following:

First, build new customs and civilized commemoration rituals. Spread traditional culture and carry out green, rational, and frugal commemoration that is environmental-friendly with minimal carbon footprints. Give up old customs like joss-paper-burning by giving flower-bouquets or bowing. Express our thoughts and commemorate the deceased in modern civilized manners, through a bouquet of flowers, a glass of wine, or a story of their life.

Second, promote environmentally-friendly commemoration rituals. Proactively promote environmental-friendly, green, low-carbon commemoration rituals. Do not pollute the environment, destroy the ecosystem, or negatively impact others’ everyday life. Do not burn or throw paper-bank-notes, or spatter fireworks in public places including city streets, public squares, green spaces, gardens, and river banks. Do not throw burnt objects into the river or green belts. Maintain a tidy and clean environment.

Third, spread traditional moral virtues and commemorate in a frugal manner. Perform filial piety to elders by caring for them and providing them with a comfortable and happy life. Commemorate the departed in a frugal manner and reject outdated customs like burning paper-bank-notes.

Dear denizen-friends: Changing old customs, passing down the cultural heritage, and protecting the environment are the shared responsibilities of everyone. We hope that all denizen-friends start from the self and from minute actions to form new customs for commemoration, for building a clean, beautiful, civilized, and happy family for all.



Figure 22 Burning joss-paper on the sidewalk in front of public posters in Chengdu (2017)

(Center) People have belief; Nation has hope; Country has power

(Left) 2015 Moral Models of Chengdu

The persistence of an apparently ineffective mode of top-down “civilizing” initiatives through embodying the codes of “civility” could appear perplexing at first. This analysis based on extracting and comparing the semantic networks around the idea of “embodied civility” at two moments of China’s modernization process intends to make evident a shared socio-structural feature below the surface of a discursive shift, as a cue towards interpreting the apparently paradoxical condition of persistence and ineffectiveness characterizing these top-down initiatives. This analysis shows that both in the Nationalist Party’s Republic China when the NLM unfolded and the CCP’s post-reform era when these public propaganda posters were produced, the party-state assumed a similar role of the civilizer, the ultimate moral authority, and the major eligible agent for societal change. Top-down “civilizing” projects, whether in the form of the state-led social movement (e.g., the NLM) or that of more dispersed propaganda campaigns (e.g.,

public posters), were to propel social transformation without necessitating drastic socio-structural changes that risk threatening the leadership position of the Party. These top-down “civilizing” projects were similarly built on a vision of politics that has individual’s morality (*de*) at its center, though they occurred decades apart at two different historical periods of modern China. Shaping the moral characters of citizens was the ultimate goal of top-down embodiment practices in both cases, where the instrumentalization of the body was a means directed towards this moralized end. The moral qualities of the ideal citizen were also similarly defined by the party-state in a restricted manner: while citizens were called upon to participate in the top-down projects, voluntary bottom-up political initiatives were disavowed. The lack of motivation from below to participate in these projects relying on moral suasion as the main method was related to these structural roots. The discursive shift towards solidarity and patriotic pride appeared to have limited effectiveness, to a great extent, for leaving these structural features intact.

The persistence of this mode of producing civilized citizens through promulgating embodying practices also poses a question on the very notion of “civility”, in particular, when viewed through the distinction between actually-embodied manners and behavioural codes to be embodied to become civilized. The difference is beyond the surficial differentiation between observable actuality and wishful aspiration. We should recall that in the 17th-century, when “civility” surpassed “courtesy” to become a more popular word for denoting good manners in early modern European societies, it bore a close tie to the idea of “citizen” through being defined as “the virtue of citizens”, from the origin of “the classical notion of an organized political community of *civitas*”⁸⁹. This political connotation gradually receded in the following century, as

⁸⁹ Thomas, Keith. 2018. P. 12.

“civility” became more commonly deployed to refer to good manners in social interactions, but its political connotation did not altogether evaporate. Evidence can be found in the observation that general manners found in a society are greatly shaped by the distribution of political power, of which the form of government is a key indicator⁹⁰. This observation is often associated to works of Montesquieu and Elias, in their similar emphasis on how human interdependence shapes the prevalent forms of sociality in a given society⁹¹. A diachronic extension of this thesis relates changes in manifested manners of people, varied forms of sociality, to that in the distribution of political power within a society⁹². When “civility” is understood as a set of manners of a peculiar sociohistorical context, it refers to polite forms of sociality between equals that emerged in early modern societies, when rapid development of commerce and expansion of the middle class were restructuring the power structure in these societies, along with other parallel social transformations such as bureaucratization, institutionalization of rules, and urbanization. These interweaving societal processes elevated the importance of not offending others to be an important motive in interacting with strangers as equals, in the changing social environment where the state was also retreating from the associational life unfolding in civil society. Civility became the new “social glue”⁹³ to facilitate this increasingly prevalent form of social interaction,

⁹⁰ The relationship between “the manners of a people” and “the nature of the government” was particularly argued by the British radical Dissenting minister Richard Price. See: Ibid., P. 244.

⁹¹ Ibid., P. 84. This idea is specifically related to Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of Law* (1748), in particular Part 3 – Book 19 (“On the laws in their relation with the principles forming the general spirit, the mores, and the manners of a nation”), and Elias’ *The Civilizing Process* (1939).

⁹² Ibid., P. 244.

⁹³ Ibid., P. 252.

both as a form of weak solidarity and potentially as a new basis of “social confidence” in the early modern period⁹⁴.

A particular feature of the top-down “civilizing” initiatives along China’s modernization process appears to be the tendency to define “civility” by normative behavioural codes for ideal citizens, instead of actually-manifested manners. It not only gives the notion of “civility” a normative appeal, but also suggests an accentuated sense of agency that is mainly manifested through the party-state’s centralized control over prescribing the codes of civilized sociality. This characteristic could be read, on the one hand, as a tacit acknowledgement of changing networks of social interdependence along China’s modernization process; and on the other, the party-state’s attempt to supervise such changes while guarding against the possibility of radical structural redistribution of political power. Acting as the arbiter of changing patterns of social interdependence triggered by concurrent processes such as marketization, urbanization, bureaucratization, and professionalization, the party-state attempted to promulgate moralized behavioural codes to define citizen’s “civility”. It has resulted to a notion of “civility” that is closer to that of “civilization” as the advanced stage of development from the social Darwinism perspective, than to that of “*civitas*” having the political organization of a community as its central concern. This notion of “civility” has also taken on contradictory connotations that are simultaneously deferential and polite, public and private, ceremonial and every-day, ideologized and depoliticized, and become a new business opportunity.

⁹⁴ Majorie Morgan argues that this development in the 19th century was closely tied to the process of professionalization that combined ethics with etiquette codes, a process deemed critical to shifting the society’s basis of mutual trust from personal character to legal credentials and professional codes of conduct. A degree of deception in the sense of the discrepancy between internal character and external presentation to others was accepted as being integral to the principle of “tact”. See: Morgan, Marjorie. 1994. *Manners, Morals, and Class in England, 1774-1858*. Macmillan Press. Pp. 119-132.

Chapter 2. Producing Embodied Civility

On first impression, this etiquette business appears to be decisively “oriental”, as shown in both its name and business webpage presentation. The name, “Eastern Etiquette”¹, explicitly suggests its root in the traditional Chinese culture through invoking the general idea of the East. Visually, in its business website the company’s name is presented in traditional Chinese calligraphy style, placed next to its brand logo where the first character of the company’s name is transformed into a ding (鼎), a type of prehistoric Chinese cauldron. The website adopts red as the predominant theme color, a color that is often associated with the traditional Spring Festival, the Chinese national flag, the history of the Chinese Communist Party, and generally joyful occasions in Chinese cultural context. Many symbolic images are also integrated into the web design to signify the affinity to Chinese culture: the portrait of Confucius, Chinese tea ceremony sets, and traditional design motif of xiangyun (祥云, literally means “lucky clouds”). It is stated in the website that the founding idea behind this etiquette business is a mission to “spread the oriental etiquette culture and revitalize China as a country of rite and etiquette (传播东方礼仪文化, 振兴中华礼仪之邦)”. At the same time, the company’s apparent root in traditional Chinese culture is complemented by

¹ It is a pseudonym chosen to closely resemble the characteristics of the original. All of the names of persons and places used in this chapter are pseudonyms. In some occasions, the actual name is omitted by indicating an “X”.

signified ties to the cosmopolitan and western cultural world through another set of images such as those of polished business settings and western faces. Some slogans and subtitles in the website are also occasionally provided with English translations. In addition, in its stream of business to train etiquette trainers, Eastern Etiquette emphasizes that all qualified trainees are awarded with double-certificates, one nationally and another internationally recognized. The “international” certificate is certified by the American Certification Institute Center², which many etiquette trainers I met later on have all heard of but cannot really say more than its being American, and therefore international. Eastern etiquette’s course offerings cover a full cultural spectrum from traditional Chinese etiquette, physical comportments, environment etiquette³, to wine etiquette and western table manners. Liang is the man behind this etiquette business.

Not certain if my email request for interview could reach Liang, while in Shanghai I visited the company address obtained from Eastern Etiquette’s business website. The address led me to an office inside a high-rise not far from downtown Shanghai. There was no signage for Eastern Etiquette, and the office turned out to be hosting a business association that is representing businesspeople from a

² The American Certification Institute Center’s official website (in Chinese) is at: <http://www.aci.ac/index.php>. There appeared to be a directory to its English version, but which cannot be accessed. This organization of ACIC was introduced in its Chinese website, yet in English: “ACIC is one of the most authoritative certification bodies in the world. ACIC business approved by the federal government, and through the Chinese embassy notarized. By 162 WTO countries recognized” (originally in English). At the time of my fieldwork, Liang’s profile was listed in the website as among the “Chief Reviewer and Lecturer Team (首席评审及讲师团队)”.

³ It is a new etiquette program designed by Liang as part of his new civility business. When the environment etiquette program was first actualized in Nankou, local volunteers were recruited for picking up trash along the hiking path of a hill in Nankou.

prefectural-level city from central China to Shanghai. After I explained the purpose of my visit, the self-introduced executive vice president of the association told me that Liang turned himself into an etiquette business entrepreneur while working there. She called Liang right away, so we talked over phone. Liang was apparently unaware of my interview request, but he enthusiastically agreed to be interviewed immediately. About two hours later, as Liang suggested, we met in a café bistro in a newly-built modern residential community in east Shanghai, over one-hour's drive away from downtown. He came in with his wife who was also an etiquette trainer working for his company, as well as their newborn baby in a stroller. Liang is in his late 30s and casually dressed in a t-shirt and shorts. He speaks quite fast with passionate eagerness and an audible accent from the province that the business association is representing. Later in the conversation I asked Liang how he got interested in etiquette in the first place. He introduced himself as having a bachelor's degree in Mathematics, without mentioning where it was from, and a master's in Chinese Philosophy from a reputable university in Shanghai. Afterwards he "conducted some humanities and sociological research (on his own) and then developed a deep understanding of culture"⁴, the experience that made him to realize that "people's life can be changed for better" and "culture should be the entry point" for such a change. The turning point was the Shanghai Expo held in 2010, when his elder sister, whom I also talked to later, participated as a

⁴ All interviews included in this chapter were conducted in Chinese and translated to English by me, if not noted otherwise.

volunteer for the Expo and thus underwent some etiquette training for serving the event. Upon return, she used what she learnt from the etiquette training to train her little brother. Liang was still talking with great excitement about the first time in his life when he was made to stand still against the wall so as to gain better posture; this comportment training technique is now widely used in Liang's and other etiquette training programs today. From there Liang went onto developing an etiquette business "to spread Chinese etiquette culture", in his own words. However, Liang appears to be reluctant to present himself as a businessman, as he likes to emphasize that he has "an academic dream". He habitually refers to himself as "Teacher Li (i.e., his family name)" in conversations, and he also told me during our first meeting that he had found a supervisor for a doctoral program on Economics from a highly prestigious university in Shanghai and might start the program in the coming fall semester. He decided not to continue studying Chinese Philosophy because of his "not-so-solid foundation in philosophy", therefore turned to a more "practically applicable" discipline in his opinion - Economics.

"The Etiquette of Party Building (党建礼仪)"⁵ project in Nankou is the program with which Liang enthusiastically jumpstarted our conversation with that

⁵ "Party building (党建)" is a political term. According to Baidu-pedia (百度百科, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/党的建设/1564187?fromtitle=党建&fromid=3620911>) the Chinese equivalent of Wikipedia, "Party building refers to the unison of the Marxist theory on Party building and its practices. It is the application of the Marxist theory on the Party. Party building includes three aspects: research on the scientific theories on Party building; practical activities under the guidance of the Marxist theory on Party building; principles and guidelines that mediate these two planes of the Marxist theory and practical activities under its guidance. Original texts: "党的建设即马克思主义建党理论同党的建设实践的统一，马克思主义党的学说的应用。党的建设包括三个方面的含义：一是研究党的建设的理论科学；二是在马克思主义党的学说指导下所进行的党的建设的实践活动；三是作为理论原则与实际行动两者中介的约法规章。"

day. Set up as a franchised model, his company had been seeking cooperation with local Communist Party branches in small towns and municipal districts to develop a series of etiquette-based civility programs with intriguing names, such as “City Etiquette”, “the Etiquette of Party Building”, and “Environment Etiquette”. Liang explained the development of this new strand of etiquette business as being based on his own assessment of the mainstream political-cultural climate in today’s mainland China, particularly the nationwide event of the National Civilized City/Town/District Campaign led by the central government: “Let me tell you, from the perspective of the market trend and the state’s policies, since China is a one-party state, the impact of official culture is tremendous. The state, the government, is like parents, you can only run along the direction they point you to”. At the very beginning of our first conversation, Liang extended an unexpected invitation to travel with his family to Nankou to interview more people involved in his local projects. Liang had planned this trip to work with his local branch to further develop their civility business there. He beamed with pride while introducing his Etiquette for Party Building Program: “The double-lead (双引) with Party building and etiquette...There is only one Party in China. We have sent out invitations around the county. On the county level, Nankou is a successful case. We are the first (in China) to develop the program!” Not knowing what to expect, I took up the invitation. Two days later, we landed at Nankou airport in the early morning.

1. *Tuopin* (脱贫): the County of Four Cultures

Nankou is an ethnic minority town in a southwest province in China. Over seventy percent of this county's population belongs to the *Dong* (侗) ethnic minority, also known as the Sam people. Historically the Dong community organized itself into a kinship-based "kingless kingdom"⁶ – a hierarchical social collective yet without a centralized government. This particular form of social organization is structurally based on the rudimentary unit of family, expanding to the kinship network of extended families, then to a village. The earliest written record of this form of kinship-based socio-political organization, *kuan* (款), was first found in the Song (宋) dynasty (960-1279)⁷. Historically the *kuan* system functioned as a form of military alliance externally and a mechanism of social management internally. Its regulative rules, *kuanyue* (款约), on various levels of family, extended family, and village were orally passed down as the shared rules to maintain the order of the Dong lifeworld. In Nankou's history of becoming a modern county, the most significant socio-political event is no doubt the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. By the 1950s, traditional Dong villages that were once headed by *zhailao* (寨老), respectable elders who are democratically elected by villagers, had been turned into new socialist villages under the political-administrative power of *cunzhibu* (村支部, village Communist Party branch) and *cunweihui* (村委会, village committee) whose members are also, ideally, democratically

⁶ 石干成 (Shi, Gancheng). 2017a. 《走进肇兴 - 南侗社区文化考察笔记》 (*Coming to Understand Zhaoxing – Observational Notes on the Culture of the Southern Dong Community*). 云南人民出版社 (Yunnan People's Publications).

⁷ 陈子豪 (Chen, Zihao). 2018. “款”文化对当今侗族地区社会团结的意义 (The Implications of ‘Kuan’ Culture on the Solidarity in the Dong Regions). Pp. 18-26 in 《贵州黔东南侗族文化调查研究》 (*Cultural Observations and Research on the Dong Culture in the Southeast of Guizhou Province*), edited by He, Shanmeng (何善蒙). Beijing: Jiuzhou Publications (北京：九州出版社).

elected by villagers to represent their collective will. Along with the removal of the *kuan* system, written pacts of modern villages also replaced traditional *kuanyue* to reflect the organizing principles underlying the new political-administrative system of PRC as a socialist state. In this process, the traditional Dong system represented by its cultural pillars of *zhailao* and *kuanyue* was transformed into a cultural supplement without any political, military, or legal power that once it had in structuring the local lifeworld. These ethnic-cultural elements were relocated into the realm of the everyday, subordinated to the political and ideological system in the hands of the state. Lixiang was introduced to me by another government officer in Nankou after my expressed interest in the Dong culture. A member of Dong ethnic minority who had been working for the county government for decades, Lixiang was one of the two *Dong* culture experts that I talked to. He described these changes in Nankou in recent decades:

Lixiang (L): Along the political development and changes, the organizations based on *kuan* no longer exist. Now everything is organized according to the administrative system from the central government. There is no longer any necessity to have *kuan*-based organizations, because after the Liberation in 1949, every one of us became a part of the big socialist family. Everyone worked in *shengchandu* (生产队; the production unit). Everyone worked together, right? Conflicts between traditional *Dong* villages became rare. Even if there were occasional conflicts, *gongshe* (公社; the commune) or *quwei* (区委; the district committee) would act on your behalf. There was no longer a need for *kuan*.

Yikun: So, after 1949, the *Dong* villages were fully integrated into the political-administrative system of new China?

L: Yes, but the role of *zhailao* was put back since 1989. [...] A few years after the economic reform, in the 1980s, people's lives had changed for better. Then, every extended family, a place, needs a group of people to manage or to exercise

regulations upon. It is a sort of familial tie. The *zhailao*, speaking from the perspective of a family, first has to have a position that is high in the familial hierarchy; second, he has to be just and righteous in resolving conflicts therefore deserving the respect of others, right? So, in a family or a village, the *zhailao*'s role has to be occupied by someone who's respectful and just, so that others wouldn't dispute. Throughout mutual communication and education, *zhailao*-s acquired a position of obeying *cunzhibu* (village Communist Party branch) and *cunweihui* (village committee) and assisting the latter's work, because after all *zhailao*-s work for the village but not for themselves⁸.

Lixiang shows us the trajectory of recent socio-political changes in Nankou since around the 1950s. After the county was officially integrated into the political-administrative system of PRC, the traditional *Dong* social-political organizational principle of *kuan* and the role of *zhailao* were replaced by the newly legitimized political and legal order and its executive organs such as *cunzhibu* (village Communist Party branch) and *cunweihui* (village committee). The later revival of the *Dong*'s traditional role of *zhailao* in 1989 was largely cultural. The authoritative figure of *zhailao* whose power comes from *Dong*'s traditional familial structure of *kuan*, was now limited to exercising power within the depoliticized sphere of everyday life. Today, these ethnic minority cultural roles and regulations are mostly preserved for the function of assisting these newly formed political-administrative organs like *cunzhibu* (village Communist Party branch) and *cunweihui* (village committee) to sustain the social order planned out by the central government under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Nankou was transformed into a

⁸ All of the interviews quoted in this chapter were conducted by me in Mandarin Chinese and audio-recorded. Their English translations are mine.

politically modern county of the socialist China, yet with distinctive *Dong* ethnic culture still deeply embedded in local everyday life.

For a long time since its transformation into a county within the new political-administrative system, Nankou's most urgent task has been seen as economic development. During the time of our trip, it still formally bore the title of the "County below the Poverty Line" (pinkunxian, 贫困县)⁹. Therefore, *tuopin* (脱贫), literally meaning slipping out of poverty, was the county government's absolute priority. In fact, historically, the minority autonomous prefecture that Nankou is part of has never been known for economic achievement nationwide. This region also did not directly benefit from the economic reform policies of 1978, when the capitalist market economy was first introduced to the coastal areas in mainland China. As a remedy for the growing gap of economic development between coastal areas and deep inlands after the 1978 economic reform, the central government initiated the Developing the West (西部大开发) Program in 2001. The province that Nankou belongs to is within the scope of this program's targeted areas, where a set of preferential policies were devised by the central government to assist economic development of these regions. It was also largely the imperative of economic growth that propelled Nankou to build an airport. When it was put into commercial operation in November 2015, the hope was to breed a tourism industry to be the main source of local economic growth, for this ethnic minority town with not many mature industries to rely on. It is therefore not surprising that although Nankou is not yet a household name even to the

⁹ The formally-designated title of "County of below the Poverty Line" (贫困县; my translation) is given to counties that fell below the poverty line, based on the standards set by the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development (国务院扶贫开发领导小组办公室). The average annual income of a county's residents is the major criterion used in the evaluation. Most counties with the "Country of Poverty" title concentrated in the central-west regions of China.

majority of mainland Chinese, it is the fourth remote inland town in this southwest province to have a regional airport of its own.

The beginning of Nankou county's efforts for developing a modern tourism industry as its economic backbone is often traced back to the early 1980s. Lixiang recounted to me the well-known story in town: the French backpacker¹⁰ who triggered off the very first tourism surge in this once unheard-of remote town crouching in the craggy southwestern terrain. Upon his return to France, the French backpacker published a travelogue, describing the *Dong* people's unique way of life. The book then attracted more foreign tourists from abroad, many of them also French, to flock to this economically backward yet culturally distinctive small town to experience the *Dong* culture. Xiong, another government officer who is experienced in assisting research projects on the cultural and religious affairs of this region, also witnessed this tourism rush first-hand. Particularly after a showcase of the Grand Songs of the Dong Ethnic Group (dongzu dage, 侗族大歌) in the Paris Autumn Festival (Festival d'Automne à Paris) in 1986, he saw visitors mostly hailing from foreign lands, in his own words, like "a tornado", one that awakened the local government to the realization of the great economic potential in cultivating a tourism industry based on their yet-to-be commercialized *Dong* ethnic culture that is on open display in traditional *Dong* villages spreading along the outskirts of Nankou. Around 1995, hotels and restaurants were started to be built, and the very first website dedicated to Nankou tourism appeared¹¹. A modern hospitality industry catering to mass tourism started to emerge. Based on Xiong's observation, however, it was only after around 2012 when the Nankou government poured resources to

¹⁰ The backpacker appeared to be the French photographer Yann Layma (1962-). Some of his photos of the *Dong* region from the late 1980s can be viewed at: https://k.sina.cn/article_3164957712_bca56c1001901h807.html

¹¹ 石干成 (Shi, Gancheng), 2017a. P.174.

create “points of tourist attraction” (lvyou jingdian, 旅游景点) in *Dong* traditional villages, that the number of “mass tourists” started to grow.

In Nankou’s search for cultural resources as the base for cultivating a modern tourism industry, the *Dong* ethnic culture is without question its most precious heritage. In mainland China where the *Han* (汉) ethnicity represents more than ninety-two percent of China’s population, there are not many towns like Nankou where an ethnic minority actually constitute the majority on the county level. The cultural distinctiveness of the *Dong* people is viscerally appealing to first-time visitors. Today, *Dong* traditional natural villages (cunzhai, 村寨) can still be seen at the foot of the mountains, with two-story wooden houses, geometrically balanced drum towers (gulou, 鼓楼) constructed only with wood, and wind-and-rain corridor bridges (fengyuqiao, 风雨桥) covered by pavilions with flying eaves. The *Dong* people, especially the old generations, continue the tradition of wearing colorfully decorated traditional attires made of home-woven-and-dyed cloth, decorated with hand-crafted silver headdresses and ornaments in a variety of imaginative shapes and patterns like dancing butterflies or swirling phoenixes, particularly during the time of traditional festivals (Figure 23). The musicality of *Dong* people is also impressive to outsiders. Without a written script, they pass down cultural traditions and common laws orally through rhythmic songs, generation by generation. In 2009 the Grand Songs of the Dong Ethnic Group, their polyphonic choir, harmonious yet without a conductor or any accompanying musical instruments¹², was listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

¹² See: 石干成 (Shi, Gancheng). 2017b. 《和谐的秘密 - 侗族大歌文化人类学诠释》 (*The Secret Codes of Harmony – A Cultural Anthropological Interpretation of the Grand Songs of the Dong Ethnic Group*). 云南人民出版社 (Yunnan People’s Publications).

by UNESCO¹³. These stylistically distinctive and experientially immersive architectures, attires, music, and landscape make Nankou into a unique ethnic minority cultural enclave at a time of rapidly growing numbers of metropolis, skyscrapers, and fast-food chains.



Figure 23 Dong ethnic attire hung at a local choir education center

For the local government, developing a modern tourism industry as the major source for generating revenue means that Nankou has to attract as many tourists as possible, however diverse might be these tourists' travelling preferences, sightseeing plans or desires for cultural immersive experience. The early discovery of Nankou as a culturally distinctive destination by cultural adventurers, like the French backpacker that Lixiang mentioned, was mainly attributed to the unique Dong ethnic minority culture. Expanding the tourism industry so as to attract mass travellers from near and afar calls for more. In the past few years, the Nankou government felt the need to present itself as a culturally attractive destination that was worth visiting for more than one reason. In the spirit of place branding, a discourse of "a county of four cultures" was

¹³ For the official record at UNESCO, see: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/grand-song-of-the-dong-ethnic-group-00202>

created by the local government. In its official website, Nankou is presented as a unique place boasting “a thick historical culture”, “a diverse ethnic culture”, “the classic red culture”, and “a pleasant ecological culture”¹⁴. During my visit to Nankou, this “four cultures” discourse also appeared to be the standardized way for local government officials to introduce Nankou to people from outside of the town. Both Nankou’s “diverse ethnic culture” and “pleasant ecological culture” are on open display, through Ming (明; 1368-1644) and Qing (清; 1644–1912) architectures and its mountainous landscape. Recently, Nankou’s “classic red culture” was embraced as the foundation to develop “red tourism” by the Nankou government. It is all based on one historical event - during the Red Army’s Long March (changzheng, 长征; 1934-1936) the Party leaders held a strategically critical meeting in Nankou. In the early 2000s, this historical meeting site located on an ancient street from the Ming Dynasty was turned into a museum and a Patriotism Education Base (爱国主义教育基地). It is a timely economic strategy under a political-cultural environment of the “red culture (hongse wenhua; 红色文化)” revival since Xi Jinping’s (习近平) ascendance to power in China in 2013¹⁵. Hang, who graduated from a

¹⁴ My translations from Chinese to English. All of the quoted materials in this chapter were originally in Chinese and translated to English by me, if not noted otherwise.

¹⁵ An article entitled “Let the Red Culture Become the Spiritual Force for Soul-Cultivation and Education (让红色文化成为铸魂育人的精神动力)” published at “people.cn” (<http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0920/c40531-31363309.html>), a website of the CCP’s mouthpiece *People’s Daily*, stated: “The General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: ‘The (People’s) Republic is red, and (we) cannot dilute this color. The Red Culture was created under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party and Marxism. It absorbs all advanced cultures from China and abroad. It represents the excellent characters of the Chinese Communist Party members and Chinese people. It is not only a critical element of the Chinese value system, more importantly, but also the spiritual drive for consolidating national strength and social consensus. (习近平总书记指出：‘共和国是红色的，不能淡化这个颜色。’红色文化是中国共产党以马克思主义为指导，吸收中外优秀文化创造的先进文化，代表了中国共产党人和广大民众的优良品格，不仅是中国人民价值观念体系中的重要组成部分，更是凝聚国家力量和社会共识的重要精神动力。)’”. It was authored by the Shanghai Research Centre on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era of Xi Jinping (上海市习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想研究中心) in 20 September 2019, and was originally published in *Enlightenment Daily* (光明日报), founded in 1949 as the official newspaper of the China Democratic League. English translations are mine.

prestigious university in Shanghai, devoted his thesis to discussing the importance of Nankou Meeting in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. Today, as the director of the Museum of the Nankou Meeting, he explained a vision that developing “red tourism” is an integral part of developing a modern tourism industry in Nankou, as ultimately *tuopin*, eradicating poverty, is what a tourism industry aims to achieve.

Yikun: What do you mean by “red tourism”?

Hang: Ok, good question. “Red tourism” is a new form of theme tourism...It has red as its base color and red culture as its content. It’s similar to “mountain tourism”, “ethnic culture tourism”, “agriculture tourism”, and ours is “red tourism”. If you come to this very street, this historical location of the Nankou Meeting, it is not only to be educated on the revolutionary tradition, on patriotism, on collectivism, and on socialism, the educational function, it is also an experience of sightseeing. When you visit this street, these architectures from the Ming and Qing Dynasties, you are not only seeing the Communist Party, the political debate in the past, you are also viewing the cultural heritage created by ancient Chinese...Visitors to this museum can also get to know the long history of Nankou and the *Dong* ethnic culture in this area. So red tourism, haven’t you seen, it could help develop Nankou’s tourism industry. Red tourism is part of the “holistic tourism industry”. Particularly for us in the *geming laoqu* (革命老区; old revolutionary base areas), we are not short of culture and spirit, but we lack the economic power. I think if we can develop red tourism and let local entrepreneurs participate along the process, we can help eradicate poverty locally...

Developing “red tourism” is part of the county-wide coordinated efforts for cultivating a “holistic tourism industry”, in Hang’s own words. Along with the “a county of four cultures” discourse, an array of cultural resources of different origins and paths of historical development are being converted into commercialized cultural capitals for Nankou to attract as many tourists

as possible. This integrative and commercialized approach to developing tourism is not Nankou's own invention, nevertheless. Since 2016 the term of "quanyu lvyou (全域旅游; all-in-one tourism, or comprehensive tourism)" has become an increasingly popular concept for planning the development of tourism in China. One year later in 2017, the China National Tourism Administration (中华人民共和国国家旅游局) issued the Guidelines for Creating a Global Tourism Demonstration Area (《全域旅游示范区创建工作导则》¹⁶), where the development of "Tourism Plus" (旅游+) is officially introduced as a novel strategy for orchestrating strategic development of the tourism industry in a regionally coordinated manner: cooperation is called for not only on the industrial level, between the tourism industry and other neighbouring industries, but also between local governments and market forces for steps such as service training at points of tourist attraction, souvenir and other product design, marketing and advertising. This integrative approach is deemed necessary by the China National Tourism Administration for creating a tourism industry on the path towards "modernization, intensification, quality-fication, internationalization (现代化、集约化、品质化、国际化)". This policy orientation for developing tourism was in addition promoted as an effective measure for *fupin* (扶贫; assisting alleviating poverty), particularly for economically less developed areas with limited industrial resources. Nankou has taken up a similar route: It has been searching for all available cultural resources so as to brand itself as a "multi-purpose" tourist destination; meanwhile it has been seeking non-commercial and commercial assistance in preparing itself to

¹⁶ The announcement of issuing the Guidelines for Creating a Global Tourism Demonstration Area (《全域旅游示范区创建工作导则》) by the Chinese government is available at: http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-06/13/content_5201826.htm

attract and welcome tourists, mostly from more economically developed regions where a relatively high rate of disposable income has produced the majority of frequent travellers in China.

2. *Yingjian* (迎检): Becoming A “Civilized Town”

Being awarded with the title of a “Civilized Town” on the provincial level has been Nankou’s most recent endeavour that is thought to be beneficial for developing its mass tourism. The National Civilized City Campaign (全国文明城市评选) that Nankou has engaged itself in in the past few years is also the political-cultural event that encouraged Liang to invent his new strand of civility business, as I was told during our first meeting. What is the campaign, and why is it so important both to Nankou as an accelerator for developing tourism, and to Liang as an opportunity to expand his etiquette business line? Since 2003, candidates on various administrative levels of city, district, town, village, or work unit can voluntarily apply to be assessed according to the standards and selection procedures promulgated by the Central Guidance Commission for Building Spiritual Civilization (中央精神文明建设指导委员会) to compete for the honorary titles of National Civilized City/District/Town/Village¹⁷. In the evaluation process, the City Investigation Team of the National Bureau of Statistics (国家统计局城市调查) acts as the independent organ to conduct a series of formal evaluation based on the National Civilized City Assessment System (全国文明城市测评体系). Through examining official reports, conducting random telephone surveys, observing on location and so on, each applicant is graded on over a hundred items as

¹⁷ The official announcement of the competition (“关于印发《中央精神文明建设指导委员会关于评选表彰全国文明城市、文明村镇、文明单位的暂行办法》的通知（2003 年）”) is available at: http://www.wenming.cn/ziliao/wenjian/jigou/wenmingban/201312/t20131231_1668724.shtml

indicators of the achieved level of material and spiritual civilization. Every three years since 2005, honorary titles have been officially awarded to qualified candidate cities, districts, towns, villages, or work units that have successfully passed this formal evaluation. While these “civilized” members have to be reassessed triennially to retain their honorary titles, new qualified members are continually added into the “civilized” bracket. Aside from knowing the procedural aspect of the National Civilized City Campaign, we can only better grasp its *geist* and significance by situating it within the general idea of “spiritual civilization (精神文明)”, particularly the more recent variation of the “socialist spiritual civilization (社会主义精神文明)” highlighted by the CCP in the past few decades.

The concept of “spiritual civilization”, as the antithetical parallel of “material civilization (物质文明)”, emerged as a significant idea on societal development in China in the late 19th century when forced modernization took hold¹⁸. The reformist thinker of the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, Liang Qichao (梁启超; 1873-1929) was thought to be the first person to use the Chinese equivalent of civilization “in its Western sense”¹⁹ – applying the Chinese word *wenming* (文明) as the equivalent to the English word “civilization” for referring to progressive social development associated with the modernization process. In the English-speaking world, the word “civilization” has been deployed to describe both an achieved state and a process from the 18th century on; it reflects “the general spirit of the Enlightenment, with its

¹⁸ Fang, Weigui. 2019. “Chapter 8 Getting Prepared for a Meeting with Western Civilization.” Pp. 87-99 in *Modern Notions of Civilization and Culture in China*, translated by Wang, Weidong. New York, NY: Palgrave Pivot.

¹⁹ Fang, Weigui. 2019. “Chapter 6 The Early Spread of ‘Civilization’ as a Modern Notion in China.” in *Modern Notions of Civilization and Culture in China*, translated by Wang, Weidong. New York, NY: Palgrave Pivot. P.63.

emphasis on secular and progressive human self-development”²⁰. This general idea of progressive social and human development was fully retained in the Chinese word *wenming* since the late 19th century when it came to be used as the equivalent to “civilization”. Nevertheless, *wenming* was also fused with a particular angle for understanding the modern civilizing process via the dialectic relationship between the material and spiritual civilization as its two intrinsic and interweaving dimensions. Such a view is often attributed to the influence of Japan’s modernization ideology on early modern Chinese reformist thinkers including Liang Qichao mentioned above, who was exiled to Japan for over two decades. Even the Chinese word *wenming* in its modern usage is thought to be from Kanji (和制汉语) - Chinese characters adopted by the Japanese writing system yet often with modified meanings and connotations²¹. The Japanese reformist thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi’s *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1875) was influential among early Chinese reformist thinkers for charting an alternative path to modernity. Japan thus became an exemplary case for successfully combining western nation-state political system with traditional Japanese culture²². A lesson was extracted: balancing the development of material and spiritual civilization was embraced as the key to transforming China into a modern country. In the late 19th century, Liang Qichao even went as far as stating that “[t]rue civilization is solely spiritual [...] Pursuing civilization by enhancing the spirit [...] is like channeling a mighty river toward a worthy goal. Once its source is cleared, the river will flow straight on, undeterred by any submerged reef or treacherous shoal.”²³ How to view the dialectic

²⁰ The entry on “civilization” in Williams, Raymond. 1976. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. P. 24.

²¹ Fang, Weigui. 2019. Chapter 6: P.67.

²² Anagnost, Ann. 1997. “Constructions of Civility in the Age of Flexible Accumulation” in *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. P. 83.

²³ Liang Qichao in “On Ten Aspects of the Chinese Nation’s Invigoration”, cited in Fang, Weigui. 2019. P. 93.

relationship as an interplay between the material and spiritual aspect of civilization has since been much debated, but this dialectic framing became the main lens through which the issue of societal development in mainland China is discussed in official discourses.

After the foundation of the PRC, the CCP reiterated the exigency for building the socialist spiritual civilization in the Sixth Plenary Session of the Twelfth CCP Central Committee (中共十二届六中全会) in 1986 and ratified “The Resolution of the CCP Central Committee with Regard to the Guiding Principles of the Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization” (《中共中央关于社会主义精神文明建设指导方针的决议》). The task of constructing the socialist spiritual civilization was brought back to the central government’s political agenda, one decade after the turmoil of Culture Revolution (1966-1976) and a few years after China’s economic reform (1978). The 1986 Resolution reasserts Marxism, specifically the amalgam of Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist thought, as the ideological foundation for guiding the socialist China’s economic development in the post-reform era. Then a decade later in 1996, the Sixth Plenary Session of the Fourteenth CCP Central Committee (中共十四届六中全会) ratified “The Resolution of the CCP Central Committee with Regard to a Few Important Questions on Strengthening the Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization (《中共中央关于加强社会主义精神文明建设若干重要问题的决议》)”. Besides adding Deng Xiaoping’s theory of building Socialism with Chinese characteristics into China’s Marxist ideological foundation, the 1996 Resolution also specified a set of more concrete steps for realizing the grand goal of constructing socialist spiritual civilization, from moral education, to developing a socialist cultural industry, and to carrying out movement-style activities. The establishment of the Central Guidance Commission for Building Spiritual

Civilization (中央精神文明建设指导委员会) in 1997 was an institutional change as a direct result of the 1996 Resolution. In the few years to follow, Offices of Spiritual Civilization (精神文明办公室) sprang up in governments on various administrative levels of province, city, and county. They were placed under the administrative power of the Propaganda Department (宣传部) and tasked with constructing spiritual civilization mainly through organizing two streams of top-down activities that resemble the “Mao-era ‘red’ practice”²⁴: competing for honorary titles and setting up models for emulation. On the one hand, *chuangjian huodong* (创建活动; literally means creating and building activities) sets up a series of movement-style campaigns that award honorary titles such as Civilized City/District/Town/Village/Work Unit to qualified candidates, evaluated against the standards stipulated by the central government. On the other hand, models for emulation are selected and propagated: Ordinary individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary virtues, according to the definitions of the CCP, are officially extolled as “Role Model of Our Time (时代楷模)”, “Moral Model (道德模范)”, or “the Most Beautiful Person (最美人物)”. The National Civilized City Campaign that both Nankou and Liang accorded great importance to, is one of the main “creating and building activities” that have occupied many Offices of Spiritual Civilization for the past few years.

The grand project of constructing socialist spiritual civilization, as shown in the 1986 and 1996 Resolutions, is predominantly concerned with establishing the “normative authority”²⁵ of

²⁴ Cartier, Carolyn. 2013. “Chapter 5: Building Civilised Cities.” In *Yearbook 2013: Civilising China*. Australian Center on China in the Word (<https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2013/chapter-5-building-civilised-cities/>) P. 266.

²⁵ Feng, Chen. 1998. “Rebuilding the Party’s Normative Authority: China’s Socialist Spiritual Civilization Campaign.” In *Problems of Post-Communism*. 45(6): 33–41.

the CCP, the Party's ideological legitimacy willingly consented to by the general public. When in the post-reform era, the expanding capitalist market economy and its entailed "Western" values such as individualism and competition threaten to weaken the ideological foundation based on Marxist ideals, a renewed moral order capable of continuously affirming the ideological legitimacy of the CCP has been put in the process of refashioning by the central government. The rapidly changing social reality brought by the market economy needs to be presented as being compatible with the state's Marxist ideology by the same moral order. Nevertheless, for us to fully understand the scope of the project of constructing spiritual civilization, we also have to heed to its "non-ideological"²⁶ aspect of "establishing moral standards for public behaviour"²⁷. It contains a cluster of moral rules and behavioural standards that are not extensions of Marxist ideological doctrines, be it Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong's thought or Deng Xiaoping's theory. Rather, greater attention appears to be gradually directed onto the quickly expanding public space emerging along with the economic marketization and social modernization; moral orders for guiding social interactions in public places were to be created from above and integrated into the guiding principles of spiritual civilization. Both the ideological and non-ideological aspects constitute not only the moral order that the spiritual civilization project seeks to establish, but also the type of ideal socialist citizens that the project is aimed at producing. The 1986 and 1996 Resolutions repetitively articulated that the objective of the socialist spiritual civilization is cultivating socialist citizens with *suzhi* (素质, quality), mainly defined by the party-state from two aspects of moral and scientific-cultural. These ideological

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.37.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.38.

and non-ideological *suzhi* (quality) are supposed to be essential for making modern socialist citizens according to the archetype envisioned by the state.

The ultimate task of the socialist spiritual civilization is, based on the need of socialist modernization, to cultivate **socialist citizens** with ideals, morality, culture and discipline, so as to enhance the **moral *suzhi*** and **scientific-cultural *suzhi*** of Chinese people. The human *suzhi* is a historical product, and it in turn influences historical development. Under the socialist condition, striving to improve the *suzhi* of all citizens, surely will increase the labour productivity in society, promote the development of **a new mode of interpersonal relationships founded on public ownership**, and lead to great changes in society. This is the necessary precondition for our objective of the socialist modernization to be realized successfully ²⁸.

(From “The Resolution of the CCP Central Committee with Regard to the Guiding Principles of the Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization”, 1986)

Based on the historical task of the CCP in the early stage of Socialism, and according to historical experiences after the foundation of PRC, particularly after the economic reform, the construction of the socialist spiritual civilization in our country must be guided by Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong’s thought, as well as Deng Xiaoping’s theory on building Socialism with Chinese characteristics. It has to adhere to the Party’s fundamental directions and guidelines, strengthen moral construction, develop education, science and culture. It aims to equip people with scientific theories; guide people with correct public opinions; shape people with a noble spirit; encourage people with excellent works; cultivate **socialist citizens** with ideals, morality, culture, and discipline; improve the **moral *suzhi*** and **scientific-cultural *suzhi***; unite and mobilize people of all ethnic groups to

²⁸ Original Chinese text: “社会主义精神文明建设的根本任务，是适应社会主义现代化建设的需要，培育有理想、有道德、有文化、有纪律的社会主义公民，提高整个中华民族的思想道德素质和科学文化素质。人的素质是历史的产物，又给历史以巨大影响。在社会主义条件下，努力改善全体公民的素质，必将使社会劳动生产率不断提高，使人和人之间在公有制基础上的新型关系不断发展，使整个社会的面貌发生深刻的变化。这是我国社会主义现代化事业获得成功的必不可少的条件。” English translations and emphases are mine.

construct our country into a **wealthy, democratic, civilized modern socialist country**. This is the general guiding ideology for constructing spiritual civilization, and it is also the general requirement for constructing spiritual civilization²⁹.

(From “The Resolution of the CCP Central Committee with Regard to a Few Important Questions on Strengthening the Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization”, 1996)

The National Civilized City Campaign is the most recent nationwide campaign promoted by the party-state as part of its spiritual civilization project. Although with a more defined loci of city, district, town, or village, this campaign inherits the same rationale of directing the state’s envisioned “civilizing” process through balancing the development of its material and spiritual dimensions, ultimately to realize the goal of cultivating ideal socialist citizens with the kind of “civility” that the CCP conceives as particularly desirable.

Not having been “invited” by Liang to his meeting with the Nankou’s Office of the Spiritual Civilization during our stay, I took another trip to Nankou in November 2017 to meet Xiaoyu, one of the most longstanding members of the Nankou government’s Office of Spiritual Civilization established in 2002. The meeting was helped set up by another government officer whom I came to be in contact with during my first stay in Nankou; and he seemed to treat me as an opportunity for introducing Nankou to Canada, and the outside world. Xiaoyu for the past five years had been working intensively, preparing Nankou to compete for the “Civilized Town” honorary title on the

²⁹ Original text: “根据党在社会主义初级阶段的历史任务，根据建国以来特别是改革开放以来的历史经验，我国社会主义精神文明建设，必须以马克思列宁主义、毛泽东思想和邓小平建设有中国特色社会主义理论为指导，坚持党的基本路线和基本方针，加强思想道德建设，发展教育科学文化，以科学的理论武装人，以正确的舆论引导人，以高尚的精神塑造人，以优秀的作品鼓舞人，培育有理想、有道德、有文化、有纪律的社会主义公民，提高全民族的思想道德素质和科学文化素质，团结和动员各族人民把我国建设成为富强、民主、文明的社会主义现代化国家。这是精神文明建设总的指导思想，也是精神文明建设总的要求。” English translations and emphases are mine.

provincial level. For over one hundred items included in the Assessment System that cover almost all aspects of the economic and social life³⁰, Xiaoyu made a vivid distinction between the “hard” and “soft” elements. He explained that about sixty percent of these evaluative criteria belong to the “hard part”, the material aspect: infrastructures, particularly those located at public spaces such as parking lots, public washrooms, farmer’s markets, and the public transportation system. The other forty percent of these items fall into the “soft part”, the spiritual aspect - the *suzhi* (quality) of town dwellers as observed during the assessment period. As stated at the official website of the Central Guidance Commission for Building Spiritual Civilization, the central organ steering this nationwide campaign, the “the National Civilized City” is “an honorary title that reflects a city’s overall level of civilization”, and it is regarded as “the highest honor among competitions on the municipal level”. A city that merits this title is required to be able to “develop material civilization, political civilization, and spiritual civilization in a coordinated manner, with notable achievement on spiritual civilization”, and have “citizens with a high level of wholistic *suzhi* and civility”³¹. This is also the direction that Xiaoyu and his office adopted for guiding their efforts to get Nankou branded as a “Civilized Town”. They were strategically aware of the need to “civilize” Nankou in a manner that can meet the definitions set by the Campaign evaluator - essentially the central government led by the CCP. During my conversation with Xiaoyu, he suggested a visit of an exemplary “civilized residential community” (文明小区) in Nankou, as one of the early fruits of the local “Civilized Town” campaign.

³⁰ The exact number of items included in the assessment system could vary slightly based on province and year. A sample from the Sichuan province (2015 version; in Chinese) can be viewed at:

http://www.scwmw.cn/zlzx/wj/cjzl/201607/t20160714_618357.htm

³¹ Source: “The Past and Present of National Civilized Cities (盘点“全国文明城市”的前世今生)”:

http://www.wenming.cn/ziliao/jujiao/201401/t20140121_1707358.shtml. Quotes were translated to English by me.

Xiaoyu: In the whole process, the Office of Spiritual Civilization acts as the supervisor for all of these residential communities. Now we are working on the project to *dazao* (打造; skillfully create) civilized residential communities. There are three to four successful cases. I myself guided them in person, based on the official standards. At this moment, the most popular things are the “Core Socialist Values (核心价值观)”³², “China Dream (中国梦)”, “*guoxue* (国学, traditional Chinese teachings)”, right? And the “family culture (家文化)”, these things. They have to be brought into communities, families. Then we first picked a few proactive residential communities to *dazao*, creating the “Culture Wall (文化墙)” and placing placards of “Civility Reminders (文明提示牌)”, these kinds of things. We have four civilized residential communities now, like the X Bureau’s residential community. I worked for it. When the leaders from the provincial and prefectural government came to inspect, I arranged a visit to the X Bureau’s residential community. They all thought it was quite good (laughing). It was well done. You have to create a good ambience, then the residents will follow your instructions. We have the “Community Civility Pact (文明小区公约)” and some cultural activities. We posted the “Community Civility Pact” and the “Denizen Pact (市民公约)” on wall. We managed to create four civilized residential communities. The effect has been positive. Before this, the environment inside these communities was not good, pretty messy and not well organized...Now we are having another campaign called “Six Entries of the Family Culture (家文化六进活动)”: entering enterprises, governmental offices, schools, towns, villages, and families, the “Six Entries of the Family Culture”. We’re going to hold some competitions and also publicly praise model families. We’ve now started this activity, because only if we

³² The Core Socialist Values (核心价值观) were first promoted at the 18th National Congress of the CCP (中国共产党第十八次全国代表大会) in 2012. It includes twelve values on three levels: on the national level - prosperity (富强), democracy (民主), civility (文明) and harmony (和谐); on the social level - freedom (自由), equality (平等), justice (公平) and the rule of law (法制); and on the individual level - patriotism (爱国), dedication (敬业), integrity (诚信) and friendliness (友善). Also refer to Chapter One for more details.

can do a good job will we pass the inspection on the provincial level. They come to inspect us on location...

The X Bureau's residential community is a gated community for civil servants working for the local office of the State X Bureau. Some of Xiaoyu and his office's efforts for enhancing the "soft" part of spiritual civilization can be readily seen on my way to this model community. One billboard planted amid the bushes in the green belt of a downtown street read: "Everyone strives to be a civilized citizen; Everyone represents the image of Nankou". Like in any other part of China racing for the title of "Civilized City/Town/District", these propaganda-style slogans have grown to be a "natural" part of Nankou's urban landscape in the past few years. Colorful, stylistically diverse, and at times overwhelmingly gigantic, they are visible almost everywhere in parks, construction sites, parking lots, bus stops, streetlamp poles and storefronts. In downtown Nankou, the X Bureau's residential community was easy to spot. Its front gate, although with a weathered facade, stood out for its decorative *Dong* style flying eaves and a row of letters in bright-red at its top center: "Nankou County X Bureau Socialist Core Values Model Community". After passing the guarded front door, I was first attracted by the wall along the driveway leading to the shared public space at the center of this gated community: first a few neatly posted wall-size posters on Confucius moral virtues, then followed by another few on the Core Socialist Values. One of the core values on the national level, *wenming* (civility, civilization), was explained in a poster: "*Wenming* is an important indicator of social progress, (it) is also an important characteristic of the modern socialist country. It is the ideal state of the cultural construction of the modern socialist country, (it) is an important backbone for realizing the great renaissance of Chinese people". The other wall encircling this gated community was also busily decorated with

a “Photographic Album of Community Cultural Activities”, with dozens of photographs documenting collective community events participated by its residents: group hiking, chess competition, flying daggers race, etc. Next to the photograph wall, headshots of uniformed “Role Models” officially approved by the local office of X Bureau were exhibited, with descriptions of a variety of honorary titles awarded to them for their performance at work. Side by side, a “Community Civility Pact” that combines commanding Do’s with prohibitive Don’ts was in sight:

The X Bureau’s Residential Community’s Civility Pact

1. Maintain neighbourhood harmony, respect each other, be modest and show solidarity, respect the elderly and care for the young;
2. Heed to public hygiene, place trashes into garbage bins, do not litter or spit;
3. Abide by laws and regulations, be polite to others, speak and behave in a civilized manner, protect the green space and other public facilities;
4. Without permission, do not build illegal structures around the residential buildings or pile up articles in hallways, keep the buildings clean and tidy;
5. Do not dry clothes and quilts by tying ropes on the public fences or trees;
6. Do not raise poultry and livestock at home, register your pets, do not let your pets wander around without supervision to disturb others;
7. Save water and electricity, do not temper with electric wires on your own;
8. Be precautious and alert, prevent fires and theft collectively, lock the anti-theft door every time after entering or exiting your residential unit;
9. Be active in participating in events for the public good and other art and sports activities, create a pleasant, safe and comfortable living environment; collectively make the X Bureau’s residential community into a civilized community;
10. Proactively adhere to the Community Civilization Pact and strive to be a civilized citizen; [sic]

This collection of conspicuously exhibited posters echo Xiaoyu's explanations of "the most popular things" to be included for improving the "soft" part of the "Civilized Town" campaign. If we compare it with the 1986 and 1996 Resolutions at the earlier stage of the grand project of constructing socialist spiritual civilization, a renewed moral order appears to have taken shape. In its ideological aspect, although the "normative authority" of the CCP remains to be founded on socialist ideals, the substantive contents of which have evolved from various incarnations of Marxism, as seen in the 1986 and 1996 Resolutions, to less ideological-toned Core Socialist Values combined with the neotraditionalist revival of traditional Chinese culture, in particular the Confucian moral virtues on the moral terrain. At the same time, the non-ideological aspect of this updated moral order reveals a heightened awareness of the public, both in the physical manifestations such as shared green areas and in the figurative sense as indicated by the abstract concept of the public good. If we observe both the inhibited (such as littering, spitting, building illegal structures at will, piling up articles in hallways, tying ropes on public fences, raising poultry or livestock at home, and tampering with electric wires) and encouraged behaviours (such as being polite, protecting the green spaces and public facilities, and participating in activities for public good) in the Community's Civility Pact, it is not hard to notice that they all belong to the class of behaviours that occur in public spaces in implicit or explicit reference to an "other" in its abstract singular or plural form, who is now very likely not coming from one's kinship network as was in the past. Underlying these prescribed behavioural Do's and Don'ts is a relatively new form of social consideration for non-familial strangers who are equally entitled to share the same space. Behaving in a "civilized" manner thus means restraining from satisfying one's own needs for taking into consideration the sensibilities of others in public spaces like hallways, public green

spaces, fences and shared unit doors. If the state-level project of constructing socialist spiritual civilization can be thought of as an initiative for addressing the moral crisis brought by economic and social development, the moral crisis has seen expanded from a question of the ideological legitimacy of the CCP to also including an increasingly conspicuous lack of moral order governing the public life.

With this renewed moral order came a revised ideal of the modern Chinese socialist citizen. In the updated moral order underlying the National Civilized City Campaign on various scales, more emphasis appears to be allocated to the non-ideological aspect of the embodied civility of citizens, necessitated by the expanding public space in China's modernizing social life. This evolved stage of the spiritual civilization project embodied in this campaign calls for ideal socialist citizens who not only embrace the socialist ideology based on the Core Socialist Values, but also display embodied civility in public. This ideologized definition of "civility" attached with an emphasis on its embodied behaviours in public spaces is one with Chinese characteristics, at least from two aspects. As shown in the "Community Civility Pact" from this model community, the value of "civility" is firmly rooted in collectivist moral principles of "harmony" and "solidarity". It thus forms a sharp contrast to the normative idea of "civility" as the communicative logic of the public sphere in democratic societies, where each individual should respect each other as equal participant regardless of their varied visions of the moral good³³. In this situation, the mutual respect demanded by the value of "civility" is fundamentally based on the equality for

³³ Bryant, Christopher G. A. 1993. "Social Self-Organisation, Civility and Sociology: A Comment on Kumar's 'Civil Society.'" *The British Journal of Sociology* 44(3): 397–401; Calhoun, Cheshire. 2000. "The Virtue of Civility." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 29(3): 251–75; Meyer, Michael J. 2000. "Liberal Civility and the Civility of Etiquette: Public Ideals and Personal Lives." *Social Theory and Practice* 26(1): 69–84; White, Melanie. 2006. "An Ambivalent Civility." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie* 31(4): 445–60.

political participation and individual autonomy³⁴. By comparison, the mutual respect of community residents demanded by the “Community Civility Pact” above is largely explained by a collectivist and Confucian cultural aversion of conflicts³⁵ and the patriotic passion “for realizing the great renaissance of Chinese people”, as shown in the poster on civility mentioned earlier. If there is any form of equality underlying such a view, it is probably the equal obligation to the shared collective to which every resident of the community is a member of. In addition, when the public self is directed by imposed guidelines to emerge in the depoliticized public spaces, it takes a form of simultaneously severing ties from the private sphere and redirecting individuals’ moral obligation from within the private household embedded in the family structure to the shared public space. As shown in the “Community Civility Pact”, while we see a set of new boundaries (e.g., between private space such as home and publicly shared space such as hallways, and between physical living space of humans and that of animals) are drawn, individuals’ moral obligation to others is extended to new strangers in shared public spaces. The prescribed behavioural restrictions and directions are intended for sculpting a public self that acts out the moral obligation to new “others” who are entitled to share the same space (e.g., heeding to public hygiene, not abusing shared public spaces for private purposes such as drying clothing, attending to the public good) by virtue of their collective membership.

This model community and Nankou have been willingly embracing this renewed moral order and image of ideal socialist citizens to “welcome the assessment” (*yingjian*, 迎检). Xiaoyu

³⁴ Coser, Lewis A. 1980. “The Notion of Civility in Contemporary Society.” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv Für Soziologie* 21(1): 3–13: P. 12.

³⁵ Pye, Lucian W. 1999. “Civility, Social Capital, and Civil Society: Three Powerful Concepts for Explaining Asia.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29 (4):763–82; Møllgaard, Eske. 2012. “Confucian Ritual and Modern Civility.” *Journal of Global Ethics* 8(2–3): 227–37.

and the local Office of Spiritual Civilization are deeply aware of the critical importance of successfully orchestrating a synchronized presentation of “civility” all over the town during the assessment period. Only if Nankou manages to pass the official evaluation, can it gain the honorary title of the “Civilized Town” and the free publicities from official channels that this entails, thereby potentially attracting more tourists. This logic also makes Nankou an interesting case - while all voluntary applicants for the National Civilized City/Town/District honorary titles are prerequired to have a “local GDP higher than the national average for two consecutive years”³⁶, an excellent record of economic performance, Nankou wants to gain the “Civilized Town” honorary title first to help develop its tourism industry, and ultimately to *tuopin* (slipping out of poverty). Contrary to the steering role accorded to the “spiritual civilization” by the state for guiding economic development, Nankou proactively engaged in enhancing the “soft” aspect of social development in hope to promote further development of the “hard” part. In order to “welcome the assessment”, Nankou had been seeking all possible forms of assistance. Afterall, “civility” first and foremost means economic development opportunity to Nankou at the moment.

3. *Dazao* (打造): The Aestheticization of Embodied Civility

To Liang and his company, “civility” means business. His business acumen translated the expansion of the National Civilized City Campaign nationwide since 2005 into emerging business opportunities for commercial etiquette training. Prior to our first meeting, his company had been marketing etiquette training services to county-level governments and district-level

³⁶The evaluation criteria can be found at (in Chinese):
http://www.wenming.cn/ziliao/jujiao/201401/t20140121_1707358.shtml

administrative units with an opportunistic need to be evaluated as “civilized”, according to the standards listed in the National Civilized City Assessment System.

Liang: Now I developed my third line of business – civility etiquette. We are seeking cooperation with local governments. For example, a county government, if you are willing to work with me, I will help you *dazao* (打造, skillfully create) the “civility culture” for your city, because the Chinese government is now promoting the National Civilized City Campaign, to build “Civilized Cities” and create “civilized citizens”. You probably have seen it everywhere, and also in Shanghai.

“*Dazao* (skillfully create)” has become one of the most popular words in China today, at a time of rapid economic and social changes. When it was first seen employed in classic Chinese literature, it assumed a neutral meaning of to create or craft manfully, as in the example of “*dazao* a sword”. Yet over the years, this word gradually took on a peculiar connotation as it became widely adopted in a variety of contexts to insinuate efficient changes within a rather short timeframe. We see hair stylists who claim to help you *dazao* an ideal self through a haircut; self-help books that intend to assist you to *dazao* a successful life through giving easy-to-learn lessons condensed in one book; etiquette trainers who offer to instruct you on how to *dazao* a professional image in two hours. While today the word “*dazao*” retains the meaning of skillfully creating something, often from scratch and into an ideal appeal, it also often faintly suggests a purposefully stylized façade without much substance, and therefore a tint of artificiality. The problem lies in the constructed appeal that may or may not be a truthful reflection of the subject being skillfully created. Therefore, “*dazao*” has become a loaded word that simultaneously signifies the importance of image and presentation in a society of growing number of strangers, the agency summoned in the process of purposeful creation, as well as the casted doubt on if the

much-polished façade has “real” substance underlying it. Liang’s business aims to *dazao* the “civility” of a county or a district. As mentioned above by Xiaoyu from the Office of Spiritual Civilization at Nankou Government, the county had also been trying to *dazao* itself into a “Civilized Town” on the provincial level. Not surprisingly, Liang’s local branch and his civility business were initially welcomed with open arms by the Nankou government, as a promise of cultivating civility efficiently and effectively.

Being able to play a role in Nankou’s “Civilized Town” campaign did not only mean more profit potential to Liang; it also imbued his business with a higher purpose of “solving social problems”, in his own words. As stated in the “Brief Introduction of the Company” posted at his Nankou office, Liang’s business undertakes a “mission” of “spreading oriental etiquette culture and renewing the country’s reputation as the home to rite and etiquette”. It was aimed to be realized through “absorbing international and national cultural essences” and “continuously developing etiquette products and programs that China needs”. This missionary stance from the macro scope of national culture met with a micro approach: Liang was only interested in solving such problems on the county or district level. As he told his students in an etiquette training class held elsewhere later, the county government and the administrative organ of a city district are more agile in decision-making therefore can speed up business development significantly. Only focusing on the county and district level governments is also a calculated decision made by Liang as a “culture-businessman”, based on his self-evaluation of the type of cultural resources that he and his company can mobilize to make their business programs attractive to their market niche. Following a similar rationale that customers tend to be attracted to sales persons with similar

socio-cultural background therefore more familiar cultural inclinations³⁷, Liang appeared to be fully aware that his civility business will only attract customers from economically and socially less developed regions that are removed from the epicentres of modern culture in China - more developed coastal metropolitans including Shanghai where his headquarter is advertised to be located. When I asked him in our first conversation if he had heard of one of the most well-known boutique etiquette training businesses in China, Liang's response was telling: "They have different platforms. Maybe their platforms were made for companies with an overseas or international background, those high-class ones." Obviously, Liang's business is not meant for the so-called "high-class" customers demanding the type of cosmopolitan cultural capital that he felt is not in his possession.

The Nankou branch of Liang's etiquette training company was established in April 2017 by a Nankou native, Lili. Not long ago before she founded this branch with a few local friend-investors, she travelled to Shanghai to attend a five-day training program operated by Liang and became certified as a professional etiquette trainer with both a nationally-recognized and an "international" certificate from ACIC, efficiently. The branch was given a distinctively oriental but modern name: East Culture Media Co., Ltd. (X 文化传媒有限公司) The front door of the branch office was decorated with four other large wooden plaques with red ribbons, orderly hung next to each other: X Province Nankou Etiquette Learned Society (X 省南口礼仪学会), Nankou East Culture Media Co., Ltd. Union Committee (X 文化传媒有限公司工会委员会), Nankou East Culture Media Co., Ltd. - Chinese Communist Party Branch Committee (X 文化传媒有限公司-中

³⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre. 2005. *Social Structures of the Economy*. Cambridge: Polity.

国共产党支部委员会), and Nankou East Culture Media Co., Ltd. - Chinese Communist Youth League Branch Committee (X 文化传媒有限公司-中国共产主义青年团支部委员会). Visitors needed to climb a flight of stairs covered with printed Confucian moral virtues to be then welcomed by Confucius, painted onto a scroll pegged onto a wall with almost brand-new nostalgic-style simulacra of traditional grey bricks and Chinese windows. To the left of Confucius was a poster entitled “Policies on Becoming A (Chinese Communist) Party Member (发展党员制度)”, detailing rules and procedures for becoming a CCP Party member through this company’s Party Branch Committee. “The Party is always in my heart; always follow the Party (党在我心中, 永远跟党走)” (Figure 24), said one of the many other slogan-posters decorating the office’s walls. The Nankou office had two large training rooms on location. The training room dedicated to comportment exercises had mirrors installed all around the classroom walls. Above two large mirrors stood two lines of massive-sized mottos in bright red: “Sculpt a graceful body; Realize an elegant life (塑造雅韵形体, 成就雅致人生)” (Figure 25). Colorfully painted traditional paper umbrellas with a dripping tassel at the center were hung upside down from the ceiling. Next door was a classroom furnished with painted grey bricks, antique-style brand-new wooden desks and stools, traditional bamboo curtains and paper lanterns, as well a white screen at the front wall for the modern projector. One wall of this classroom was covered with scrolls of Confucian moral virtues (Figure 26), the other excerpts from *Dizigui* (《弟子规》; *Standards for being a Good Pupil and Child*)³⁸. In the hallway between these two classrooms was erected a reproduction of a poster

³⁸ This Confucian classic is commonly attributed to Li Yuxiu (刘毓秀; 1662-1722) in the *Qing* Dynasty during the reign of the Kangxi (康熙) Emperor (1661-1722). It was written in three-word verses, based on the Confucian teachings.

from the spiritual-civilization-series that can be seen almost everywhere in China today; it read: “China Dream, My Dream (中国梦, 我的梦)”. Touring Liang’s *Nankou* office was like travelling in a culturally phantasmagorical world, yet with a strange sense of familiarity. It reminds us of the cultural composition of the moral order underlying the National Civilized City Campaign, yet also with a major difference: The ideological authority of the CCP and neotraditionalist resurrection of Confucian classics such as *Dizigui* (*Standards for being a Good Pupil and Child*) is here combined with a particular emphasis on training physical comportments, the making of “a graceful body” and “an elegant life”, with no mentioning on trainings related to the behavioural rules for interacting with strangers in public spaces. Physical embodiment exercises are designed for shaping an aesthetically pleasant self-presentation in the perception of others, but not for producing a public-self knowing how to act with a consideration for other strangers sharing public spaces.



Figure 24 “The Party is always in my heart; always follow the Party”



Figure 25 “Sculpt a graceful body; Realize an elegant life”



Figure 26 Classroom wall with Confucian moral virtues

Having a Party Branch Committee and a Communist Youth League Branch Committee in a commercial etiquette company would probably come across as an unusual combination to many, but not to Jun, a government officer with an official duty to conduct research on Nankou’s newly-registered private companies and organizations, particularly on their “modes of operation, social needs, and potential contributions to society”. But more importantly, the government department that Jun was working for is also assigned with a political responsibility for directing

these private entities towards “healthy and continuous growth”. He explained the relationship between the local branch of the CCP and Liang’s business as a condition of “double unity, double lead (双联双引)”, in an anaphora-style phrases that are commonly seen in political propaganda even to this date. Such an institutional setup aims to reinforce a much-desired unity for both parties. Jun and his department wanted to “provide political and cultural directions” closely while working with Liang’s branch to make Nankou “felt much similar to those big cities to those tourists coming from outside”, in other words, to be more “civilized”. I was told that in the past, the Nankou government had been searching for third-party assistance from private enterprises, particularly those coming from more developed parts of China, to assist Nankou to cultivate “civility”, but it turned out to be difficult for a town of poverty - the local government still cannot afford purchasing as many services as needed without worrying about the financial costs that might incur. In this equation of market exchange for “civility” with Liang’s business, the Nankou government planned to repay the etiquette business’s assistance in their “civilizing” project by supplying a platform of business opportunities in return. Although Liang’s etiquette business was trusted as a promising agent for methodologically and efficiently civilizing Nankou, lurking behind this thinking was also the understanding that “companies need marketized operations”, in other words, to profit. And for Liang and his business, the Nankou government was apparently viewed as the springboard that was needed at that moment to promote his commercial etiquette training programs through a set of official channels reaching out to government organs, schools, business associations, enterprises, communities, and villages. Liang’s ambition was to set up Nankou as the exemplar to franchise the civility business nationwide. Operated under the logic

of the capitalist market exchange, politically-backed social capital and a desirable form of cultural capital were set into a process of conversion.

Liang's company displayed both the "right" political aptitude and cosmopolitan cultural competence needed to help Nankou get "civilized". For the Nankou government under the leadership of the Party, "correct" political orientation was the most important criterion for selecting the assisting civilizing agent. In Liang's local branch, the branch manager and a few investors were established businessmen and businesswomen in Nankou, and more importantly, Party members as well. When I first met Shanlin, one of the investors and owner of a local real estate business, his CCP membership was clear: proudly wearing a pin with Mao Zedong's slogan of "serve the people (为人民服务)" on his shirt, and having miniature Party flag and national flag flying at the center of his car dashboard. But embracing the official political ideology was only one aspect of East Culture Media Co. Ltd.'s cultural legitimacy for becoming an assistant "civilizing" agent for Nankou. Without a discernible tie to the more modern, developed, and "civilized" world, one that Nankou was eager to join, no candidate would stand a chance of being selected. Liang, an etiquette business owner, prefers to introduce himself as an educated businessman with academic aspirations; his company is advertised as headquartered in Shanghai, a cosmopolitan city where East meets West; the leading trainers at his Nankou branch are Nankou natives yet certified at Liang's Shanghai headquarter with double-certificates, national and international. Liang's company's cultural profile is appealing to Nankou, a remote southwestern county in an economically under-developed zone. Hua, a local government officer who had been involved in the process of establishing Liang's Nankou branch, told me about Nankou's preference for etiquette professionals from Beijing or Shanghai for large events and

local trainers with nationally or internationally recognized certificates for smaller ones. For Nankou as “a relatively remote town compared to places like Beijing and Shanghai”, in his own words, standards of “civility” for the modern world can only thought to be found elsewhere, other than Nankou, that is still struggling to fight poverty. The leading etiquette trainer Lili at the Nankou branch was deeply aware of the stratified cultural preference. It was a conventional wisdom to her - “foreign monks give better sermons (外来的和尚会念经).” As people often tend to have a blind faith in outsiders than in those around them, her years of experiences of living outside of the province was turned into a cultural asset when she decided to return to her hometown Nankou as an etiquette trainer, particularly in this environment where “civility” appeared to be imagined by many as the shared universal standards among more economically developed regions in China:

Lili: I grew up in the mountains and always wanted to try to make a living in the outside world. It may be like what my dad told me when I was little: One has to go to the outside world. If you never go out, you’ll never know what’s the outside world is like. They say that “you are not valuable if you never get outside of the door (人不出门身不贵)”. You know why when we return to our hometown so many people give us so much attention? It’s because once you’ve lived outside, it’s like our Chinese studying abroad. In reality nobody knows what you’ve learned overseas, but once you come back, others would say “my, you studied abroad”. They would feel that you’re so capable, right? It’s just that once you’re returning from the outside, you’ve already thought as having achieved a great deal. Whatever you choose to do in your hometown, it’s very likely that you’ll attract a lot of attention from locals.

The project that brought Liang to Nankou this time was a new one called the “Etiquette for Party Building” program. It was part of Liang’s new strand of civility business, yet the exclusive

focus of this program was to train the government officers to behave in a more “civilized” manner, so as to address an often-complained problem that locals summarized as, not without a sense of humor: “the difficulty to enter the doors (of governmental offices), the difficulty to look at the faces (of civil servants), the difficulty to get things done (门难进、脸难看、事难办)”. Local civil servants working in governmental offices had earned themselves quite a reputation for not having displayed much courtesy when interacting with the locals. It was not rare that visitors to government offices were left unattended, against the spirit of “serving the people”. For Hua, the local government officer who has been actively participating in designing and promoting the “Etiquette for Party Building” program, the “three-difficulties” were caused by the low *suzhi* (quality) of some civil servants. Liang’s “Trilogy of the Etiquette of Party Building in Nankou”³⁹, composed of three baroquely-presented parts of “the theme song of organizational construction”, “the inherited song of etiquette culture”, and “the harmony song of the civilized city”, was proposed as a solution. After filtering through these excessively formalized ideological jargons, it becomes clear that Liang’s proposed solution to enhancing the *suzhi* (quality) of government officers, civil servants, or any other groups in Nankou is quite straightforward. Besides organizing ceremonial cultural displays such as *qipao*⁴⁰ catwalk shows, most trainings planned under his civility business strand have an almost exclusive focus on molding physical comportments: how to “correctly” walk, sit, greet, give directions, shake hands, pass a pen, knock at the door, assign car seats, or smile following his signature “One-Million-Dollar Training Method

³⁹ This is the title of a report (written in Chinese) authored by Jun (a government officer who has been involved in the process of establishing Liang’s local branch) and re-posted at Liang’s etiquette business’s WeChat public account. Translations of the quotes are mine.

⁴⁰ Qipao (旗袍) is a type of form-fitting traditional Chinese dress for women. It is no longer commonly-worn today in everyday life, but is often seen in ceremonial events, as a token of traditional Chinese culture.

for the Etiquette of Smiling”. In one of this etiquette training session held later in another town, Liang demonstrated his signature method himself. To train to smile at the “appropriate” degree, one can simply follow three steps: first, making both hands into the shape of the “OK” gesture and then travel upwards while pronouncing “yi” (which means “one” in Mandarin Chinese); second, opening both arms and raising upward to stretch out, while pronouncing “bai” (which means “hundred” in Mandarin Chinese); and third, swinging the straightened arms in 360 degrees, while pronouncing “wan” (which means “ten thousand” in Mandarin Chinese). It was reported by Liang’s company that later 2017 he travelled back to Nankou to train security guards and the cleaning staff members working at the Museum of Nankou Meeting with this signature “One-Million-Dollar Training Method for the Etiquette of Smiling”, to make the museum better prepared for welcoming tourists from outside of the town.

On the surface, Liang’s training methods appear to have their own flair, such as having a perky name of “One-Million-Dollar Training Method for the Etiquette of Smiling”. Yet, the training contents to be included in his civility etiquette program are in fact quite similar to typical etiquette trainings offered by other native-Chinese training businesses: the basic behavioural component constituting social interactions (e.g., standing, sitting, walking, squatting, greeting, communicating, and seeing off) are extracted and then transformed into decontextualized “etiquette points” (礼仪点) that make up each movement. For instance, as another example in addition to smiling, the action of walking is decomposed into a collection of “key etiquette points” of “natural facial expression, looking forward, moderate step, even speed, steady gait,

quiet under feet”⁴¹ in Liang’s program. They are presented as prescribed codes that etiquette trainers should direct the embodying practices according to, in order to walk in a “standardized” manner. The homogeneity of training methods for physical comportments among the circle of native etiquette trainers is not a surprising discovery if we take into consideration the sources of these widely circulated etiquette training contents. When on separate occasions I asked two of Liang’s contract etiquette trainers about the course slides contents, they told me that these slides were all prepared by Liang with the assistance of the Internet, in reference to other etiquette training programs available in the mainland market. Even more interesting than the unpublicized and rarely-questioned origin of these shared behavioural standards within the etiquette training guild, these behavioural standards are now proposed by Liang as paths towards cultivating embodied civility. His reasoning is as follows:

Liang: Now China is trying to realize *liyi luodi* (礼仪落地; materializing etiquette).

It is very detailed, doing from different angles. You see, the National Civilized City Campaign, from the central government and involving many Ministries. You see, the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education, then the Ministry of Education passed regulations. The Minister of Education was thinking about what the etiquette standards for our primary schools should be, junior high schools, senior high schools, and universities. They didn’t have this kind of task in the past. Now they have it. In the past, before “etiquette construction (礼仪建设)” is “moral construction (道德建设)”. It is to say that the Chairman Hu (Jintao) ⁴² then called for “moral construction”. What’s the difference between “moral construction” and “etiquette construction”? “Moral construction” is more

⁴¹ The contents are from a course slide in one of Liang’s etiquette trainer certification programs held in another city.

⁴² Hu Jintao (胡锦涛; 1942-) was the former General Secretary of the CCP (2002-2012) and Chairman of the PRC (2003-2013).

abstract, and “etiquette construction” is more specific. If you say you are a good person, having moral virtues, trustworthy, honest, it’s hard to see it right away. But, if you say that you understand civility (懂文明) and you are polite, it can be seen right away. How to tell that you are civilized? When you see somebody, you should smile, nod, or shake hands. Observe others when you are walking. These are very specific. These are very specific behaviours that follow etiquette rules.

Behind Liang’s idiosyncratic theory of China’s transformation from “moral construction” to “etiquette construction” is a radically depoliticized pragmatic view of embodied civility, risking overt simplification. Different from the CCP’s search for moral principles via the neotraditionalist resurrection of Confucian moral values, in order to substantiate a set of behavioural rules for guiding public interactions, Liang appears to approach the issue of civility outwardly and from the opposite direction - whether or not an individual is civilized is solely judged by visible behavioural signs such as smiling, nodding, or shaking hands. Acting in a “civilized” manner is thus given far more importance than their underlying moral or political principles as the foundation to make civility a virtue or a necessity. In the same spirit of his often-emphasized statement that “culture is the invisible etiquette, and etiquette is the visible culture”, behaviours obeying standardized etiquette rules as the shared efforts of the group of professional etiquette trainers are now elevated to be signs of embodied civility by their sheer visibility. Such a depoliticized and pragmatic view of embodied civility with an exclusive emphasis on its physical manifestations enables it to be efficiently *dazao*-ed (skillfully created) through etiquette trainings offered by his business. In this process, the shared behaviours standards conjured by professional etiquette trainers like Liang and his team are introduced as behavioural codes shared by the civilized world “out there” to their clients. Nankou, as the underdeveloped peripheral “other of

‘civility’ within the nation-space”⁴³, was in no position to question or challenge such a definition thought to be imported from the more developed national economic and cultural center of Shanghai.

Dazao-ing civility with assistance of commercial etiquette training businesses like Liang’s risks producing a tendency of the aestheticization of embodied civility, as a result. The aestheticizing effect is not limited to Liang’s emphasis on cultivating “the beauty of image, the beauty of behaviours, (and) the beauty of language” as the ultimate objective of etiquette training. It suggests an exclusive focus on behavioural forms that are unrooted from the social and political relationships that each individual is inevitably embedded within. As shown in the standards of walking quoted above, embodied civility appeared translated into prescribed mannerisms expressed through “natural facial expression, looking forward, moderate step, even speed, steady gait, (and being) quiet under feet”. Both social relationships and the consideration for others are nowhere to be found in these aestheticized codes of behaviours. Rather, underlying these aestheticized embodied civility remains the logic of distinction that is a common motive for purposeful acquisition of etiquette at the time of drastic societal changes, such as the transformation into the society of absolute court in West Europe as analyzed by Elias⁴⁴ and Japan’s development of Tokugawa proto-modernity discussed by Ikegami⁴⁵. In Nankou, only behaviours that comply with Liang’s etiquette codes are demarcated as civilized. Civility as such therefore can only exist in the aesthetic judgement of the “better” others, if they too agree upon

⁴³ Anagnost, Ann. 1997. P. 77.

⁴⁴ Elias, Norbert. 2000. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Oxford; Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell.

⁴⁵ Ikegami, Eiko. 2005. *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture*. Cambridge University Press.

these embodied etiquette codes as the appropriate expressions of civility. The Nankou case thus begs the question: can socio-politically rooted civility be *dazao*-ed (skillfully created) at all?

4. *Suzhi* (素质): Culture Scissors and Sly Civility

Liang and his business carved out an opportunity space in Nankou's "Civilized Town" competition through playing the role of assistant civilizer. The value of commercial assistance by etiquette businesses like Liang's appeared to be structured on a careful balance of similarity and difference of cultural capital that could produce the discernable "culture scissors": on the one hand was the mastery of the codes of civility; and on the other, a clearly-defined need to move up the national civility scale by becoming classified as "civilized" by the party-state and its representatives. This peculiar feature of Liang's civility business and the line of "culture business" that it belongs to becomes clearer when we compare them against Bourdieu's research on the role of habitus in purchase decision-making at the intersection of culture and economy⁴⁶. While, similarly, the congruence of habitus and its manifested cultural inclinations between the seller and buyer was critical in both cases to establishing a compatible therefore decodable cultural repertoire, Liang's civility business derived both its legitimacy and profit potential from an accentuated sense of cultural differentiation that makes the discernable culture scissors visible to his target clients. An image of cultural sophistication and mastery was critical to making Liang's civility business attractive to Nankou, interpreted according to a similar cultural scheme. The discernable culture scissors also place two parties at varied strata on a culture hierarchy, in this case, that of civility defined by the state as linear progress in social development.

⁴⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre. 2005.

Only through contrasts culture scissors take shape. A large proportion of marketing materials of Liang's business were devoted to showcasing its cultural legitimacy to its target clients. The etiquette business was advertised as having a headquarter in cosmopolitan Shanghai, a well-educated leader with academic aspiration and a missionary commitment to all things cultural, and the qualification to issue both national and "international" certificates to trained professional etiquette professionals. But the business' both traditional Chinese and modern cosmopolitan profile was also discretely distanced from those of "high-end" boutique etiquette businesses with different "platforms" and niche markets that were not deemed as within the cultural command of Liang and his team. Focusing on clients like Nankou, a remote southwestern ethnic-minority town struggling to be above the poverty line and without an industrial backbone to change its status quo, was a strategic decision on the part of Liang to create discernable culture scissors needed as the legitimate foundation of his civility business. In Nankou's attempt to obtain the "Civilized Town" honorary title were both its hope to develop the local economy and Liang's ambition to create a franchised civility business that could profit from the state-led campaign reaching out from the political center to nationwide.

Having discernable culture scissors alone could not have enlisted commercial etiquette businesses like Liang's as an effective assistant civilizing agent, without the background of the state-led civilizing campaigns. The previous chapter has shown the persistence of this mode of civilizing initiatives along China's modernization process. The Civilized City/Town/District Campaign that Nankou joined is one of these competition-style projects led by the central government in recent years. Some of its intrinsic characteristics associated with its format of competing for honorary titles through inspection elevated manifested civility onto a degree of

importance more than they actually had in the official evaluation system. It was particularly the case for Nankou, where economic backwardness was not able to be fought off through economic means. The conundrum helped to create a situation: although only a small portion of the evaluative items on aspects of manifested civility was included in the National Civilized City Assessment System (stipulated by the Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization), great efforts were devoted to improving these aspects during Nankou's preparation stage, for these "soft" fronts could be efficiently enhanced and put on conspicuous display at the time of evaluative inspection. Liang's civility business was built on the same strategic planning. Out of the same rationale, etiquette training was able to be promoted as an efficient and effective means for improving the service offered at governmental "window departments" (where direct interactions with locals were necessary), teaching civil servants how to present themselves in a standardized manner, and introducing the same etiquette codes to communities and schools.

The type of civility that Liang's business was assisting Nankou to produce appeared both docile and sly. Its superficial docility came from the mechanical prescription of etiquette codes that were presented as the behavioral aesthetics of the "modern" world that Nankou was yet to be classified as a part of. But the civility is also characteristically sly, not least for its being able to be put on and off with ease for showcasing a standardized and "civilized" scene to be inspected by representatives of the party-state. Underlying its slyness was an ambivalent attitude that was neither acceptance nor rejection of the state-propagated notion of "wenming (civility, civilization)"⁴⁷. Pondering over its connotations also seemed to be beyond the consideration of

⁴⁷ Bhabha, Homi K. 2004. *The Location of Culture*. 2 edition. London, New York: Routledge. "Sly civility" was quoted by Bhabha from Archdeacon Potts' sermon in 1818 and discussed in the colonial context. The ambiguous doubleness, such as manifested in the role of authority as both "father and oppressor", can also be viewed in current context yet from a varied angle by virtue of the different sociocultural context.

both Nankou and Liang, both preoccupied with practical objectives of their own. But as this notion becomes sealed off from further deliberations along the state-led civilizing process, it could undergo a similar path which a closely related notion of *suzhi* (quality) went through. Since the rise to popularity in political and social discourses in the mainland in the post-reform era, cultivating *suzhi* (quality) had for long triggered a variety of businesses, but it has also become frequently deployed to justify “social and political hierarchies of all sorts”⁴⁸, as represented by the bodies of two contrasting figures of rural migrants and middle class only-child⁴⁹. We have seen in the case of Nankou, both the top-down campaign and the civility business had the effect of reinforcing the hierarchical divide between the developed and underdeveloped regions, as if between civilized modernity and thwarted historical backwardness. Honorary titles on civility also functioned as the basis for justifying the centralized allocation of symbolic resources.

But not everyone I met in Nankou was equally optimistic about what the “Civilized Town” campaign could bring or how Liang’s civility business might be of help. Doubt and suspicion were often expressed through silence or polite refusal to discuss these matters. Xiong spoke his mind, with cautious self-censorship:

Xiong (X): I think in the mainland good habits are yet to be formed, but it’s inconvenient to say too much. Why...Taiwan in the past was not that different from the mainland, people littered at will and spoke loudly in public. Many of these bad habits that the mainlanders are criticized for were also everywhere in Taiwan then. But after the democratization of Taiwan, it changed rapidly, rapidly.

Yikun (Y): Why do you think such rapid change happened?

⁴⁸ Kipnis, Andrew. 2006. “Suzhi: A Keyword Approach.” *The China Quarterly* 186:295–313. P. 295. Also see: Friedman, Sara L. 2004. “Embodying Civility: Civilizing Processes and Symbolic Citizenship in Southeastern China.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63(3): 687–718.

⁴⁹ Anagnost, Ann. 2004. “The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi).” *Public Culture* 16(2):189–208.

X: After its democratization, its citizens, their position as the owner, their sense of ownership, were suddenly elevated. That Taiwan is not a Taiwan belonging to Jiang Jingguo (蒋经国)⁵⁰, not a Taiwan belonging to Guomindang (国民党, the Nationalist Party). It became my Taiwan, my Taiwan. Then if I litter or spit at will, I would pollute my Taiwan, not Guomindang's Taiwan.

Y: So you are mainly referring to changes in the political system?

X: Yes, it's obvious. For many times I've discussed this issue with Taiwanese. But it's not good to talk too much about it in the mainland (laughing).

Y: This conversation is anonymous. Are you saying that how one behaves in public spaces are related to how one feels as a citizen?

X: Yes. Like there are some people in Nankou, for example, if they dislike a stone-stool placed on the sidewalk, s/he would simply push it aside. He thinks that (putting it back) is not his duty. It's the responsibility of the county government. Those salaried civil servants should do it. It's not my business. But imagine that if the "managers of society" acquired their positions vote by vote, people would then genuinely feel that "truly I am a citizen. Nankou is mine, really mine." Do you think then they would still do such a thing? No.

Y: You are saying that changes in suzhi (quality) is greatly related to that of political systems.

X: Yes, very much so.

Xiong's understanding of the idea of civility was apparently different - as manifested "good habits" in social life largely produced by the political system, most importantly, the relationship between those who govern (i.e., "managers of society") and the rest. Whether a political system could foster "the sense of ownership" was therefore viewed as decisive in shaping the prevalent attitude towards the public good in abstract and concrete forms. The lack of civility observed in

⁵⁰ Jiang Jingguo, also spelt as Chiang Ching-kuo (蒋经国), served as the premier of Taiwan during 1972-1978. He was from Guomindang (国民党), the Nationalist Party.

Nankou, as in the hypothetical example of not taking care of public facilities, was in Xiong's opinion a product of its political system that rendered caring for the public good mainly the responsibility of "those salaries civil servants", in the view of the majority in Nankou. It echoed a peculiar configuration between *gong* (公; public), *guan* (官; official), and *si* (私; private/selfish) in the Chinese context: having a large grey area where the public and the official/bureaucratic overlap in shaping the intertwining state-society relationship⁵¹, and viewing officials as representatives of the state and the ideal guardians of the public good under the Confucian influence⁵². Its implied understanding of "publicness" closely resembles what Habermas termed "representational publicness"⁵³ to be found in some pre-modern societies, where "public" was almost taken as synonymous to "state-related". The "sense of ownership" central to Xiong's understanding of civility can hardly co-exist with forms of "representational publicness" that projects the "managers of the society" as embodied representations of some higher power, but not necessarily that of citizens' will. Civility in this condition could easily be reduced to a status-like attribute to be displayed in rituals and ceremonies and a commodity to be *dazao*-ed, docile and sly.

⁵¹ Rankin, Mary Backus. 1993. "Some Observations on a Chinese Public Sphere." *Modern China* 19(2):158-182.

⁵² Rankin, Mary Backus. 1986. *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911*. 1st edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press. Pp. 15-16.

⁵³ Habermas, Jürgen. 1991. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. 1 edition. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press: Pp. 5-14.

Chapter 3. The New Performative Man¹

1. A New Professional Type

Butling² is reportedly becoming a new profession in mainland China. This development has generated great attention internationally, resulting in a slew of catchy headlines such as “China’s Butler Boom”³ (*The New Yorker*, 2015) and “Rich Chinese, Inspired by ‘Downton,’ Fuel Demand for Butlers”⁴ (*The New York Times*, 2017). From a sociological perspective, we can only begin to get a perspective on this phenomenon by considering related roles that are antecedent to the modern butler in the making. The most obvious one within China’s own historical and cultural context is *guanjia* (管家) from its feudal past. Given that the English word “butler” is also translated to “*guanjia*” in Mandarin today, the implications attached to this dated occupational role linger through this linguistic liaison. In feudal China, the limited sociocultural significance accorded to *guanjia* can hardly make it an appealing occupational position either from a historical perspective or today. The limited sociocultural significance of feudal *guanjia* is evidenced in some acclaimed historical and literary works from the Qing dynasty (1636-1912), such as *Unofficial*

¹ “Man” and its plural form of “men” are used in a gender-neutral sense of person/persons. An abbreviated version of this chapter has been published as: Zhao, Yikun. 2022. “A Portrait of the Modern Butler as an Emergent Professional Type in Mainland China.” *Comparative Sociology* 21(5), 536-560.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691330-bja10066>

² “Butling” rather than “butlering” is adopted here to reflect the terminology shared within the international butler community.

³ Bosker, Bianca. 2015. “China’s Butler Boom.” *The New Yorker*. (<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/chinas-butler-boom>)

⁴ Buckley, Chris, and Karoline Kan. 2017. “Rich Chinese, Inspired by ‘Downton,’ Fuel Demand for Butlers.” *The New York Times*. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/14/world/asia/rich-chinese-inspired-by-downton-fuel-demand-for-butlers.html>)

History of the Scholars (《儒林外史》, 1750), *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (《红楼梦》, 1791) and *Modern Times* (《文明小史》, 1906). In these works, the *guanjia* character is rarely portrayed as a protagonist⁵. As a high-ranking domestic servant who oversees the household affairs of wealthy feudal families, the *guanjia* character usually appears without an individualized identity, oftentimes devoid of a full name. We see the feudal master commanding his *guanjia* by calling upon the latter's occupational title alone, and then the *guanjia* responding with a humbly deferential and viscerally minimizing self-address of "your little" (xiaode, 小的)⁶.

The modern butler that has attracted recent media attention is not the feudal *guanjia* reintroduced. The outdated occupational role of feudal *guanjia* vanished along with the collapse of feudalism at the end of 19th century. China's first half of the 20th century characterized by the evaporating private wealth and incessantly restructuring of political power did not produce a social condition calling for private service either. Then after the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, for a long while, subservient roles like *guanjia* became inconceivable through the then-prevalent Marxist lens. Entrenched in the Marxist ideas of social domination and class exploitation, private service roles were thought to be betraying the hypothetical equality within the *wuchanjieji* (无产阶级; property-less class) on the ideological plane. The long stretch of material scarcity in the Mao era (1949-1976) also rendered such roles

⁵ It might appear as exceptions that a protagonist could be responsible for managing the household, such as the character of Wang Xifeng (王熙凤) in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, but these characters were not referred to as "guanjia", a title more often than not suggesting a relatively humble social origin.

⁶ An example of this can be found in the Chapter Fifty-four of *Modern Times*: "This reminds Qin Fengwu, so he asked guanjia to go to the mansion of Master Bian on Shiba Road to invite him over. Tell Master Bian that 'the Master Wang of Jiangpu is here waiting to talk to him'. So guanjia went. Qin Fengwu called guanjia back and then told him not to invite Master Bian's younger brother, Master Bian Er, by mistake. Guanjia replied: 'Your little understand'." The translation to English is mine.

functionally superfluous. It was only after the official introduction of a market economy since the economic reform and opening up in the late 1970s that new possibilities emerged, enabled by an ideological shift. As Deng Xiaoping famously put it, “(i)t does not matter whether they are black cats or white cats; so long as they catch mice, they are good cats”⁷. In the following period, unprecedented economic growth brought with it new professions. But the modern butler/*guanjia* was added to China’s encyclopedia of modern occupations quite recently, as I was informed during my field research. But not much resemblance can be detected between this nascent modern profession and its feudal predecessor. Free from the feudal *guanjia*’s stereotypical servility and at times self-debasing humbleness, the modern butler/*guanjia* is now mass promoted as an enchanting occupation that is financially gainful and culturally European.

Although media reports had it that the fictional butler character of Mr. Carson from *Downton Abbey* singlehandedly triggered this “butler boom” in mainland China⁸, the new European-style butler is not the classic English butler reincarnated either. Embedded in a different historical and social context from that bred in China’s feudal *guanjia*, the classic English butler has a much greater sociocultural significance. Just like wine as the “totem-drink”⁹ of France, in the words of Roland Barthes, the English butler has also risen to the status of a preeminent cultural symbol. Today it proves unusual, if not impossible, to view, in a detached manner, the English butler solely as a historical occupation, without regard to its symbolic aura. Literary and cinematic works have greatly contributed to propagating this English symbolic figure.

⁷ “不管黑猫白猫，捉到老鼠就是好猫。” (Reference: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/85037/8530953.html>).

⁸ Terming the phenomenon China’s butler boom, for instance, can be seen in: Balenieri, Raphael. 2012. “Serve the (Rich) People: China’s Butler Boom.” *Al Jazeera*. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2012/12/14/serve-the-rich-people-chinas-butler-boom/?gb=true>); and Bosker, Bianca. 2015. “China’s Butler Boom.” *The New Yorker*. (<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/chinas-butler-boom>).

⁹ Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. P. 58.

Indeed, quite a few fictional British butler characters have become well-known and even gained a global reputation. These include, in addition to Mr. Carson in *Downton Abbey* (TV series: 2010-2015; movie: 2019), the valet-butler (Reginald) Jeeves, the protagonist in a series of comic short stories and novels (1915-1974) by Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, and the butler Mr. Stevens in the book and popular film, *the Remains of the Day* (1989) by Kazuo Ishiguro. As succinctly summarized by Ishiguro, the figure of the British butler is often portrayed in a “comic” or “stoic” light, and even “(p)eople who never set in foot in England have an idea of what the English butler might be like.”¹⁰ Ishiguro’s book captures the defining quality of the “great” English butler in the character of Mr. Stevens in *the Remains of the Day*: overemphasizing technical competence, command of language, mastery of encyclopedic knowledge over the moral quality of dignity, stringent emotional restraint and impeccable professionalism only risks “mistak(ing) the superficial for essence”¹¹. But such a portrayal of the classic English butler does not seem to concur with the image of the new European-style butler painted in media reports.

What stands out in media discussions about the nascent European-style butler in the mainland is its seemingly exuberant *performativeness*¹², extraordinary and phantasmagoric. Reports on China’s “butler boom” often take on a subtly humoristic, if not ironic, hue. Journalistic photographs tend to show western-aristocratic-style-uniformed and white-gloved butlers-to-be earnestly absorbed in their preparatory training for serving China’s freshly made riches. Visual splendor is matched with a running discourse on display, much in line with Thorstein Veblen’s

¹⁰ Kazuo Ishiguro at TIFF 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1P6c3yomp0>

¹¹ Ishiguro, Kazuo. 1990. *The Remains of the Day*. 1st edition. New York: Vintage International: p. 35 (eBook version).

¹² “Performativeness” is here differentiated from “performativity” for the latter’s connotations associated to Judith Butler’s theory of “performative acts” and John L. Austin’s idea of “utterance”.

idea of “conspicuous consumption”¹³: openly demonstrating the ability to waste as a form of social distinction. In these international and national reports, the increasingly popular European-style butler is presented as “the symbol of good taste”¹⁴ (*The New York Times*, 2017), “the latest accessory”¹⁵ (*CNN*, 2015), and the next “biaopei”¹⁶. (标配; literally means standard trappings) of super-riches after large mansions, luxurious cars, bodyguards, yachts, and private jets (*中国新闻周刊/China Newsweek*, 2015). According to these observations, it is now deemed “fashionable”¹⁷ (*Al Jazeera*, 2012) to have a European-style butler, along the same rationale as having a “Ferrari”¹⁸ (*The New Yorker*, 2015). These media analyses implicitly suggest that the observed performativeness of the nascent European-style butler in the mainland is due to its almost exclusively symbolic function that is partially reflected through its surficial ostentatiousness. But the cultural complexity entailed in this new profession in which the lines between the past and the present and between the West and the East are blurred, such a simplistic interpretation is far from satisfactory. But this line of popular interpretation clearly distances the modern butler from its comparatively inconspicuous counterpart of *baomu* (also often referred to the kinship-related term of *ayi*, ‘auntie’) - female rural migrant domestic worker stereotypically deemed as having low *suzhi* (quality), propelling their middle-class urban employers to engage practices of

¹³ Veblen, Thorstein. 2007. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. 1 edition. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Buckley, Chris, and Karoline Kan. 2017.

¹⁵ Hunt, Katie. 2015. “Butler Boom? Jeeves Has Arrived in China.” *CNN*.

(<https://www.cnn.com/2015/10/18/asia/china-butlers/index.html>)

¹⁶ 王思婧 (Wang, Sijing). 2015. “中国富豪管家养成记 (The Making of Butlers for Chinese Riches).” *中国新闻周刊 (China Newsweek)*. (<http://www.banyuetan.org/chcontent/zx/mtzd/2016115/179329.shtml>)

¹⁷ Balenieri, Raphael. 2012. “Serve the (Rich) People: China’s Butler Boom.” *Al Jazeera*.

(<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2012/12/14/serve-the-rich-people-chinas-butler-boom/?gb=true>).

¹⁸ Bosker, Bianca. 2015.

boundary keeping in everyday interactions¹⁹. This analysis proposes that the performativeness as an innate characteristic of the new European-style butler in China can only be better understood if we venture deeper to explore its social roots.

Temporal and cultural conjunction, as visible in this case, is not strange to the state of “liminality”²⁰, which aptly describes both the stage of China’s socio-economic development and that of the modern butler as a new profession therein. The processual state of betwixt and between is ripe with cultural contradictions and once-inconceivable possibilities. But this new profession of the European-style butler can be viewed as a new social type in the making, for it is neither a simple revival of the Chinese *guanjia* from its feudal past, nor an unhampered transplantation of the aristocratic British butler to the newly discovered Chinese market. When we observe this process from inside its making, in a “subjunctive” state of ontological formation. Similar to boundlessness as an emergent property of “action”²¹, this is a case of a new role emerging within the changing social structures, what Elias called “figurations”. The role and the figuration are therefore to be understood as emergent entities, exhibiting a novel and distinctive range of qualities that are distinct to the Chinese context. This process of gradually realizing a certain possibility among many others towards a particular path can also be seen as a “performative act”²² - this new modern profession only takes on a definition as it is being shaped into a certain manner along this process.

¹⁹ Sun, Wanning. 2009. *Maid In China: Media, Morality, and the Cultural Politics of Boundaries*. London; New York: Routledge.

²⁰ Turner, Victor, and Richard Schechner. 2001. *The Anthropology of Performance*. 2nd Revised edition. New York, NY: PAJ Publications.

²¹ Walsh, Philip D. 2015. *Arendt Contra Sociology: Theory, Society and Its Science*. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. p.36.

²² Butler, Judith. 1988. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal*. 40(4):519–31.

Analytically, in this chapter we seek an understanding of the modern European-style butler as a new professional type in today's China. Professional types, similar to Georg Simmel's "social types", can be defined as comprising a distinctive set of characteristics that are shaped by their embedded economic, political and sociocultural conditions²³ and entailing symbolic struggle between differently-positioned social actors²⁴. Social types are *the* types sculpted by the specific social conditionings that make possible their emergence. For example, Simmel's "stranger"²⁵ is not a social type that can be commonly found in traditional societies of closely knitted social ties. Also, Karen Halttunen's "confidence men" and "painted women"²⁶ did not typically exist in America prior to its industrialization and urbanization or long afterwards. As indices of particular historical-social conditions²⁷, social types and professional types are defined by their embedded patterns of social relationships, shaped by intertwining economic, political and sociocultural forces in the final analysis. When a new professional type of ostentatious performativeness emerges in mainland China, its embedded social configuration²⁸ could provide clues for understanding its performativeness. Based on this analytical rationale, structurally, the pages to follow will first provide an overview of the relevant fieldwork, as the empirical

²³ Coser, Lewis A. 2003. *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*. Waveland Press. p.182.

²⁴ le Grand, E. 2019. Conceptualising Social Types and Figures: From Social Forms to Classificatory Struggles. *Cultural Sociology*, 1-17. This analysis of 'professional type' does not make a distinction between 'types as abstract concepts and figures as empirically situated phenomena' (le Grand 2019: 10), as while the idea of profession type entails abstraction of its characteristic qualities, it is empirically situated within a particular historical and sociocultural context.

²⁵ Simmel, Georg. 2011. *The Philosophy of Money*. 1 edition. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.

²⁶ Halttunen, Karen. 1982. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. Yale University Press.

²⁷ A similar approach of cultural and societal analysis is also seen in the works of two theorists associated with the first-generation Frankfurt School, although their analytical focuses slightly differ: Benjamin, Walter (1969). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In Harry Zohn (trans.), Hannah Arendt (ed.) *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books.; and Kracauer, Siegfried (1995[1963]). *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. (Thomas Levin (trans.)). Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

²⁸ Elias, Norbert. 1984. *What Is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.

foundation of the analysis presented in this chapter. A figurational sketch of the modern European-style butler's targeted employers is then to follow, in order to situate this new professional type within its broader sociocultural context. The next section supplies a portrait of the European-style modern butler based on ethnographic observations and interviews conducted during training sessions at a butler training academy. The tie between the distinctive characteristics of the professional type and the trajectory of figurational changes underwent by the new economic elites is then interpreted through and in "thick description"²⁹. To conclude, the chapter will return to the issue of the modern butler's performativeness and discuss it figurationally.

2. Do as Butlers-to-be Do: Fieldwork at the Butler Training Academy

I travelled to this provincial capital city in its humid and scorching summer in 2017. To most Chinese and non-Chinese alike, it might be initially surprising to locate the only international campus of this much talked-about European butler training institute in China's west. In the shared classificatory scheme for mapping mainland China's urban landscape, this city has yet to be officially admitted to the class of "first-tier city (yixian chengshi, 一线城市)". Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, often together abbreviated as "Bei-Shang-Guang-Shen (北上广深)", are where wealth and prosperity first sprang in the mainland after its economic reform. International businesses tend to first land in more developed coastal regions in search for branching-out opportunities in China's emerging market. I came to know later that a local luxury real-estate developer was the one who first imported this butler training institute from Europe a

²⁹ Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

few years ago. In this first-tier-city-to-be, the academy is in the process of turning a culturally symbolic figure from Europe's distant past into a modern profession that is said to have a bright future, here and right now. In recent years, many other butler training agencies in other parts of China are also swarming to this sunrise industry built around this new profession: modern butler dipped in the aura of European aristocracy.

At the time of my visit, a new session of butler training was about to take place. Eight trainees hailing from all over China (mostly from the mainland and one from Hong Kong) were about to join this six-week training program for a tuition fee of CNY 50,000 (about CAD\$ 10,000). For those who did not have their companies subsidize this cost, this amount is not a small investment; they thus arrived with elevated expectations and a dream for a career change - to join the reportedly gainful new profession. Most of the trainees were between 25 and 45 years of age, mostly with a degree from technical college and only a few (i.e., one in this group of eight) from university. In this July group are to be found a high-school teacher, a makeup artist, a court clerk, a well-to-do business co-owner, a hotel manager, and three employees from the hospitality industry. Among them two were males, and six females, a composition that modernizes the butler as a gendered occupational role. However diverse their occupational and socio-economic backgrounds, they were all here to learn the same new trade of modern butling. They were to be taught by more experienced butlers who graduated from the institute's European location, which still runs ten-week long English language butler training programs at a higher tuition of around CAD\$ 22,000. These trainers were truly international in their cultural background: Chinese, Dutch, German, Slovakian, Spanish, and Swiss. Two Chinese translators worked on-site to assist non-mandarin-speaking trainers, as the vast majority of trainees who choose to attend the

academy's Chinese campus can neither understand nor communicate in English in professional settings.

In its European location, this butler training institute is housed in a monastery-turned castle-like mansion, now privately owned by the academy's investors. There are over a hundred rooms in this stately estate, including chapels, a porcelain room, a cigar room, ballrooms, and butler pantries - the kind of functional spaces that are more easily found in *Downton Abbey* on TV than in average homes today. Yet for modern butlers, this historic castle is thought to resemble the working environment where they will find employment after graduation, in the mansions of the moneyed and the powerful. Although the institute's training site in China does not have a castle of equal magnitude, the luxurious glamour is well translated. Training sessions were to be carried out in the X Club on the top floor of one of the priciest condominiums developed by the institute's Chinese investor, inside a gated community with butler service 24/7. Visitors can only enter through the front door once the appointment has been confirmed with the butler department by the resident who extended the invitation. Overlooking the river winding through the city, the X Club perceptibly displays a flair for modern cosmopolitan aesthetics: marble flooring, reflective glass ceiling, patched fur carpets, leather sofas and side-tables, porcelain vases, Chinese calligraphy rolls, a Japanese samurai knife on display, Baroque silver candle stands, a grand black piano, bottles of shelved wines, black-and-white photos of the Beatles, Bob Marley and Elvis Presley. It is in this kind of private household that self-sponsored trainees wish to start a new career path in, after the costly and intensive six weeks.

I arrived on site after receiving confirmation of the institute's willingness to participate in my research project, which was then broadly framed as a study of the development of the

etiquette market in the mainland. Possibly because my research was seen as an opportunity for international publicity or my research repertoire was viewed as a source for potentially enhancing their competitive analysis³⁰, the marketing department of the institute's Chinese campus allowed me an opportunity to observe the training sessions carried out from 19 July to 29 July. My observation started at eight o'clock in the morning. I kept notes on their daily training till after its completion when the dinner was over. We lunched and dined together most of these days. Occasionally I hung out with the group of butler trainees in less formal settings, mostly in the common areas of their dormitory on the compound or small restaurants on neighboring streets, when they had free time outside of their often-packed training schedule. In addition to non-participant observations³¹, I conducted audially-recorded interviews mostly in the one-to-one format, with two exceptions of group interview. These interviews average one-hour long in length. As an overview, I talked to all of the eight trainees of the July group, seven butler trainers of varied cultural backgrounds (three of them also assumed administrative roles as the founder of the butler training institute, the Training Director of the institute's Chinese campus, and the Project Director of the institute's Chinese campus, respectively), one translator working on site, as well as the Brand Manager and the Marketing Director of this training institute's Chinese branch. During my stay, three journalistic media crews (one local and two international) visited the training site and published reports subsequently. In late August, I returned to the training site on the day of graduation to join the July group's certificate award ceremony and celebration

³⁰ No information on the names and details of other research objects in this study was given to the academy, as per the ethical regulations of York University's Ethics Review Board and the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

³¹ Nader, Laura. 1972. "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up." Washington, DC: US Department of Health Education & Welfare Office of Education.

afterward. As supplemental materials, international media reports on China's "butler boom" and this training institute's website contents and WeChat posts were also collected and analyzed. In addition, although a formal interview with the Hurun Report³² did not materialize, an unrecorded conversation with a senior staff member at its Shanghai office was possible. The Hurun Report's relevant online contents were also digitally captured and analyzed.

3. The Modern Butler: A Vicarious Profession for China's HNWI

An important empirical fact highlighted in media analyses and butler training academies' marketing publicities is the close tie between the modern professional butler and China's High Net Worth Individuals (HNWI). Such a link makes a figurational sketch of HNWI informative for interpreting the cultural tendencies that appear intrinsic to the new European-style modern butler. Starting with the elementary, the term "HNWI" first emerged in the financial service sector, yet it has now been absorbed into the mass media and popular parlance in the mainland. According to the authoritative source that has been monitoring the rise of HNWI in China since 1999, the Hurun Report indicates that the minimum threshold for being included into the HNWI bracket in today's China is holding a minimum of fixed and/or liquid financial assets of CNY 10 million (about CAD\$ 2 million). The *Hurun Wealth Report 2017* (《2017 胡润财富报告》)³³ reported 1.86 million High Net Worth Households (HNWH)³⁴ with assets of or above CNY 10

³² Hurun Report Inc. was established by British accountant Rupert Hoogewerf in 1999. Based in *Shanghai*, it considers itself as "a leading luxury publishing group" (<https://www.hurun.net/EN/Home/Aboutus>). Every year it publishes research-based white papers (e.g., "2017 Overseas Property Needs of the Chinese HNWI") and reports such as the well-known "Hurun Wealth Report" and "China Rich List"; it also organizes "high-end" events ("innovative conferences and lifestyle dinners") for HNWI in China.

³³ Source: <https://www.hurun.net/CN/Article/Details?num=A831ED47918C> ("Hurun Wealth Report 2017" 《2017 胡润财富报告》)

³⁴ Discussions on the HNWI population in China are most often seen being based on the unit of household but not individual. It is partially because of the Confucian influence on emphasizing the importance of family in Chinese

million in greater China (including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan) in 2016; and the number of HNWH grew by 8.6%³⁵ from the year before. In this categorically developing economy³⁶ with an average individual disposable income of CNY 25,974 (about CAD\$ 5,000) and a slightly higher average of CNY 36,396 (around CAD\$ 6,900) in urban regions³⁷, China's HNWI distinguish themselves for having a disproportionately large amount of economic capital. As for the sources of their fortune, the same report found that in 2016 the HNWI comprised private business owners (55%), "golden-collar" salary workers in managerial positions at transnational enterprises (20%), real estate speculators (15%), and professional investors (10%). As we move upstream, the HNWI with relatively more assets of or above CNY 100 million (about CAD\$ 20 million) displayed a slightly varied occupational distribution: private business owners (75%), real estate speculators (15%), and professional investors (10%). Salaried employees were purged out from the top of this pyramid. In absence of a shared professional basis, one commonality among these HNWI's occupations is their engagement in speculative economic actions that Max Weber found

culture; and partially because in many instances one individual of the nuclear family is the main source of family income and wealth.

³⁵ An excerpt from *the Hurun Wealth Report 2017* (《2017 胡润财富报告》) details the enormous scale of this group's private wealth: "The report shows that the total wealth of households with CNY 6 million assets or above in Greater China reached CNY 125 trillion, which is 1.5 times of the annual GDP of 2016. About 80% of these households are from mainland China. By 1 January 2017, the number of households with CNY 6 million assets or above reached 4.6 million, an increase of 274, 000 at a growth rate of 6.3%. Among them, 1.61 million households have investable assets of CNY 6 million or above. The number of High Net Worth Households with assets of or above CNY 10 million reached 1.86 million, an increase of 147,000 from last year at a growth rate of 8.6%. Among them, 948,000 High Net Worth Households have investable assets of or above CNY 10 million. The number of Ultra-High Net Worth Households with assets of or above CNY 100 million reached 121,000, an increase of 12,000 at a growth rate of 10.5%. Among them, 71,000 households have investable assets of or above CNY 100 million. The number of International Ultra-High Net Worth Households with assets of or above USD\$ 30 million reached 79,000, an increase of 8,300 at a growth rate of 11.8%. Among them, 48,000 households have investable assets of or above USD\$ 30 million. Hu Run commented: "the number of High Net Worth Households grows faster than the GDP." The quoted text was originally published in Chinese and translated to English by me.

³⁶ Source: "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2017", published by the United Nations (https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/2017wesp_full_en.pdf)

³⁷ Source: http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201801/t20180118_1574931.html (by the National Bureau of Statistics, 2017; originally published in Chinese)

characteristic of “the capitalist adventurer”³⁸ existed in many historical periods and social contexts even prior to the birth of modern rational capitalism.

The HNWI is among the most salient symbols of upward social mobility after China’s economic reform and opening up, but its upward mobility has its peculiarities. Genealogically speaking, this upwardly mobile group was in fact formed by both upward and downward figural movements triggered by the reform. Although a consensus on the exact constitution of this new elite group has not yet fully formed, largely due to incessant and ongoing changes, analyses converge in pinpointing two streams of movements that shaped the formation of this group during the past four decades. On the one hand, the introduction of the capitalist market economy motivated some former political elites and their close associates to join the *Xiahai* Rush (下海浪潮; literally means the wave to go out to sea, and refers to the trend of giving up previous occupations and undertaking commercial endeavours)³⁹ in the 1990s. Simultaneously, on the other hand, self-made and often less-educated *getihu*-s (个体户; private business owners) from outside of the CCP-led political system rose to prominence for their newly gained economic power. This genealogically heterogeneous group of economic elites together embodies a form of social mobility resulted from a process that can perhaps be described as functional democratization without political democratization⁴⁰. This process greatly enhanced the emerging economic elites’ social position for their newly acquired critical roles in national economic

³⁸ Weber, Max. 2003. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications. P. 20.

³⁹ 孙立平 (Sun, Liping). 2002. “90 年代中期以来中国社会结构演变的新趋势 (New Trends in the Changes in China’s Social Structure Since the Mid-1990s).” *Modern Chinese Studies*. 2002(3): Article 2.

⁴⁰ Discussions on the concept of “functional democratization” can be found in: Mennell, Stephen. 2007. *The American Civilizing Process*. Cambridge: Polity.; Wouters, Cas. 2007. *Informalization: Manners and Emotions Since 1890*. SAGE.; Wouters, Cas. 2016. “Functional Democratisation and Disintegration as Side-Effects of Differentiation and Integration Processes.” *Human Figurations* 5(2).

development, yet without simultaneously significantly lessening their political dependence on the party-state, in a political economy now officially presented as the “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (中国特色社会主义)” and also often referred to as a form of state-led capitalism by others⁴¹. Much like the gentry class existed prior to the foundation of PRC⁴², today’s wealthy HNWI too differ from the Western aristocratic class in the lack of a political party as the foundation of their independent political power. The upward mobility embodied by HNWI is thus “capped”: confined largely within the economic realm and with almost no chance for trespassing the class boundary, in the sense to be discussed below, to reach the center of political power⁴³. A persistent issue that has been plaguing these new economic elites is partially resulted from this condition - an observable lack of the social status that could match up with their advantageous position in the economic arena⁴⁴. The Hurun Report has keenly detected it. Its two-liner slogan reads: “Hurun Report, we understand Chinese riches much better!” “Hurun Report, leading the style and taste from *fu* (富, wealthy) to *gui* (贵, having high social status/rank).”⁴⁵ It is within the

⁴¹ The continuities of the state capitalist policies in the Mao era (1949-1976) and that after the economic reform are shown in: Gerth, Karl. 2020. *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China’s Communist Revolution*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴² Fei, Hsiao-Tung. 1946. “Peasantry and Gentry: An Interpretation of Chinese Social Structure and Its Changes.” *American Journal of Sociology* 52(1):1–17. P. 9.

⁴³ 李春玲 (Li, Chunling). 2018. “第四章：十大社会阶层的来源与流向 (Chapter four: the origins and flows of the ten stratifications)”. Pp.163-209 in 《当代中国社会阶层研究报告 II: 当代中国社会流动》 (*Reports on the Structure of Contemporary China II: Social Mobility of Contemporary China*), edited by Lu, Xueyi (陆学艺). Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe (社会科学文献出版社).

⁴⁴ 陆学艺, 王春光, 李春玲, 李炜, 陈光金, 张林江, 樊平 (Lu, Xueyi, and Wang Chunguang, Li Chunling, Liwei, Chen Guangjin, Zhang Linjiang, Fan Ping). 2018. “当代中国社会阶层研究报告 (Reports on the stratification in contemporary China)”. Pp.3-86 in 《当代中国社会阶层研究报告 I: 当代中国社会阶层》 (*Reports on the Structure of Contemporary China I: Social Stratification of Contemporary China*), edited by Lu, Xueyi (陆学艺). Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe (社会科学文献出版社). P. 27.

⁴⁵ The slogan was originally in Chinese and translated to English by me. Source: <https://www.hurun.net/CN/Home/Aboutus>

gap that splits asunder the Chinese word “*fugui* (富贵, wealthy and having high social status)” that the collective chagrin of these nascent moneyed elites is thought to lie.

The socially conditioned rationale behind the HNWI’s lack of social status and proposed remedies for mending it becomes clearer when we examine the figural boundaries that separate this class from its neighbouring others, if we understand “class” in the Bourdieusian sense as the social classification system based on the amount and composition of different forms of capital considered important in a certain society⁴⁶. It only makes sense to conceive figural boundaries as including both explicit and “hard” social boundaries such as private wealth, and more implicit and “soft” symbolic ones at the “intersubjective”⁴⁷ margins, where power works in its least direct form⁴⁸. Less conspicuous dividing lines contained in faintly tangible forms such as inter-class sentiments could be more revealing of the unstated yet widely held rules of inclusion and exclusion marking social collectives. One important part of the boundary that silhouettes the HNWI as a class is with the political elites. Institutionalized clientelism bonds the new economic elites and the all-powerful politburo class⁴⁹, the designated “administrators of the state and society (国家与社会管理者)”. In the latter’s hands all forms of consequential capital in the Chinese society are concentrated: organizational capital, economic capital, and cultural capital⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press.

⁴⁷ Lamont, Michèle, and Virág Molnár. 2002. “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28(1):167–95. P. 169.

⁴⁸ Lamont, Michèle, Sabrina Pendergrass, and Mark Pachucki. 2015. “Symbolic Boundaries.” Pp. 850–55 in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. Elsevier. P. 850.

⁴⁹ Li, Xing, and Timothy M. Shaw. 2013. “The Political Economy of Chinese State Capitalism.” *Journal of China and International Relations* 1(1).

⁵⁰ This is a finding reported by the Research Group on the Structural Change of the Contemporary Chinese Society (当代中国社会结构变迁研究课题组) from the Sociological Research Center at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (中国社会科学院社会学研究所), based on nation-wide empirical studies that started in the late 1990s and extended into the 2000s. Their research findings produced four books/reports on all aspects of the structural

As a varied form of social capital, organizational capital is “the decisively important type of resource, because the ruling party and the governmental organizations control the most important and the largest amount of resources in (the Chinese) society”⁵¹. During the marketization process after the economic reform was set in motion since 1978, the political elites were able to convert their organizational/political capital to economic benefits, partially through its lawmaking power and partially through its control over the distribution of valuable resources nationwide⁵². The politburo is the only elite group that weathered the three waves of social restructuring in the history of PRC⁵³. The established social legitimacy renders it on par with “good society”. Indeed, as I discovered during the field research, the politburo class is generally respected as the “noble and aristocratic” in today’s China. Their perceived nobility is not solely attributed to their ruling position, but more importantly yet less implicitly, to a semi-hereditary appeal that is more rare to be found in other elite groups. Popularized vernacular terms of “高干子弟” (*gaogan zidi*, literally means the offspring of high-level Party officials), “红二代” (*honger dai*, literally means the second Red generation; here “Red” refers to the CCP), and “红三

changes of the contemporary Chinese society. “Resources (*ziyuan*, 资源), rather than “capital (*ziben*, 资本), was used in their analyses of the social stratification in China.

⁵¹ 陆学艺, 王春光, 李春玲, 李炜, 陈光金, 张林江, 樊平 (Lu, Xueyi, and Chunguang Wang, Chunling Li, Wei Li, Guangjin Chen, Linjiang Zhang, Ping Fan). 2008. Pp. 7-9. Quotes are translated to English by me.

⁵² 李春玲, 陈光金 (Li, Chunling and Guangjin Chen). 2018. “第一章：十大社会阶层的划分 (Chapter one: the division of ten stratifications)”. Pp.21-44 in 《当代中国社会阶层研究报告 II: 当代中国社会流动》 (*Reports on the Structure of Contemporary China II: Social Mobility of Contemporary China*), edited by Lu, Xueyi (陆学艺). Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe (社会科学文献出版社). P.35.

⁵³ The three waves of structural transformation in Chinese society are: 1) 1949-1956: the working class, the peasant class, the petite bourgeoisie class, and the national bourgeoisie class; 2) 1956-1977: the working class, the peasant class, and the intellectual strata; 3) 1978-present: administrators of the state and society, private business owners, managers, technicians, administrative staff members, small business owners, service industry employees, workers, peasants, unemployed. From: 胡建国, 李春玲, 李炜 (Hu, Jianguo, and Chunling Li, Wei Li). 2018. “第九章：社会阶层结构 (Chapter nine: the structure of social stratification)”. Pp. 396-429 in 《当代中国社会阶层研究报告 III: 当代中国社会结构》 (*Reports on the Structure of Contemporary China III: Social Structure of Contemporary China*), edited by Lu, Xueyi (陆学艺). Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe (社会科学文献出版社). Pp.396-412.

代” (*hongsandai*, literally means the third Red generation) all hint on this semi-hereditary allure. A sense of deference, feigned or sincere, is therefore often extended from outside of this group, not least from the HNWI, who are allied through a clientelist tie. But the economic elites simultaneously display a competitive attitude when it comes to the matter of social status⁵⁴, in a manner of competitive outsiders rivaling for the high status of the established⁵⁵. It is analogous to the relationship that the German bourgeoisie had with the court society, as observed by Norbert Elias: the bourgeoisie *kultur* was in fact developed in contrast to the court’s ideal of *civilisation*⁵⁶ to serve as a distinctive foundation of the bourgeois identity. Genealogical heterogeneity of the group of new economic elites appears to rest their status aspiration on a different cultural foundation⁵⁷, different from yet simultaneously showing respect for, the politicized mainstream culture propagated by the CCP.

Another equally important part of the figurational boundary defining the HNWI class is marked by a mixed sentiment coined as “admiration-jealousy-hatred (xianmujiduhun, 羡慕嫉妒恨)”⁵⁸. Its extreme manifestation is a psychological condition popularly referred to as the “resentment against the rich (仇富心理)”. Private wealth, the very foundation of the HNWI’s elevated social position is ironically turned into an “indictment”⁵⁹, a source of stigma, particularly

⁵⁴ 陆学艺, 王春光, 李春玲, 李炜, 陈光金, 张林江, 樊平 (Lu, Xueyi, and Wang Chunguang, Li Chunling, Liwei, Chen Guangjin, Zhang Linjiang, Fan Ping). 2008. P. 30.

⁵⁵ Elias, Norbert, and John L. Scotson. 1994. *The Established and the Outsiders*. SAGE; Mennell, Stephen. 2007. *The American Civilizing Process*. Cambridge: Polity. Ps. 40-50.

⁵⁶ Elias, Norbert. 2000. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. 2 edition. Oxford; Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell. Pp. 5-11.

⁵⁷ Osburg, John. 2013. *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality among China’s New Rich*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. P. 35.

⁵⁸ The three words of were conjoined into one single colloquial word/phrase. This format reflects both the complexity of this sentiment and the informality of the Internet speech.

⁵⁹ Gerth, Karl. 2011. “Lifestyles of the Rich and Infamous: The Creation and Implications of China’s New Aristocracy.” *Comparative Sociology* 10(4):488–507. P. 498.

by the better-off urban upper-middle-class professionals. These professionals' pride in their relatively high cultural capital, mainly in institutionalized forms of academic degrees and technical diplomas, is neither the only nor the main cause of this inter-class dynamism. Underlying this sentiment and psychological condition is a cultural and moral critique waged against the HNWI. Derisive aliases are given to these new riches: *nouveau riches*, *parvenus*, “土老肥 (*tulaofei*; literally means local/un-cosmopolitan/provincial, old, and fat)”, “土豪 (*tuhao*; literally means local tycoon)”, and “暴发户 (*baofahu*; literally means someone who suddenly becomes rich)”. The newness of wealth is un-hesitantly translated into a lack of cultural sophistication, particularly poignantly shown through the unsightly portrait of the new riches as being “provincial”, “old” and “fat”. This critique of cultural uncouthness in all its senses is extended to an evaluation of moral baseness, mainly focussed on the issue of the legitimacy of HNWI's fast-generated wealth. In this assessment, contextualized within the perceived short period of time that has elapsed between a time of equal scarcity and that of the opulence of a few, only the “heartless” and “cruel” are thought to be able to secure the kind of “unreasonable” and “unjustified”⁶⁰ economic prosperity as is enjoyed by the HNWI. This critique of moral corruption points to the unspoken-of, yet well-known, intimacy between the economic and political elites, a collectively muted fact made explicit in a viral parodic post on the social stratification system in contemporary China in a 2014 article in *Foreign Policy*⁶¹. For the cultured

⁶⁰ Wu, Xiaoyi, and Lan Lin. 2018. “Resentment against the Rich: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Empirical Evidence from China.” *International Journal of Conflict Management* 31(4):529–58. P. 538 (Table 1).

⁶¹ An English version of it is available at: Lu, Rachel. 2014. “China's New Class Hierarchy: A Guide.” *Foreign Policy*. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/04/25/chinas-new-class-hierarchy-a-guide/>). In this stratification system, the political and economic elites together occupy the top four tiers, to which the politically unconnected are thought to have little chance to enter.

urban professionals, the moral predicament of the HNWI is not the “greed” for profiteering, but the undignified means through which their fortune is found.

In such a social environment, the modern European-style butler is introduced along the HNWI’s path towards *fugui* (being wealthy and having high social status). This professional type is brand new and initially mainly aimed for serving the HNWI. As the marketing director of the butler training institute where my fieldwork was carried out put it: “We believe we are seeing a ‘blue ocean’ (i.e., an unexplored market⁶²), but how to go about it and how to enter these (HNWI) households, I think we are still exploring.”⁶³ A part of their exploration was publishing and presenting a white paper entitled “the Global Vision of Chinese Butler Service (全球视野下的中国管家服务)”⁶⁴ in a public relations event in early 2017. It was introduced as a collaborative work of a long list of contributors, including but not limited to 36 experts, 46 enterprises, many educational scholars, hundreds of professional elites, 328 butler graduates from the academy in and out of China, 8 industrial associations, numerous commercial, governmental and scholarly organizations. The white paper aims to introduce the modern butler to both prospective employers and aspiring butlers-to-be, both on the demand and supply side of this new market in the making:

The Emerging HNWI class Gave Birth to the Professional Butler in China⁶⁵

Forming Allies with the HNWI Class: In medieval England, butlers were not available to everyone; **only nobles and aristocrats with titles were qualified.**

⁶² “Blue ocean” is a term originally from Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne’s bestseller book *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant* (2005).

⁶³ The interview was originally in Chinese and translated by me.

⁶⁴ Both the English and Chinese titles of the white paper are original. The body of document is mostly written in Chinese, with an exception of a few places where English words are added into Chinese words.

⁶⁵ The white paper is originally in Chinese and translated by me. Bold highlights are original.

Along with social development, gradually, wealthy families could employ butlers for their service. After the WWII, as the service industry in the UK declined, high-end butlers also became outdated. However, today, as the number of ultra-riches grows rapidly, **professional high-end butler is experiencing an unprecedented renaissance.**

According to the statistics provided by the International Guild of Professional Butlers in 2014, **there were around 100,000 high-end butlers around the world**, and the number is still on the rise. This is certainly inseparable from the excellent salary and treatment received by these professionals. According to the Australian Butlers School, the average annual income of the senior butlers employed in the European and American continents reaches GBP 45,000.

In China, centralizing wealth is changing social relationships. Swelling material goods and multiplying business matters deprive individuals of the time and energy needed for maintaining and updating their private households. Therefore, it can be said that **butlers are the work-partners in private households** – they know how to manage the household in a more efficient and ideal manner; they can employ etiquette and protocols to mend the sense of social alienation caused by materialism.

The collective of professional butlers has rid of their antiquated property of being a life-long private chattel. They have acquired greater independence and developed an awareness of equality. The authentic traditional British butlers have been evolving with the changing new era - **they are transforming old-fashioned loyalty into professional service**, so as to enable themselves to enjoy much greater social mobility and freedom.

The modern butler is introduced in this white paper as a vicarious profession for China's HNWIs. It is a professional role that emerges along with the new economic elites' changing household needs and unsatisfied status aspirations. Parallel to Thorstein Veblen's vicarious leisure and consumption performed by the wives and servants of the new American leisure class

during the Gilded Age⁶⁶, modern professional butlers are only experiencing a “renaissance” in mainland China now for providing service to the HNWI. As private service professionals, these modern butlers have pragmatic functions to fulfill. They are to be trained to manage private households and to oversee the acquisition and care of luxury goods, in response to the changing needs of the HNWH. Also described in this whitepaper, on average every HNWH spends a minimum of CAD\$ 6 million on multiple residences in and outside of China, has at least four cars per household, and enrolls in three or more high-end sports clubs. For households of this size, untrained and less cultured “aunties (*ayi*-s, 阿姨)”⁶⁷ have become inadequate. However, the distinctive value of the modern European-style professional butler is not thought to be their technical capabilities. The cultural need underlying the new economic elites’ pursuit of social distinction is what makes such a professional role into an “inelastic need (*gangxu*, 刚需)”. The modern butler’s aristocratic pedigree, emphasized through its exclusive kinship to “nobles and aristocrats of titles”, is the validation of its cultural legitimacy: established and esteemed. The professional butler’s mastery of “etiquette and protocols” are but symbols of cultural knowledge, to which an incredible power “to mend the sense of social alienation caused by materialism” is credited. This hyperbolic introduction of the modern butler projects her/his employer onto the highland of cultural distinction, in a peculiar form where respect and status are churned from culturized pecuniary strength.

⁶⁶ Veblen, Thorstein. 2007.

⁶⁷ Domestic helpers are commonly referred to as “auntie” (*ayi*, 阿姨) in the mainland, as most of them are middle-aged females coming from rural areas. Most of them do not have sufficient formal education for seeking an alternative professional career path.

For the butlers-to-be, the vicariousness is an attribute of their professional role. As individuals, they are no longer thought to be bonded to their employers by the outdated value of “loyalty”, as did their predecessors of the same cultural pedigree - the antiquated European butlers. Under the professional cloak of the European-style butler is a thoroughly modernized self that is independent, upwardly mobile, free, and equal to her/his employer for household management matters. These modern individuals with a professional identity of the professional European-style butler embody a form of dignity that is no longer fully subsumed under their professional role, therefore forming a sharp contrast to the reflections of the classic butler character of Mr. Stevens in *the Remains of the Day*, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Their professional role is not to be confused with the “real” self. Private chattels no longer, they are now empowered “work-partners” of their wealthy “principles”, where the market-based labor exchange is romanticized to be a source of empowerment. This opportunity to join a financially well-compensated profession with a nobly “autonomous” and “insular”⁶⁸ charm, at the expense of a six-week training, surely sounds efficient and profitable. It is therefore not surprising that a good number of career-changers have flocked in, sometimes with debt resulting from the steep tuition fee. As they perceive it, this could well be their chance to realize their own “China Dream (*zhongguomeng*; 中国梦)”⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ Simmel, Georg. 1972. “The Nobility” Pp. 199-214. in *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*. 1 edition. edited by D. N. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁶⁹ “中国梦 (*zhongguomeng*)”, was a term officially popularized by Chairman Xi Jinping in late 2012. It is officially translated to English as “China Dream”. It resembles “American Dream”, yet also differs from the latter for including both national- and individual- level objectives.

4. The Portrait of the Private Butler as a Modern Professional

4.1 Appearance

With a pledge to “energy, passion and commitment”, the eight butler trainees begin a six-week transformation at the X Club. Outwardly, butler trainees don a similar uniform to that of Mr. Carson from *Downton Abbey*. The recent popularity of this British TV series has made Mr. Carson the spokesperson of the new professional butler in the mainland. Not only many butlers-to-be claim to be inspired to pursue this new profession because of this fictional figure, even more formal publications like the white paper discussed above deployed a photograph of Mr. Carson as a visual representation of the ideal butler when discussing the “international standards of private butlers”. Just like Mr. Carson from the Yorkshire country estate in the mediascape, particularly for formal events and ceremonial occasions, butlers at this training academy dress up in custom-fitted European-style set that is no less than ornate: black morning coat over a white wing collar dress shirt layered under a dove-grey vest, a pair of academy-name engraved cufflinks, a faint-grey tie tucked under the vest, matched with a pair of dark-grey striped formal trousers and meticulously polished black closed leather shoes. At first glance, this look emits an air of classic European gentleman of aristocratic upbringing, but a closer look reveals a set of distinctive props that clearly mark their professional identity: a pair of white gloves, a silver-colored pocket watch chained onto the vest, and a black pilot briefcase filled up with all sorts of butling tools such as stationaries, wine openers, and a grooming tool set. It is shared knowledge in the academy that modern butlers should function like a “Swiss knife” or an “encyclopedia”, while always being presentable, just like gentlemen. As one young German butler trainer explained to the eight trainees of the July group: “Since we are butlers, we will represent our

principles. We are ambassadors. As ambassadors, we need to look impeccable”. From the first day of the training program, only formal business wares were allowed on site. In the pre-training meeting with the academy to schedule my field observation, a similar yet slightly lenient dress code was also politely extended to me, for the stated purpose of being able to be blended into the environment.

Every morning, butler trainees lined up in a row to be inspected by the student head butler. They were trained to stand to attention with an open shoulder and chest, decorated with a smile to a professional degree of just being enough to tug a chopstick horizontally in-between two rows of teeth. When the morning inspection started, every butler trainee would lay their hands gently on the folded left forearm of the inspector for a close examination of fingernails and then flip over for another round of scrutiny. They opened and then closed their suit jacket to be checked inside out. The head butler would brush off unsightly linens on their attires, point out any small yet unpleasant spots clumped on the surface of shoes, or take off any wristwatch to protect fragile glassware and to avoid the risk of outshining their future “principles” for inappropriately wearing a more expensive one. The power dynamism between butlers and their employers is gently reminded in such minute details of appearance. To ensure their “impeccable” appearance and presence, the head butler also had to take on the trying task of “personally smelling” other butlers’ armpits, a requirement particularly reinforced at the academy’s European campus. Perfectly maintained personal hygiene and flawless appearance is the imperative that has to be achieved at all cost. Butler trainees had to overcome the “civilized” distaste associated with bodily functions⁷⁰ to meet the professional requirement of a culturally

⁷⁰ Elias, Norbert. 2000..

glossy role. Without showing any trace of shame or revulsion, butlers-to-be had to temporarily cross the line of the modern “*civilité*”, yet somewhat paradoxically, only doing so within the permission of gentlemen’s manners: only between butlers of the same gender and always asking for permission before touching another person if needed: “May I touch you, sir?” A sense of formality is interjected through mannered speeches and mandatory politeness. The X Club is linguistically transformed into a club of “Messrs” and “Misses”, even heard amid casual chats during training breaks. Relational hierarchy is subtly summoned in everyone’s subconsciousness through linguistic priming of social distance. This formalized mode of address⁷¹ also transforms this group of trainees into a professional community guarded by their shared codes of honor and mutual respect.

4.2 Morality

Having respect for others and showing this respect by acting ostensibly kind to them is rarely found as an explicit professional requirement today, but it is thought to be crucial for butlers as service professionals. The moral undertone inherent in this requirement of not failing to display respect is on the ideational plane planted into a worldview, one that probably will not find popularity in the world of wealth and power, where these butler trainees were thought to compete for posts after graduation. In posing as a morally virtuous being, the modern professional butler bears a resemblance to the classic European gentleman, whose mannered presence is often taken as suggestive of moral virtues, with a dose of romanticism. But the moral

⁷¹ The importance of using the mode of address to define relationships between people and situations is discussed in: Wouters, Cas. 2007. *Informalization: Manners and Emotions Since 1890*. SAGE. (particularly Chapter 5: pp.101-165)

requirement of these professionals appears to be even more stringent – moralist principles are considered the foundation of their spontaneous actions. In an era where discussion of morality has lost much traction in the face of rampant materialist desires, and in a social context where “getting rich is glorious”, an overt emphasis on moral virtues for a service professional role is curious. A bewildering moment occurred during a training session on “the art of service”, a lecture by a well-seasoned butler who was also the founder of this butler training academy in a European country. He started the session with a somewhat surprising monologue on poverty. It was a topic that neither I, nor, most likely, the eight trainees of the July group expected to learn about in this costly training program on a service profession attached to the new world of China’s HNWI, a world of startling privilege to many. The trainer went on in a quite soothing voice on a topic that was felt to be so remote from the luxurious comfort offered at the X Club, where the training session was held:

We are living in a very privileged world, and sometimes we forget that we work with beautiful things, furniture, rich people, there are other people who are not very privileged as we are. (I) would like to let people know there is something about poverty. (It) might be strange but knowing a little bit of poverty would guide to develop respect, much as for people driving beautiful cars and for people picking up garbage [...] It’s hard to believe half the world’s population live on less than \$2.50 a day, 74 billion people. I want them⁷² to think about this for a moment. Consider what privilege is to be gathered here [...] 1.5 billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day. Not sure you are expecting this on the slide, but next time when walking on the street, should think this person struggling to work to bring food for the family, and that person deserves your respect also. Eighty

⁷² The trainees were referred to as “them”, because the trainer was talking to the trainees via the translator, who translated these contents from English to Mandarin Chinese for the trainees to comprehend.

percent of all people in the world live on less than \$10 per day. We are very provided today. One in ten people lack access to safe water; one in three lack access to a toilet [...] Access to safe water is the largest crisis facing the world's population now. Water is going to become the most important problem. Every three seconds a child dies because of poverty. Privilege to sit here, not only to respect but also to share wealth with others. Everyone in the room is very wealthy. Just the fact that we can have water and go to toilet. Compared to poverty there is also wealth [...] The 100 rich people in the world earn enough money every year to end global poverty 4 times [...] Wonder why there is not much help for the third world [...] There are more slaves today than at any time in human history. Slavery officially doesn't exist. It does, if you look at India, has the largest slave population in the world, 150,000. The only way to get rid of poverty: empowerment to women, let women decide. I am a strong feminist. I believe the power of the world should belong to women not men. Now, start with the art of service⁷³...

It is extraordinary to preface a lecture on the “art of service” with a passionate discourse on morality. A world of inequality was presented in a morally indignant manner: The social system that produced the enormous wealth of riches was characterized as an unjustly tilted one, leading to grave social problems of poverty, inequality, and exploitation of labor, here referred to as “slavery”. In this bipartite world of the privileged and the underprivileged, the butlers-to-be were placed on the “better” side with their future HNWI “principles”, yet on account of a different set of forgotten privileges: unhindered access to life necessities like water and washrooms, and the ability to financially afford this training program. The butler trainees were discursively transformed to be among the privileged, which their “principles” unquestionably belong to;

⁷³ This monologue was originally delivered in English in class. As indicated in the quoted text, parts of it are omitted here to reduce its length without significantly changing the points conveyed therein.

however, these trainees' privileged positions were also rested on a far modest foundation. The cultural sophistication and moral righteousness underlying this moralistic requirement to respect all appeared to estrange the modern butler from the materialist values prevalent in the world of the privileged, but they also helped to provide a cultured aura for this service profession at the same time. As a step further, these trainees were even encouraged to take on a politically progressive stance of "feminism", as the "only" solution to poverty, while the doctrine of feminism was also equated with letting women but not men decide. The lengthy monologue on poverty ended abruptly with a swift turn to "the art of service", a topic alien to the world of the underprivileged. The arbitrariness in this moralistic reasoning and the ambiguities in cultural sophistication displayed make one wonder whether or not displaying respect without discrimination is truly a moral *sine qua non* for butlers, but it appears that professing an egalitarian ideal is critical to the makeup of this new occupational role. The projected spiritual aura could further be undermined by the professional butler's requirement to become a master of social tact.

4.3 Tact

In interpersonal interactions, professional butlers are highly socialized with interpersonal skills that make their characteristic discretion possible. Discretion calls for skillful employment of tact. Erving Goffman notes that the exercise of tact is critical for maintaining uninterrupted social performances in everyday life: "Once the audience has been admitted to a performance, the necessity of being tactful does not cease"⁷⁴. Together with the skillful deployment of props such

⁷⁴ Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Anchor. P.148.

as language choices and facial expressions, tact is necessary for sustaining the consented definition of the situation between those engaged in a particular social performance, thereby ensuring the impression management of all parties for the sake of uninterrupted communicative acts. Civil inattention and leave-taking are two often-deployed tactful acts in interactions in public places⁷⁵. By showing an appropriate amount of attention to a person or signaling the termination of an encounter through a decodable gesture, social embarrassment can be greatly avoided. For professional butlers, the employment of tact is most readily shown in making appropriate decisions on being invisible or engaging. Butlers often play a role like “furniture”, as often required in service scenarios. In such occasions, they act as Erving Goffman’s “non-person”⁷⁶, tactfully retreating from both roles of performer and audience, while being attentively present in detecting the service that needs to be fulfilled. In other cases, tact requires butlers to be ready to entertain by supplying amusing trivia in any conversation. During my stay, one of the training sessions was filled with a variety of almost obscure facts such as the fruit that symbolizes hospitality, the country where cheesecake is from, the most shoplifted food, the oldest restaurant, the largest hotel group, the country with the largest wine consumption per capita, or the rare condition of oenophobia. Both knowledge of trivia and small talk skills are two important techniques of tact to be acquired by butlers-to-be. They are trained to habitually express their respect for others openly: “It looks beautiful. Thanks for doing this!” “What a lovely job you are doing!” The July group was asked to practice these expressions as tokens of appreciation every day, not least to the cleaning ladies or security guards on their training site, as those upholding

⁷⁵ Goffman, Erving. 1966. *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. Reissue edition. New York, NY: Free Press. Pps.83-190.

⁷⁶ Goffman, Erving. 1959. P.151. Goffman considers “the servant” as “the classic type of non-person” in North-American societies.

the morally egalitarian ideal would do. “As a butler, you are the engine of energy, passion and commitment”, said one trainer. Butlers’ sociability is set to a positive tone through emphasizing their responsibility in creating a congratulatory, amiable, and pleasant social ambiance. Training small-talk skills was taken quite seriously at this butler training academy in the making of professional butlers. Upon finishing their dinner every evening, the academy’s tradition of five-minute presentation carried on. A trainer would randomly drop a broadly defined topic and proceed to pick some trainees for five-minute spontaneous presentations. The topics varied, from international news like G20, to the relationship between China and Mongolia, and to the “big five” (animals) in Africa. Making a presentation on these culturally inclined topics does not necessitate a wealth of cultural capital for a critical discourse of scholarly depth, yet it calls for polished conversational skills for the presenter to produce a moment of conviviality with her/his audience around the dinner table. For this reason, presenters were then evaluated not only, or mainly, on the content of their presentations, but more importantly, on their body language, voice, and projected confidence. After all, a tactful person has to be observant through all senses, therefore a qualified butler needs to speak body language well. For butlers, the body is seen as the most expressive Goffmanian prop in their professional performance. Utilizing the body is seen turned into a professional requirement that is integrated into the butler’s performance.

The axiom of today’s etiquette industry is also shared among professional butlers: the three ‘V-s’ of communication are ranked as “visual (55%), vocal (38%), then verbal (7%)”, backed up with some unspecified scientific research. Seeing social interactions through such a lens, the importance of body language can hardly be overemphasized. It vaguely echoes McLuhan’s famous statement of “the medium is the message”. The visual presentation of interlocutors is

given heightened importance in social interactions, far more outweighing the verbal contents stated via the visual or vocal medium. The ability to decode body language and also communicate through it is thought of as a must for professional butlers, who distinguish themselves from other service professionals, such as waiters and waitresses, for offering “invisible” service. “Butler is about non-verbal communication,” a Swiss trainer told the July group. “We have to use our eyes. We have to look. We have to listen. We have to read between the lines.”⁷⁷ The importance accorded to body language goes beyond the need for impression management required by any particular social performance. For butlers, it is a professional skill to sense the unstated needs of those being served by reading their body language. More importantly, butlers need to proactively respond to these unarticulated needs in a discreet manner. In one training session, the group discussion unfolded around how to recognize the embodied signals of various personality traits and emotional states of people by observing the minutest details of body language. It is a guided process for butler trainees to start to cultivate a professional sensitivity towards behavioral signs given out by nervous, angry, or distracted people who might be naturally shy, arrogant, or open. Only upon successfully decoding the latent needs implied through these hardly perceptible signs, butlers can then proceed to draw on their prepared scripts to provide professional service, with a maximum degree of courtesy and tact:

Trainer (T): How to recognize arrogant person?

Student (S)-One: High head.

S-Two: Don’t listen.

⁷⁷ These quotes were originally stated in English and recorded verbatim.

T: How's the communication most time with an arrogant person, vocally and verbally? Clear, short, and mostly not many "please". Sometimes have the tone of "do it now", but not "wait a minute". How to you deal with arrogant person?

S-Three: Be brief.

T: If you do it like this, actually you leave this person in his comfortable zone. Do you have the Chinese expression of "kill arrogance with smile"? No? Now you have it. If I have that person, I'm extremely friendly with that person. Extreme smile. If someone calls me an idiot, I'd say: "My pleasure, Sir". Why do you think many people look arrogant, behave arrogant? Many arrogant persons are very insecure. They are nearly a shy person, so they'll build a "Chinese wall". There are not really many arrogant people in the world, thinking they are better. 70% of arrogant persons are insecure. "Kill arrogance with smile".⁷⁸

It is also through body language that butlers impress their audience with a charismatic presence that is highly stylized. They are trained to present themselves in a graceful, confident and proud manner. A good portion of butler training sessions is "practice" courses for training these butlers-to-be to embody a stylized presence through honing their body language. It is often heard repeated at the training site that "butler never runs". Elegance is meant to be shown in its embodied forms of steady gait and discernable ease in their movements.

4.4 Pride

On an extremely humid summer afternoon in this southwestern city, I followed the July group to a flight of swirling staircases in a lobby within the luxurious gated community where the training site was located. The butler trainees were all formally dressed in trim business suits, with both

⁷⁸ This episode was manually recorded verbatim during a training session. The trainer spoke English, and the students/trainees responded in Mandarin Chinese. The students' responses quoted were translated by the translator on site from Chinese to English.

hands they held a silver-colored service tray, on which a few colorful fist-sized rubber balls were placed. They stood upright, with necks strenuously elongated. With a book balanced on top of their head, the July group descended the stairs one after one, wearing a smile of professional amiability. Two equally formally attired trainers were observing from downstairs at varied angles, while giving instructions intermittently: “Upright! Straight! Be proud! Be elegant! You are now allowed to feel like Princess X or Prince.” “It is important to look elegant. That’s why butler never runs.” “It’s like ballet, first your legs then the step follows.” “We want you to have a real smile, not a fake smile. Again, it’s a kind of talent. Think positive and we have to help you to think something positive to make you smile.”⁷⁹ Rounds and rounds of rehearsals amid flying rubber balls, toppled books, and frozen smiles of wariness, the July group learned their steps towards elegance. This is also part of their comportment training to present themselves with pride, a state in which service professionals rarely present themselves, particularly in the mainland where the less formally educated constitute the majority of this department of the labor force. Butler trainers from outside of mainland China have also observed the cultural peculiarity of this manner of self-presentation, in general, as well as in the service industry. As the Swiss trainer stated in class:

Always be proud of yourself. Somehow, in general, a cliché. Somehow from your tradition, Chinese, Asian, Indonesian, to show in your body language humbleness, which is in the way nice, but it’s not the way to show your body language in Europe, to show in the body language of the butler profession. It’s the difference especially between Thailand or Indonesia (gesturing), to show, to make them

⁷⁹ These quotes were originally stated in English and manually recorded verbatim. During this training, a translator simultaneously translated these instructions to Mandarin Chinese for trainees to comprehend.

small. I'm not making fun, please, very important. At X⁸⁰ China, be proud. If you are proud and stand upright, talk loud and clear, and still smile, it's a talent. Someone cannot do that. That's the minimum that I'm expecting from you in the next six weeks. Best thing is smiling while talking, at least smile between you're talking. We are coming now into the body language as well. I'm repeating these things. The point is being proud. Smile. There is a very fine line. I'm just telling you from my experience. I always have a bit of problem when people meet me for the first time. They think I'm a little arrogant. I was happy and not smiling too much. Since I'm leaning and dealing with other people, it has changed a little bit. It's very important to be proud, but not be arrogant.

Butler professionals speak the European body language of pride, but not the "Asian humbleness", in the words of the Swiss trainer. On multiple occasions, different butler trainees from outside of China commented on a peculiar way many females in the mainland seat themselves - tugging both hands in between the mid-thighs thus forming a slight arch between shoulders. It was noted as an etiquette faux pas for butlers, on the ground that such a posture makes one look smaller, therefore appearing not confident. A proud butler needs to show confidence through comportment, emitting an air of "ease and confidence" that are "aristocratic" in their cultural origin⁸¹. Although the very idea of "proud service professional" risks sounding oxymoronic, particularly in mainland China, this novel professional sentiment of pride can equally be an attribute that makes the butler into a charismatic character in the Chinese market. Coming from the historical era "when time was slow and gracious and life was lived with elegance and style"⁸², butlers are thought to inherit the pride shared within the society of aristocratic gentlemen of

⁸⁰ "X" here stands for the name of the butler training academy.

⁸¹ Wouters, Cas. 2007. P. 81.

⁸² This quote is obtained from the butler training academy's website.

yesterday. Today, butler trainees, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, are taught to embody the professional proud body language of staid European convention - to “stand upright, talk loud and clear, and still smile”. The cultural exoticness of this professional sentiment is evidently shown in the contrast that while the Swiss trainer himself is more concerned about appearing overtly proud therefore being criticized as a sign of arrogance, his Chinese students’ focus was instead acquiring the body language of proud confidence that they currently lacked in their professional presence. But this sense of pride should not be confused as only meaning an elegant appearance and graceful comportment. At the time when the butler is introduced as a modern profession today, butlers’ inner identification with their professional role’s past and present is sought as the deeper ground for their pride. The project director of this butler training academy, one of the few mainland-Chinese butlers who were trained at the academy’s European campus, exalted butlers’ performance of professional pride as one of the quintessential attributes that make their presence valuable to their audience in today’s China:

We have been researching on how to mold people, their image and projected temperament. In fact, it is beyond the idea that they (butler trainees) need to acquire more knowledge. From the very beginning, the first step is their image. The second is their comportment, how they walk. A very simple example to quickly improve one’s projected temperament. You need to press your shoulder down as much as you can. When you walk, lift the bottom of your ears upward as much as you can. This will create a very different visual impression on our customers. Yet, the most important thing is that it (pride) should come from one’s heart. You can see it. At the end of the butler training program, they (butler trainees) have a *test* in the format of *formal dinner*. We invite some relatively high-end people, and they (butler trainees) provide service for them. They show pride that comes from their heart. They feel the pride of their profession. When there is this sense of

pride, it looks so different. Now Chinese people are generally impetuous. Everywhere money is the only goal. There is no respect for any industry nor any profession. So, regardless of what we choose to do, we have to do it enthusiastically, feeling proud to be in this profession, this feeling. When you do feel this way...did you see our videos? (*Yikun*: Yes.) So, you see when the butlers come out, they do not appear cowering. They hold themselves upright, with a firm expression in their eyes. The state of feeling proud can easily move others. It triggers, exerts influence on others. This is the distinctive feel that butlers' art of service can offer⁸³.

Presenting themselves with pride takes on a renewed significance when today's China is framed as increasingly forming a hegemony of the capitalist pecuniary culture – “everywhere money is the only goal”. In a social environment that is characterized as being surrounded by “impetuous” people with no respect for “any industry nor any profession”, modern butlers stand out for their signature pride, an emotional state that is viewed as a form of cultural distinction even bordering on being countercultural. Almost suggesting the edginess of cultural rock stars, butlers' pride is presented as an embodied symbol of cultural and spiritual independence – autonomous beings that are insular against both the ideologized mainstream culture and the pecuniary culture brought by the market. This spiritual stamina is turned into an alluring virtue to the “high-end people” who might well be these butlers' future employers. In the state-capitalist system where economic elites are allied with the established political elites through institutionalized clientelism yet not on an equal footing, a desire for cultural and spiritual independence is not hard to comprehend. This aspiration grows even stronger in the face of the cultural and moral critique

⁸³ The interview was conducted in Mandarin Chinese, and the quoted text was translated from Chinese to English by me. Words and phrases in italics in the quoted texts were originally said in English.

coming from below. Proud butlers are bestowed with the power to “move” or even “influence” the economically better-off others by their sense of pride in the most visceral form of upright posture, steady gait, and the “firm expression in their eyes”. The proud butler is given a charming aura of a principled man with the rare courage to go against the cultural grain of the world where their livelihood lies.

4.5 The Art of Service

As for pragmatic duties, modern butlers are specialists trained to provide service in private households. “What is service?” In the military review style, a trainer posed this question in English in front of the neatly lined July group standing in attention, one fist away from each other. “Sir! Service is technical skills. Sir!” They answered in English in a well-synchronized manner, loud and clear. The technical skills that butler trainees need to acquire have a wide range. It matches up their reputed functional role as a “swiss knife” or “encyclopedia” of private households. Like homely “aunties” (*ayi-s*) working as domestic helpers, butlers need to be able to complete mundane tasks like housekeeping, dishwashing, and doing the laundry. The July group’s training in fact started with an hours-long lesson on how to clean a toilet bowl properly, by following a set of “correct” steps. Then in the following weeks, every morning immediately after the morning briefing given by the Training Director, butler trainees went onto their housekeeping routine at the X Club. They dusted furniture, washed and polished cups and glasses, cleaned washrooms, replaced toilet paper rolls, and prepared the coffee machine for the day ahead. Yet unlike “aunties”, butlers were trained to carry out these everyday tasks by applying standardized procedures and methods; when they iron clothes, maintain a wardrobe filled with different fabrics and for various social occasions, or clean and polish leather shoes. Since the private butler

is a professional role catering to affluent households, the July group was also introduced to the activities that can only be imagined for the private households of HNWI: different types of luxury sports enjoyed by the affluent, the taxonomy of fine wine and tea from China and abroad, different titles of the heads of state and the customary ways for announcing them according to international protocols, room service without intruding on the privacy of their “principles”, and aesthetically pleasant ways for arranging florals, folding napkins, or making a bowtie. Most importantly, whatever task butlers take on, they are supposed to do it in style and with panache:

When serving something, always put on gloves; and clear something, take off gloves, to let the employer now I’m serving you versus I’m clearing you. When serving the table, what’s the very first thing to do? Check the overall environment and cleanness of the dining room. Once the table is set, you cannot touch anything on the table as the dust would come down. Have to do all the work before setting the table. Before starting to set the table, a few things: must know the number of guests, the seating plan, the menu and the wines, diets of guests, the theme of the dinner, if any, the dining schedule, preference of Mr/Mrs. X (imaginary employers). Based on the answers you can set the table. There are five things normally for setting the table: the chairs, first place the chairs. Many tables are made of very beautiful wood, so you’ll place the table protector, silence pad, or molten on the table. Place the ironed tablecloth on the table, with final ironing to be done at the table. Carefully measure the table. Carefully measure the table. Base on your measurements, place candelabras, centerpieces, and other decoration on the table, knowing that they may not be higher than eyes. Based on your calculation, you place the cover plates, and everything else. Assuming ten guests, table size 300 x 120 cm. Calculation: $300 / (4+1)$. Symmetry is one of the most important things when you set the table. The show plate, the distance from the edge of the plate to the edge of the table is one inch. Should be the same everywhere. One of the most important things is symmetry. As a guest, when you

walk around the table, everywhere would be the same. Left side is fork; right is knife. Everything is lined up everywhere. First course glass, white wine glass is above the main course knife, exactly the same everywhere. This is why should use the measuring tool to make sure everywhere is exactly the same⁸⁴.

A heightened sense of ceremonial theatricality permeated the training program, as if everything unfolding in the X Club was encapsulated in an absolute temporal-spatial confine where the order of propriety reigns. The ritualistic instructions on the dinner-table setting appeared to mesmerize the July group with excessively complex and detailed instructions, as the above excerpt illustrates. A slide was also shown while the above instructions were given - "It's all about style, elegance, decorum, harmony, flexibility, patience, synchronization, uniformity, consistency, and symmetry."⁸⁵ Assuming their classic role as the gentlemen's gentlemen, butlers are here seen as cultural masters of domestic matters with impeccable taste. By putting on or taking off their signature white gloves, they raise or draw the curtain of the stage show of table setting. Almost as if with a touch of magic, the mundane task of table setting is transformed into a set of procedures demanding both an eye for aesthetic beauty and a semi-scientific rigor. With excruciating professionalism, they execute a carefully designed service plan by attending to the minutest details like placing table protectors and silencer pads. No crises on the tablecloth can escape from their scrutinizing eyes. With the assistance of specialized measuring tools, they calculate the exact space to be allocated to each guest mathematically, based on the size of the table and the number of guests. They place candelabras, centerpieces, and complete sets of

⁸⁴ This excerpt was recorded verbatim manually during a training session on the "Art of Service". It was originally stated in English.

⁸⁵ This slide was originally in English.

utensils with a sense of understated ceremonial theatricality that is no less luxurious, according to aesthetic principles of harmony, synchronization, uniformity, consistency, and symmetry.

Not only the table setting for formal dinners, but also daily lunching was turned into a ceremonial event. Every day at lunchtime, the student head-butler of the day had to plan out a division of labor amongst themselves in advance. Some ironed and placed the tablecloth; Some placed the red velvet chairs with the same forty-five-degree angle towards the dinner table; Some designed a theme and then decorated the dinner table accordingly; Some placed plates, glasses and utensils. Last but not least, the “music master” of the week would pick a music track and appropriately adjust the volume of the background music during lunchtime. Every day a minute before 12:30pm, butler trainees would start to line up in a row to wait in attention. The music was then turned off at 12:30pm sharp. The student-head butler would step out to ring a bell, announcing in English: “My Lord, Ladies and Gentlemen, lunch is served.” The background music went up again after this moment of solemn theatricality. In calling out for the lord, ladies and gentlemen, it was as if a tribute was being collectively paid to the butler profession’s aristocratic ancestors and their established traditions. Although the July group’s daily lunch was offered in a buffet style, they had to learn the differences among a good range of professional table-service styles that were unheard-of prior to the training: French service, Russian service, English service, silver service, family service, banquet service, and buffet service. Among all styles, only the “ballet service” was crowned as *the* true art of service for its synchronized aesthetic pleasantness. It was designated as the real “royal service” solely reserved for “very important guests” in the royal society. In this close association with the high art form of ballet, butlers are also turned into the artists of households.

Many afternoons of the training program were devoted to practicing the academy's signature "ballet service", the finest art of butling. Butler trainees were instructed to enter the dining room at the X Club in a synchronized manner "like ballet", holding a service tray populated with wine glasses and bouncing rubber balls. They were constantly reminded by the trainer to present themselves in an elegant and proud manner, yet not without the touch of a pleasant smile. They held both elbows close to their body with visible tension, at a three-finger distance between the tray and their belly button. Once the synchronized line of butler trainees had encircled the dinner table as they all entered the dining room, upon their peripheral vision's capturing of the discreet sign given out by the designated head of the group, in concert the team served their imaginary guests. The art of ballet service was further polished with great patience through practicing similar exercises with more complexity. The trainees were required to turn the wine glasses on their service plate upside down while marching on around the dinner table, at the same time not forgetting to elegantly yet steadily swing away from the rushing guest role-played by another trainer. The head-trainer instructed the group: "Remember Chairman Xi⁸⁶ is still watching you. He is a very respectful person. He has great respect of his private staff. You have to look pretty and elegant⁸⁷." The two swirling lines of butler trainees circling around the table were then asked to repeat sentence by sentence, and in English: "My pleasure Chairman Xi!" "Your champagne Chairman Xi!" "How I may be of service, Chairman Xi?" "It's my pleasure, Chairman Xi!" These ambitious butlers-to-be who initially joined the program with the hope to serve the HNWI were also led to aim higher to offer their service to the "noble and aristocratic"

⁸⁶ "Chairman Xi" refers to the Chairman of the People's Republic of China: Xi Jinping. He has been in office since 15 March 2008.

⁸⁷ These quotes were originally stated in English.

class in the mainland. It strangely echoed the emphasis in the butler training institute's whitepaper that "only nobles and aristocrats with titles were qualified" to have a butler in the distant past. In a media interview during my stay, the founder of this academy was telling the journalist: "It would be a dream come true if President Xi would invite my school to come to Beijing to train some of his staff. I know they have many foreign dignitaries visiting. It would be nice to help them."

5. The Performativeness of the New Performative Man

The preceding pages situate the emergence of a new professional type, the modern butler, in the figurational position of China's HNWI. The new economic elites' status anxiety is not driven by the commonly-observed fear of condemnation from below⁸⁸, but by a lack of social status that could match their quickly-accumulated economic power in a state capitalist society. This group's relational dynamism with the politburo class and more cultured others have channeled the former towards an "imagined"⁸⁹ cultural tradition as a source of social distinction to deflect from the caricatured image of being culturally-uncouth and morally-base, while showing due deference to the politburo elites. Along this process, the modern butler emerged within the HNWI's pecuniary culture in formation.

The performativeness of the new professional type is conspicuously formal, cultural and moral. The modern butler's costumed presence, courteous speech, communicative tact, professional pride, and art of service produce a vicarious service professional with an image of the principled and cultured man. But the cultural contradictions embodied in the new

⁸⁸ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984; Wouters, Cas. 2007.

⁸⁹ Osburg, John. 2013. P. 139.

professional type reveal that just like the butler's performativeness appears but a form of cultural masking, the HNWI's social distinction could hardly be sought beyond the realm of commercial culture. In a state capitalist society where functional democratization has very a limited impact on the distribution of political power, the pattern of social interdependence tends to persist structurally. The pursuit of social distinction, as seen in the case of China's HNWI, tends to be enacted through commercially fashioning uprooted cultural signs and symbols. The modern butler's polished demeanor, or what Erasmus referred to as "the outward honesty of the body"⁹⁰ (Thomas 2018: 27), can perhaps be understood as professional performance of inward moral character to be projected onto its employer through this role's vicariousness that binds the modern butler and its employer symbolically. With the emergence of this professional type is a form of social distinction that is based upon yet beyond pecuniary prowess, actualized through the vicarious performance of cultural and moral *suzhi* (quality).

⁹⁰ Thomas, Keith. 2018. P. 27.

Chapter 4. The Expert on Self-Betterment

1. Introduction: A New Market of the Malleable Self

A distinctive function of etiquette professionals in today's mainland China is serving as the expert on self-amelioration. It differentiates these professionals from their peers of etiquette consultants to be found outside of the mainland, particularly in North America, beyond the exclusive focus on providing services catering to organizational needs. The more conspicuous presence of etiquette professionals in today's mainland is partly accounted for by their comparatively more diverse clientele base beyond commercial organizations. Chapter Two of this dissertation presents a case study of an etiquette entrepreneur seeking business opportunities through working with local government departments and offices. However, the distinctive type of service that differentiates these etiquette professionals in the mainland from their peers elsewhere is personal etiquette training. These etiquette experts refer to themselves as "teachers" for self-betterment, rather than, for example, consultants in a more impersonal tone. How shall we understand this distinctive functional feature observed in the professionalization process of etiquette professionals in the mainland, as well as its sociocultural implications? This chapter explores this characteristic through a close analysis of five etiquette businesses that exclusively or largely specialize in etiquette training for individuals. But to better understand this phenomenon in its peculiar historical and sociocultural context, a brief discussion on the cultural and structural preconditions for the malleable self is necessary. One term that has been

proposed, mostly by European social theorists, to describe such preconditions is “individualization”. These developments will be discussed under this rubric.

Calling a social process “individualization” introduces a great deal of ambiguities given its much-contested definition to this date. It should be noted that the notion of “individualization” emerged in a peculiar political and sociocultural environment, in particular from a comparative perspective. Although “individualization” is largely used to describe societal changes in western countries since the second half of the twentieth century - the age of “high modernity” or “second modernity” characterized by neoliberalism and globalization - this development is thought to be preconditioned by “a constitutional basis for individualization”¹. It is within western social environments with a long-established culture of democracy and institutionalized basic individual rights that individualization emerged as a significant theoretical concept to analyze structural changes manifested through the relationship between the individual and society, although Norbert Elias argues that even such a dichotomous framing is itself a historical product in European societies along what he refers to as “the civilizing process”². Common to the influential works on individualization by Zygmunt Bauman³, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim⁴, Norbert Elias, and Anthony Giddens⁵ is the theme of the increasing prominence of the individual in relation to society. The process is said to be reciprocal; that is, increased individualism implies

¹ Beck, Ulrich. 2014. “Individualization Is Eroding Traditions Worldwide: A Comparison Between Europe and China.” Pp. 90–99 in *Ulrich Beck: Pioneer in Cosmopolitan Sociology and Risk Society, Springer Briefs on Pioneers in Science and Practice*, edited by U. Beck. Cham: Springer International Publishing. P. 98.

² Elias, Norbert. 2001. *Society of Individuals*. Reissue edition. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

³ Bauman, Zygmunt. 2001. *The Individualized Society*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity.

⁴ Beck, Ulrich, and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. 2002. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*. London: Sage.

⁵ Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. 1st edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

the relaxing of traditional norms and institutions such as family, kinship, religion, gender and class. In Elias's vocabulary, the "I-We balance" has been tilting towards the former. This developmental trend of individualization has been presented as both emancipatory (particularly evident in the work of Giddens) and pathological for neoliberalism-swept western societies. It has been argued that this process could lead to issues such as transforming the individual into the locus of reflexive identity work hollowed out by consumerism, new forms of scapegoating in response to structural problems, or even the site of political action or life(style) politics. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim summarized such a social condition brought by individualization as "disembedding without reembedding"⁶, producing "*homo optionis*"⁷. While the individualization process that has been unfolding in China also elevates the presence and agency of the individual in relation to society to some degree, this process has its own characteristics for emerging within a different historical, political and sociocultural context.

China's path to individualization began in the absence of "cultural democracy", "a welfare state regime", and "classic individualism and political liberalism"⁸. In this society where Confucianism has been its dominant cultural and moral tradition, with rare exceptions⁹, the individual has independent value without serving a collective end. Given the central importance of "self-cultivation (修身)" in Confucian thoughts, neither are its moral sources thought to be intrinsic to the individual, nor is the importance of self-cultivation self-referential. Self-cultivation

⁶ Beck, Ulrich, and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. 2002. P. xxi.

⁷ *ibid.* P. 5.

⁸ Yan, Yunxiang. 2010. "The Chinese Path to Individualization." *The British Journal of Sociology* 61(3):489–512. P. 510.

⁹ The exceptions include the Daoist/Taoist thoughts represented by Lao-Tze (Laozi, 老子; 571 BC – circa 470 BC) and Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi, 庄子; 369 BC – 286 BC), as well as the Neo-Daoist/Taoist *xuanxue* (玄学) from the Wei-Jin period (魏晋; 220-589). See: Yang, Nianqun. 2019. "The Rise and Fall of 'Individualism' before and after the May Fourth Movement." *Chinese Studies in History* 52(3–4):209–22. P. 211.

acquires significance as the means towards “regulating the family, governing the state, and (then) bringing peace to the world (齐家治国平天下)”¹⁰. In late-Qing and early Republican China, the Confucian cultural and moral traditions became challenged by the imported social Darwinist ideas that enacted a “moral secularization process”¹¹, comparable to that of secularization in the Age of European Enlightenment. Socio-structurally, the abolishment of the Imperial Examination System (科举制度)¹² in 1905 and the termination of the autocratic monarchy (帝制) in 1911 furthered the disenchantment of traditional Confucian values¹³. Under the influence of utilitarianism, in particular the ideas discussed by John Stuart Mill in his *On Liberty* (1859)¹⁴, a spurt of public deliberation on individualism (个人主义) among the intelligentsia unfolded during the May Fourth Movement (五四运动)¹⁵ period. Individualism as an ideology differs from individualization as the social process of institutionalizing individualism¹⁶, yet the ideological explorations at the time are socially significant for shaping the conception of the relationship between the individual and society in the Chinese context. Modern Chinese society was sought to be built under the guidance of “Mr. Democracy (德先生)”, “Mr. Science (赛先生)”, and “Ms.

¹⁰ This idea is from *the Book of Rites: the Great Learning* (《礼记·大学》).

¹¹ 段煉 (Duan, Lian). 2013. “‘穆姑娘’的關懷 - ‘五四’啟蒙思想中的新道德觀研究 (The Concerns of “Miss Morals”: The New Morality of May Fourth Chinese Intellectuals).” *新史學 (New History)* 24(1): 107-156. P. 109.

¹² The Imperial Examination System (keju zhidu, 科举制度) was formally established in the Sui Dynasty (隋朝; 581-619) for selecting bureaucrats by merits, specifically by written examinations on the knowledge of Chinese classics.

¹³ Duan, Lian. 2013. P. 108.

¹⁴ Its Chinese version was translated by the Chinese thinker and translator Yan Fu (严复; 1854-1921) and published in 1903 as 《群己权界论》 (literally means on the rights of and boundaries between the group and the individual).

¹⁵ The May Fourth Movement occurred in Beijing on 4 May, 1919. It was a political movement mainly led by university students and the intelligentsia. The movement began as protests against the Chinese government’s weak response to the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War and Japan’s taking over of Shandong province after Germany’s occupation. The event has been commemorated as the Youth Day (五四青年节) in China since 1939. It should also be noted that the May Fourth period is often employed to refer to the period of 1915-1925.

¹⁶ Beck, Ulrich. 2014. Pp.92-95. See also: Beck, Ulrich, and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. 2002. P. xxi.

Moral (莫小姐)¹⁷. Throughout the May Fourth period, whereas the individual liberty and pursuit of happiness became legitimate ends, self-realization remained directed towards collective objectives, echoing the Confucian idea of “*xiuqizhiping* (修齐治平; self-cultivation, regulating the family, managing the state, and bringing peace to the world)”. Ardent attention generated onto individualism therefore appeared short-lived under the urgent political imperative at the time - to “save the country”¹⁸ from Western imperialism. Swiftly, the individual liberated, ideologically, from its traditional social structures were again subsumed under new alternatives of “state”, “society”, “group”, or “party”¹⁹. This episode also inadvertently reinforced negative connotations of individualism as suggesting selfishness and egoism, echoing the view of the private as “the source of human evil in Chinese thought and behaviour”, as reflected in the idea of “the world is for all” (天下为公) from the Confucian classic of *the Book of Rites* (礼记)²⁰. This historically long-sustained collectivist view of the individual therefore forged a deeply-seeded relationship of dependency between the individual and state, in a social environ where voluntary associations without the intrusion of official or private interests had been scanty²¹. Even when “cracks” in its social structure started to produce an increasingly prevalent desire for individual autonomy and

¹⁷ Referring “democracy” and “science” as “Mr. Democracy (德先生)”, “Mr. Science (赛先生)” first emerged in an article published by Chen Duxiu (陈独秀; 1879-1942) - a Chinese socialist revolutionary, politician, thinker and author - at the literary magazine founded by him: *Xin Qingnian*/La Jeunesse (新青年; New Youth), on 15 January, 1915. Since then, the vivid images of Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science became widely adopted as two figures of Enlightenment, in particular during the New Culture Movement (新文化运动; 1915-1923) and the May Fourth Movement (五四运动; 1919). “Ms. Moral (莫小姐; 穆姑娘)” was included as a third Enlightenment figure for countering the decline of private morality, likely by Wu Zhihui (吴稚晖; 1865-1953) in 1923. See: Lu, Ping. 2007. “Beyond Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science: The Introduction of Miss Moral and the Trend of Moral Revolution in the New Culture Movement.” *Frontiers of History in China* 2(2):254–86.

¹⁸ Yang, Nianqun. 2019. P. 218.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 221.

²⁰ Ibid. P. 210.

²¹ Rankin, Mary Backus. 1993. “Some Observations on a Chinese Public Sphere.” *Modern China* 19(2):158–82.

self-assertion, the psychological inertia of dependency and conformity appears slow to dissipate²².

As an actual social process of institutional-structural change, individualization in China was partially set in motion during the Mao era (1949-1976)²³, although this view has been challenged by commentators who note the persistent importance of family in charting interpersonal relationships in contemporary Chinese society²⁴. During this first phase of individualization in the Mao era, the party-state replaced traditional social categories, most prominently kinship networks, as the key force for determining a person's social position and life chances. The second phase of individualization may be said to have begun with the economic reform and opening up (1978), since when the market has become another significant force in shaping the relationship between the individual and society. Gradual economic deregulation, although throughout managed by the state, disembedded individuals from urban work units (工作单位) and rural production brigades (生产大队), the major regulatory categories during the Mao era. The once-rigid household registration system²⁵ (户口) was also gradually relaxed along with an increasingly mobile labor market, represented by the floating class of rural migrant workers seeking employment in urban areas. Given the signs of enhanced right awareness and cultural tolerance in this second phase of individualization, the broader social and political context in China remains fundamentally different. It is therefore apt to characterize China's path

²² Pye, Lucian W. 1991. "The State and the Individual: An Overview Interpretation." *The China Quarterly* 127:443–466.

²³ Yan, Yunxiang. 2010.

²⁴ A counter argument of this view can be found in: Barbalet, Jack. 2016. "Chinese Individualization, Revisited." *Journal of Sociology* 52(1):9–23. P.9.

²⁵ The *hukou* (户口; household registration) system in the history of PRC restricted populational mobility across regions and limited rural migrants' access to a set of social benefits in urban cities, such as healthcare, pension and educations. It has been a source of inequality in particular between rural and urban populations in mainland China.

to individualization as exhibiting “a reverse temporal sequence to the European”²⁶ and appearing simultaneously “premodern, modern, and late-modern”²⁷. But similar to the individualization process in Western Europe at the time of neoliberalism and globalization, China’s top-down policy changes aimed at facilitating economic development have also had the effect of transforming the individual into the basis of reproduction and the site of reflexive identity work. Similar to western societies in Giddens’s analysis, self-identity gradually becomes “a reflexively organized endeavor”²⁸ of constructing a coherent biographic narrative of the self, within the backdrop of multiplying choices, elevated importance of abstract systems, and the sequestration of experience in organizational and everyday life. The individual’s pursuit of ontological security led to the emergence of life politics of self-actualization that transform body as its key site²⁹, yet perhaps not for its being the site of institutionalized oppression in the Chinese context. As the social structure becomes increasingly complex with the joined force of the globalizing market economy, the individual, state, global market, and emerging civil society intertwine into new relational patterns. These developments greatly facilitated the idea of the malleable self in becoming a more commonplace notion. In addition, the structure of the self appeared to become more frequently seen described as comprising an inside and an outside that are separated “as if by a visible wall”³⁰, a tendency that will also be shown in the cases analyzed in the following section. It suggests that the process of individualization could modify the makeup of the self, as

²⁶ Beck, Ulrich. 2014. P. 98.

²⁷ Yan, Yunxiang. 2010. P. 510.

²⁸ Giddens, Anthony. 1991. P. 5.

²⁹ Ibid. Pp. 35-69; 99-108; 217-226.

³⁰ Elias, Norbert. 2001. P. 125.

perceived by the individual. This more complex and layered view of the self could also be taken as a suggestive sign of its increasing reflexivity.

Commercial etiquette training for individuals could not emerge without the process of individualization discussed above. During the first phase of partial individualization an unintended consequence of the Mao era, the highly ideologized cultural climate was most salient during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (文化大革命; 1966-1976), a political purge largely fought on the cultural front. At the time, the “four olds (四旧)” of “old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits” of both feudal and bourgeois origins were cast as “monsters and demons (牛鬼蛇神)”³¹ to be swept away by the proletariat. State power was the predominant concern of culture within the realm of the superstructure. Partially a result of the lag in cultural perceptions in reflecting material and structural changes³², while a partial individualization process was initiated in the Mao era, individualistic ideas had no place in the face of the collective endeavor of building a modern socialist country. Self-sacrifice, but not self-betterment, was thought to be “the highest ideal of citizenship”³³; traces of this view can still be discovered in today’s public posters discussed in Chapter One. But only two years after the tumultuous Cultural Revolution, a drastic social and cultural turn occurred with marketization and the accompanying process of individualization in its second phase. Cultural goods were produced no longer solely, or at all, for strengthening the state power, but also for satisfying unfulfilled market needs. The “reciprocated control” between the individual and state was modified by the quickly developing

³¹ The bilingual (English and Chinese) editorial entitled “Sweep Away All Monsters and Demons” (1966) published at *People’s Daily* is available at: <http://chinaheritage.net/journal/essays/sub-essays/mao-zedongs-monsters-and-demons/?lang=zh>

³² Lefebvre, Henri (2008[1991]). *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 1*. London and New York: Verso.

³³ Pye, Lucian. 1991. P. 443.

and globalizing market. The individual's "scope of decision"³⁴ remains constrained as a citizen, but as a consumer, s/he is king.

Yet, the renewed significance of etiquette in the post-reform era was not first for satisfying the personal need for self-betterment. The returned emphasis on the importance of etiquette may be initially exemplified by the semi-commodified functional-professional role of "*liyi xiaojie* (礼仪小姐; Miss Etiquette)" after the economic reform (1978). Young and tall females in ceremonial uniforms were hired or recruited as volunteers (for governmental or official events) for political conferences and conventions, opening ceremonies of sports events and department stores, or business expos and exhibitions. They performed ritualistic and largely ornamental functions such as directing guests, presenting flowers, and assisting in the ribbon-cutting ceremony. As economic globalization progressed, symbolized by China's entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, etiquette became in demand for international businesses. This trend was reflected by the increasing number of business etiquette books published for white-collar business careerists working in large cities since the early 2000s³⁵. But the more general etiquette awareness beyond the business sector, as I discovered in my fieldwork, was attributed by etiquette professionals to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, propagated by the central government as an opportunity to showcase the new China on the world stage. Soon after, a

³⁴ Elias, Norbert. 2001. P. 126.

³⁵ A representative publication is: 周思敏 (Zhou, Simin). 2012. 《你的礼仪价值百万: Your Etiquette Is Worthy of Million Dollars》. Beijing: China Textile Publications (中国纺织出版社). The book is written in Chinese, yet its title is bilingual, as noted here. This book is advertised as part of the "career success series" (职场成功学书系) and "the best etiquette Bible in China" (中国最具含金量的礼仪圣经). The author has published several books on etiquette and appeared in a variety of TV shows in mainland China. It is also interesting to note that in mainland China as in England in the 1840s, etiquette books as a distinctive literature genre emerged concurrently with the "success literature" along the process of commercialization and professionalization. See: Morgan, Marjorie. 1994. *Manners, Morals, and Class in England, 1774-1858*. Macmillan Press. P. 93.

growing variety of commercial etiquette training programs emerged quickly, particularly in more economically developed regions in the mainland. Etiquette trainings expanded from inside the business sector to individual clients.

Today, the composition of etiquette teachers for personal training reflects that of the etiquette profession in the mainland, comprising two groups of culturally-differentiated pedigrees. On the one hand, the vast majority of the first-generation domestically-trained etiquette trainers migrated from the service sector, in particular from commercial airlines, for their professional training on business and service etiquette. Their acquired skills of inconspicuously estranging from the “real” or inner self for managing a professional image were deemed as a valuable asset³⁶. As discovered in my fieldwork, the first-generation domestically-trained etiquette professionals were also joined by a few cross-cultural communication experts from higher education³⁷. They together built an etiquette knowledge system through combining business and service etiquette with theoretical backings on cross-cultural differences, as the shared knowledge base for domestically-trained etiquette professionals for training their organizational and individual clients. On the other hand, a few years later, since the early 2010s, foreign-born or trained etiquette professionals started to appear in this emerging industry in mainland China, with a more exclusive focus on personal etiquette training. At the time,

³⁶ Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2012. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Third Edition, Updated with a New Preface. Berkeley: University of California Press.

³⁷ An example of publications on etiquette by academics is: Peng, Lin. 2011. 《彭林说礼》 (*Peng Lin on Li*). Beijing: Publishing House of Electronic Industry (电子工业出版社). These two groups of domestically-trained etiquette trainers jointly promoted the institutionalization of commercial etiquette training as a new profession. Then around 2000, a few certification systems of commercial etiquette trainers became established by official bodies and commercial entities. Most notable among them are China Human Resources and The Professional Education Development Center (中国人力资源与职业教育发展中心) under the State Council and the American Certification Institute Center.

international media keenly detected this trend and dubbed it as China's western etiquette craze: "20,000 yuan (\$3,243) per group of 10 for an afternoon session" or "100,000 yuan (\$16,216)"³⁸ for a 12-day hostessing class for learning how to elegantly peel and eat an orange or a banana with a knife and fork, correctly pronounce luxury brand names like "*Gucci*", gracefully enjoy traditional British afternoon tea, or strike a charming pose on the red carpet. These boutique etiquette classes appeared to be attracting China's *nouveaux riches*³⁹, tapping on their desire to acquire the high art of "the Bling Dynasty" so as to become the new "nationless citizens" of the "Yachtland"⁴⁰.

A notable feature of the professionalization process of etiquette experts is the sociocultural distance separating these two groups mentioned above. While they jointly institutionalized a nascent professional role, in particular for personal etiquette training, their social distance has so far kept them apart, leading to neither feud nor fusion. Even at the current stage of professionalization, these two groups do not share the same professional certification system. In addition, there has been no trace of open rivalries and conflicts characterizing the initial stage of most professionalization processes⁴¹. This chapter explores the distinctive feature of functional integration with cultural differentiation characterizing the professionalization process of personal etiquette teachers in the mainland, as commercialized experts for self-betterment. The following analysis presents five representative personal etiquette businesses by

³⁸ Mangin, Virginie. 2015. "Western Manners: The Latest Chinese Status Symbol". *BBC*. (<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20150219-the-latest-chinese-status-symbol>)

³⁹ An example of such reports is: Vasel, Kathryn. 2014. CNN. "The Next Big Thing for China's Wealthy: Etiquette Classes". (<https://money.cnn.com/2014/11/19/luxury/wealthy-china-etiquette/index.html>)

⁴⁰ Friedman, Devin. 2015. "The Bling Dynasty". *GQ*. (<https://www.gq.com/story/chinas-richest>)

⁴¹ Elias, Norbert. 1950. "Studies in the Genesis of the Naval Profession." *The British Journal of Sociology* 1(4):291–309.

drawing on ethnographic observation and interviews. Through delineating their own articulated or implied rationales for rendering personal etiquette training meaningful, this analysis intends to show how the two main forces charting China's path to individualization, the party-state and the market, also together shape the ideals of self in the personal etiquette training market. I conclude that these two ideologized images of the ideal self, gentleman with *sprezzatura* and *junzi* (君子; a man of virtue) of moral virtues, can perhaps be understood as commercialized cultural reembedding along China's distinctive path to individualization.

2.1 Individualistic Distinction

2.1.1 Le Transfuge de Classe (Class-changer)

Monsieur Aubert⁴² is well-known in the mainland's etiquette market today. Even those who did not know his full name to the exact spelling could recall "that French etiquette teacher". He has cultivated a signature look of a form-fitting double-breasted suit, worn with a pearl-studded silk cravat, a pocket square, and a pair of socks of matching colors. Now a sought-after western etiquette expert offering private and semi-private classes, he was hard to reach. My interview was finally obtained through a "planned encounter", thanks to the course information published on WeChat. As he was walking out from the training room with his translator-assistant, I greeted: "*Bonjour, Monsieur Aubert!*" After briefly introducing myself and the research project, on spot a one-hour interview was granted, courteously. I came to know that the cultural differences he first experienced as a university exchange student in Shanghai about a decade ago led him to

⁴² Pseudonyms from the same language are used throughout this chapter. For instance, if a native-Chinese person referred herself/himself with an English first-name, a pseudonym in English is chosen for the same individual.

take up this profession. But he was also “chosen”. At numerous media interviews and our conversation, Aubert talked about his family legacy with great pride: the father and uncle of his grandmother provided “a French education to children at the royal court”⁴³ in an African country for a few decades from the early 20th century on and for a few decades. From an early age, his grandmother began instilling in him all that she had learned at the royal court. The family tradition had now been formally passed down to Monsieur Aubert with an engraved signet ring, a symbol worn by European aristocrats in the past, as he explained in an article. The family legacy appeared to give Aubert’s etiquette knowledge an aura of “doxa”, a form of practical learning without first consciously grasping the grammar-like codes structuring habituated practices⁴⁴, therefore a heightened sense of authenticity. So, I asked about the importance of this family legacy, and he responded in a similar rationale that it “somehow gives a tradition” and a feeling “that it goes beyond me”. The broader cultural tradition is seen as the established ground for the cultural legitimation of his expertise. But Aubert’s cultural sophistication was also cosmopolitan and all-rounded. The academy’s website introduced him as “a world’s citizen” who “speaks four languages” and “has lived in several countries with various cultures”, “completed his knowledge in London and Switzerland”, “eager to weave narrower links between the East and the West”. Also an oenophile and an experienced piano player, Aubert was said to enjoy skiing and had been “involved in charity”⁴⁵. His profile was an exemplary one of modern aristocrat with a distinct and omnivorous taste⁴⁶.

⁴³ The quotation is from the etiquette academy’s website’s English version.

⁴⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press. p.168.

⁴⁵ The quoted contents are originally in English.

⁴⁶ Peterson, Richard A. 1992. “Understanding Audience Segmentation: From Elite and Mass to Omnivore and Univore.” *Poetics* 21(4):243–58.

Founded less than a decade ago in the early days of the mainland's western etiquette craze, the Aubert Etiquette Academy in Shanghai has been adapting traditional etiquette rules to today's world, for "creating the ladies and gentlemen of the 21st century" through "proposing them [sic] meaningful, enjoyable and elegant content to reveal the outstanding version of themselves"⁴⁷. Aubert observed that making etiquette into a medium for self-improvement or even upward social mobility is nowadays more prevalent in rapidly-developing countries like China, India, Mexico, and African countries, than in old industrialized countries where the room for upward social mobility has become comparatively limited because of their stabilized social structures. The issue of social mobility appeared to be central to Aubert's conception of the importance of etiquette:

Yikun (Y): And you mentioned in one of your interviews, talking about how social classes can be changed. Class mobility exists.

Aubert (A): Um huh.

Y: And etiquette potentially is one way of doing that. Do you think it's only in China or everywhere?

A: Everywhere.

Y: Using etiquette or learning etiquette.

A: Totally. Generally speaking, no matter which country, there is social mobility. And there is always what we call, I don't know what's in English, but in French we say "*le transfuge de classe*", someone who has changed social class. So this person will always encounter trouble in his new class, because he or she will not feel legitimate in the new class. Even though if he has everything of this class, even if he is rich enough, even if he is cultured enough, but he will always feel that not being born in this class will make him less legitimate with this. So, no matter when there is the change of class, there is always the need of learning the etiquette of

⁴⁷ The quotations are from the etiquette academy's website's English version.

his new class. We always think about (when) there are homeless and poor people become prince and princess, he or she has to learn manners of the royal. True. The contrary is true [...] I come back to what I said in the beginning that China is changing fast, and the social class scene is moving, whereas some countries, especially in Europe, old western countries, they are more structured. And they don't move so fast and so much.

As suggested by Aubert, the internalized lack of legitimacy shared by the upwardly-mobile was thought to be the social-psychological drive that sent wealthy clients to Aubert's etiquette classes. Self-improvement through etiquette training was indeed the most prevalent promotional pitch shared by boutique etiquette businesses in the mainland today⁴⁸. In the Aubert Academy's literature, creating "a better version of ourselves" was often repeated to attract prospective clients. This euphemist⁴⁹ discourse of self-improvement blurs the boundaries and absolves the contradictions between commerce and culture, as well as between mannered presence and a better self in Aubert's narratives. But this cultural trend is gendered, as reflected by his clientele. Predominantly wealthy women between 25-55 years old attend his etiquette classes:

Women. We rarely have men deciding to take it. So, women, from 25 years old to 50, 55 years old approximately. They have kids. And generally, they don't have one. They have more. Because either they have been able to overpass the law before it has been cancelled, or they have some other passport, so they accepted other nationality. So, they are wealthy. But what made them different is not actually the money. Are they very well-connected; are they open to other cultures.

⁴⁸ Another example can be found in: Leong, Charmian. 2020. "Manners Maketh (Wo)Man: Reforming Chinese Manners, One \$23,000 Course at A Time". *A Magazine Singapore*. (<https://read-a.com/reforming-chinese-manners-one-course-at-a-time/>)

⁴⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977; Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. 1st edition. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. P.121.

Have they been travelling; this is the big difference. If they have been living in other countries...either they have been living abroad, travelling; either they have been working in some international firms, yes, they will be sensitive. They will be interested to learn. Otherwise, like I said always, someone living in some, I don't know, in a province of China deep in some villages, without having connections with the rest of the world, why should he change? No need. I would not do it if I was him. You just...etiquette is being the best of yourself in your own environment. So, if you are not living in an environment which is international, why would you learn so many rules of how other people do?

The characterization of women with more than one child is a salient social class and status marker in this sociocultural context⁵⁰. The women who were able to circumvent the strictly-enforced one-child policy spanning over the past three decades had the private wealth to “overpass the law before it has been canceled” or to gain “some other passport”. But Aubert highlighted the group’s “sensitivity” towards other cultures and eagerness to learn as their defining attributes that portray them in a more positive light. The selective emphasis on the dimension of personal merit suggests it as an innate quality, with the effect of deemphasizing its socioeconomic preconditioning of private wealth. The personalized attribute is further distanced from its material base in the remark: “This is something that I really admire them for - they want to be a better person. [...] I never try to, I never judged people by how rich they are, or about their

⁵⁰ To curb the rapidly rising population growth rate after the foundation of People's Republic of China, in 1980 the One-Child Policy was officially carried out nationwide with the publication of “An Open Letter from the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party to All Communist Party Members and Pioneers on the Problem of Controlling the National Population Growth Rate” (《中共中央关于控制我国人口增长问题致全体共产党员、共青团员的公开信》). Till the end of 2015, all urban and rural families were allowed to have only one child, except for ethnic-minorities and families with a handicapped first-born. The Policy was abolished in late 2015 at The Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (中国共产党第十八届中央委员会第五次全体会议), due to a set of social problems resulted, most notably the unbalanced sex ratio, abandonments and infanticides of baby girls particularly in rural areas, and the nation's aging population.

familial background. Never.” In an egalitarian and non-judgmental stance, the praiseworthy personal inclination for self-betterment is disassociated from its economic precondition that enables pricy etiquette training to be a means for self-improvement in the upper social enclave.

Aubert offered exquisite group or individual etiquette classes on “elegant deportment” and “high-end table manners” to modern aristocrats in-the-making. More specialized trainings on photo-posing, public speech, floral arrangement, wine etiquette, afternoon tea etiquette, social or business etiquette, and dress code were also available. Upon my request during our interview, Monsieur Aubert courteously allowed an opportunity to observe a group-class on the “high-end table etiquette” to be held in a few weeks. Even at a lower price for less individualized/private group training, it cost each participant RMB 1888⁵¹ for a three-hour course over a full-course dinner at an exquisite restaurant. Located at the heart of the financial and retail center of Shanghai, the restaurant overlooked the Bund (外滩) from the east bank of the Huangpu River (黄浦江). Its large window panels offered a panorama view of a fantastic Shanghai, particularly after dusk when both sides of the river bank were lit up. Stylized historical banks, trading houses, and clubs in the former foreign settlement of the Bund on the west merged with the new cosmopolitan center of modern skyscrapers and the futurist Oriental Pearl Tower (东方明珠塔)⁵² on the east. Inside the restaurant, the private dining room was completely shielded away from the public view with a burgundy velvet curtain reaching from ceiling to floor. When I arrived, Monsieur Aubert in his signature look of a black double-breast suit with a silky

⁵¹ The pricing strategy is obviously “Chinese”. Since the pronunciation of the number eight sounds much like that of *fa* (发; meaning becoming wealthy), eight is deemed as a lucky number to be included in price tags, telephone numbers, or automobile plates. The Aubert team’s strategic understanding of Chinese culture is evident.

⁵² The Oriental Pearl Tower (东方明珠塔) is a TV tower that was built during 1991-1995. It stands 468m tall and was the tallest structure in China until 2007. It is often taken as one of the symbols of Shanghai.

cravat and a pocket square both in red had been waiting with his French-speaking Chinese assistant/translator in the rest area of the dining room to welcome five female participants. They presented themselves according to the advised “elegant and smart” dress code. The first arrival was a 16-year-old international high-schooler wearing a diamond-embedded pendant and a sparkling hairpin. She spoke impressively fluent English with a polished British accent. Three out of the other four participants who joined the dinner were in their 30s to 40s and could communicate in English with ease. Most of them came from Shanghai and the neighboring cities, and one flew in all the way from China’s south, only for this training session.

After recounting his family legacy, Aubert opened the class by asking: “What is etiquette?” Quoting the Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus’s advice in his 1530 book *The Good Etiquette for Children*⁵³ - “kids, if you want to spit, do not spit on the table but on the ground” - he stressed that etiquette “changes all the time...but etiquette will always be how to give the best of yourself”. Western etiquette was introduced as coming from France, just as did the very word *etiquette*; and the French King Louis XIV was presented as the first to enforce etiquette: “he did in the castle of Versailles, putting etiquette on wall that this group if you want to do this, do this way”⁵⁴. Compressing the history of western etiquette to these pointers was based on Aubert’s observation that Chinese clients appeared to be more interested in practical tips than the history of etiquette rules. The rest of the training was devoted to nuances of western table manners. Assisted with slides and cutlery for hands-on practice, the group learned about the right glass to drink water from, the order to use utensils from outside in, messages suggested

⁵³ The English title of the book is more often translated to: *On Civility in Children*.

⁵⁴ These quoted contents were manually recorded verbatim during the class, as audibility permitted. They were originally stated in English.

by different knife and fork positions, techniques for folding and using napkins, the level of wine or champagne to pull in a wine glass or a champagne flute, the discrete way to remove lipstick mark on glass, and the specialized purposes of seven types of spoons, seven forms of forks, and ten sorts of knives. For the better version of the self-in-the-making, using the oyster fork to eat snails or fish was said to be a grave *faux pas*.

While I was standing in the close-by rest area beside the dinner table and jotting down on my notebook, the group practiced their table manners over an exquisite menu⁵⁵ served with complimentary red wine that was “not just from a nearby store”, in Monsieur Aubert’s words. Everyone appeared fully-absorbed without at all noticing my presence throughout. At the dinner table, Aubert was demonstrating how to take a seat and sit elegantly for making a good impression at the dinner table:

You should not do this [demonstrating sitting while looking down and then dragging the chair closer to the dinner table] for three reasons. First, not very elegant. Second, when you do this, you are losing eye contact. Third, half of the belly leans forward and it’s not good for your body. That’s the way to sit down [demonstrating the proper manner], straight back. And also get up straight back [...] We are seated. Now we are going to see how to place your legs...Do not do this way [demonstrating resting two legs widely apart], ladies. If with dress, close knees. They look longer, one backward, another pointing forward. How to cross legs? When you cross your legs, keep your knees together. Shouldn’t have space between the two. It looks slimmer. How to make legs longer and slimmer? You can’t cross your legs when facing people...You should have a good posture. Open

⁵⁵ The dinner menu included a starter of Australian beef tenderloin Carpaccio truffle sauce, a choice of main course between Angus grain fed beef tenderloin and Diavola-style chicken herb and roasted chili bread crumb, Sicilian caponata, and a dessert of the restaurant’s signature tiramisu.

shoulder. Up. Down. To keep this posture. I'll show you this exercise from my grandmother⁵⁶.

An Academy-name-embedded red ribbon was gently tied across each participant's shoulder and finished at the back in a butterfly-knot, to cultivate grace that is supposed to be shown through bringing food to mouth in an upright posture, but not otherwise with an unpleasant haunched back. "Once again, a method from my grandmother. What you can't do is open your arms. If the papers fall, no dessert." The dinner increasingly resembled a laborious drill, with each participant having two hotel letterheads tugged under both arms and a book laid flat on top of their heads. Further, a wine glass was stuck horizontally between the back and the chair's backrest for those striving harder to acquire elegant grace. But Aubert's cosmopolitan sociability made the ambiance in the dining room amiable and relaxed throughout. He was forward in giving others compliments: "You have a beautiful dress"; and courteous in offering well-worded suggestions: "Shall we try?" He engaged everyone around the table with casual chats on light topics: "Which city are you from?" "What's your favorite subject at school?" "How do you like the red wine?" When the dinner was about to conclude based on the training schedule, a certificate delicately rolled up and fastened with the Academy-name embedded red ribbon was presented by Monsieur Aubert to each lady: "Thank you very much for coming to the class. Thank you so much. This is the certificate to have you in my class as student." After another round of selfies and group photos with the colorful contour of the Oriental Pearl Tower in the background, Aubert sent off these newly-certified ladies through the velvet curtain with a gentlemanly hand kiss.

⁵⁶ The instructions were manually recorded verbatim during the class; they were originally stated in English.

In the “dream of becoming upper class” and “with the pleasure to feel different types of manners”⁵⁷, etiquette was presented as the illusionary passport to legitimacy for “*le transfuge de classe*”. For global cosmopolites-to-be, the mannered presentation of the socioeconomically-upgraded self in elegant table manners and graceful postures is culturally-externalized material distinction, in which the codes of conduct were largely imported from old industrialized countries where the bourgeois culture first emerged. To Monsieur Aubert and his wealthy clients, personal etiquette training is the means for efficiently converting their economic capital into individually embodied forms of cultural capital⁵⁸. The neoliberal order of worth based on a person’s economic achievement is translated into cultural refinement with *sprezzatura*. To be performed to their peers, the air of elegant nonchalance should be devoid of traces of studious effort for its acquisition⁵⁹. Only measured confidence and graceful ease were deemed suitable cultural expressions of the exceptional socioeconomic positions that this group aspires to become a part of. Artful nonchalance rooted in the “fear of deception”⁶⁰ combines with the fear of the accusation of hypocrisy, as a powerful delegitimizing force for the self-conception of this group. In this view, a better self is equated to artful self-presentation for open display in the “good society” of peers from the “Yachtland” of cosmopolitan elites. Underlying the apparent attraction of European royalties and aristocrats is a form of individualistic distinction manifested in stylistic

⁵⁷ The quoted contents are from my recorded interview.

⁵⁸ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. “The Forms of Capital.” Pp. 241–58. in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by Richardson. Greenwood Press.

⁵⁹ Castiglione, Baldesar. [1528]1976. *The Book of the Courtier*, translated by George Bull. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.

⁶⁰ Rebhorn, Wayne A. 1978. *Courtly Performances: Masking and Festivity in Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. P. 32. Also see: Morgan, Marjorie. 1994. P.106: “And during a performance, it was important that there be no apparent incongruity between a courtier's real self and the role he was playing at any given time. Such an incongruity met with disapproval at court because it signified a botched, unconvincing performance - not because of any negative associations with role playing itself.”

ease and performative carelessness. The historical origin of this peculiar form of social grace is far less important than it first seems, although the topicality of European aristocracy and royalty had generated great attention in the consumerist market. Presenting etiquette as a form of aestheticized personal distinction for the transnational society economic elites is common among boutique etiquette schools in economically-prosperous cosmopolitan cities like Shanghai and Beijing, and explicit and implicit references to western royal and aristocratic traditions are also commonplace in their marketing materials. While in Shanghai, I contacted another etiquette business with a similar market appeal, yet with an intriguing mix of “foreign” and Chinese etiquette teachers.

2.1.2 *Youseyanjing* (有色眼镜; *Tinted Glasses*)

Through a Baidu⁶¹ search on etiquette schools in Shanghai I found the “Alexandra Style School Training Center [sic]”⁶². While it was thought to be founded by a member of a Western royal family, the English version of its bilingual website was riddled with glaring errors. The business was thought to be named after this royal founder, introduced only by a first-name of “Alexandra”. In a cropped snapshot posted on the website, a glamorously-jeweled blond woman in her 50s was shown in a bright-purple dress, looking away from the camera with a hint of smile. Parts of the “About Us” section read:

...Alexandra Style Institute was established in August 2015, the [sic] founder of the royal family of Austrian descent Alexandra is [sic] a Polish etiquette teacher, practitioners [sic] for more than 10 years, love [sic] Chinese culture, then [sic] the

⁶¹ Baidu is the most popular search engine in mainland China, where Google is currently blocked.

⁶² This is the original English name of the etiquette school, found at its official website. “Alexandra” is pseudonym.

European royal rituals, Shuyuan⁶³ etiquette, business etiquette, Western Etiquette and so on with [sic] the family into Shanghai, from the opening of the professional ritual [sic] in Shanghai. Alexandra is the last granddaughter of [the name of a European country]'s granddaughter⁶⁴ [sic], from childhood with grandparents to learn [sic] the royal rituals, Poland X University after graduation [sic] when [sic] a full-time model, then years later opened his [sic] own ceremonial studio [sic], customers mostly from Local [sic] famous company and clothing brand. Alexandra College currently has a number of foreign etiquette trainers, hundreds of students, training [sic] courses are Western etiquette, elegant manner [sic], Western business etiquette, physical models [sic] and other courses.

When I called the number found on the business's website, Amy answered. She referred to herself as "Teacher *Guo*". This increasingly popular way of self-address in the training industry in China, by affixing "teacher" to the family name, simultaneously secures anonymity and suggests expertise. On the school's website, Amy Guo was introduced as the "co-founder" of the business and an ACI-certified (i.e., American Certification Institute)⁶⁵ etiquette trainer "on business etiquette, social etiquette, service etiquette, and physical deportment". But it quickly came through in our phone conversation that Amy was in charge of everything, from scheduling courses, to taking phone inquiries, managing etiquette trainers, and to renting classrooms, and ordering refreshments. Although initially surprised by my cold call, Amy agreed "to help", for the stated reason that her Eurasian son was also conducting a social project at an international school. I came to know later in the interview that after graduating from a teacher's college, Amy worked as a school teacher in central China. When she married her British husband, they lived in

⁶³ *Shuyuan* (淑媛) refers to graceful and modest ladies who are often coming from well-provided families.

⁶⁴ It was explained in the website's Chinese version that Alexandra is the great-granddaughter of the last royal family member in a European country.

⁶⁵ More information on the ACI can be found in Chapter 3.

the UK for three years before relocating to Shanghai. While her husband had been working as a manager in a transnational company, Amy tried to run a home décor shop and then worked as a salesperson for foreign rental agencies, in search of a career “of value”. A chance meeting with the elegant Alexandra, so “refined, shown in her clothing style, appearance, makeup, and even facial expressions”, led Amy to the etiquette industry about two years ago. She found it a befitting career choice, because of her “greatest strength” in English and “living in an in-between space, with some Chinese elements and some Western elements”⁶⁶.

We first met in person in a weekend “elegant deportment” class. About ten minutes before the start time, a well-kept woman in a trendy mini dress and boldly-designed high-heels dashed out from the elevator to unlock the classroom door. It was Amy. She came to all classes herself to attend to all details including registration, refreshments and the rented properties. Amy opened the class with a very brief introduction: “The founder of our school is an offspring from a royal family. She is currently in Poland. [...] Today’s deportment trainer studied with the Deportment Queen from Austria...Australia. She has many students from abroad and has met celebrities.” The flash of royalties and celebrities was followed by the students’ self-introductions. Most of the women (i.e., six out of seven) in the class were in their 20s-40s and migrated from neighboring provinces to work or study in Shanghai. Their self-reported reasons for attending the class were “not walking in a standard manner”, “appearing a little hunchbacked”, “not able to walk in high-heels with straightened knees”, and “being too casual with personal appearance”. The contracted deportment trainer, Teacher Liu, arrived the night before from a nearby city. It had been five years since she turned herself from a clothing-store

⁶⁶ The quoted contents were from the audio-recorded interview conducted in Chinese and translated by me.

owner to a deportment trainer. She wore the professional uniform of a black bodysuit, with a sheer-pink scarf gently flowing down all along her back. The training began with a music track that was quite a mix, from funky disco beats to choirs from the film *Les Choristes* (2004), to Sarah Brightman's "Love Changes Everything" (2005), and then to Beethoven's "Für Elise" on piano. As Teacher Liu demonstrated each move in front, the eager students copied studiously: stretching the back vertically and then horizontally; using the core strength to mobilize glute muscles; standing upright against the wall with two feet 30 degrees apart; raising and lowering legs on tiptoe like in ballet dance; walking the "mountain-climbing steps (登山步)" on the balls of feet with both purlicues held forward to make hands look smaller; practicing Mei-Lanfang⁶⁷ eye movements by letting eyeballs race after a swirling finger; lifting the masseter muscles to find the perfect angle of smiling; walking with a catwalk strut like "the noblest queen" and placing one hand at "the thinnest part of waist" for a perfect proportion; posing as if shielding the sun with one hand, or appreciating a precious gemstone held by both hands, or placing the right hand under the left cheek while looking the opposite way to appear deeply lost-in-thoughts. Teacher Liu said to the class: "Elegance is the transformation after studying (deportment). The best way for a woman to love herself is not (buying) luxury-brand handbags, but becoming elegant inside and out."⁶⁸

In addition to the physical deportment class, children's etiquette classes (儿礼) also appeared popular at Amy's etiquette school. It was a business strategy on her part. When we first met, Amy expressed her thoughts that the etiquette industry is a product of the "civilizing

⁶⁷ Mei Lanfang (梅兰芳; 1894-1961) is the stage name of Mei Lan (梅澜), a Chinese Peking Opera artist. He is internationally renowned for playing female characters (danjue, 旦角) in a highly expressive and skillful manner.

⁶⁸ These phrases and sentences were originally stated in Chinese in class and translated to English by me.

process”, and her business had been trying to respond to the needs in the market. She observed that devoted Chinese parents never shirked from investing in their children’s future, so maybe expanding on the school’s course offerings on children’s etiquette was a promising direction to go. One such class I observed was held in the X Club in an international community in Shanghai. The Club was filled up with English-speaking children and teens for all sorts of extracurricular activities on weekends. But the four girls and two boys attending the children’s etiquette class were all Mandarin-speaking preschoolers from outside of this community. The outgoing trainer Teacher Lele⁶⁹ contracted by Amy for the session worked at a 4S car shop in a central province before meeting a “very beautiful” air-steward-turned-etiquette trainer with “even a better image than my own” during a sales service training session. Lele then moved to Shanghai to study under another airline-steward-turned expert on children’s etiquette, a pioneer who had founded the Commission for Children’s Etiquette Education (儿童礼仪教育工作委员会) and published a popular book on children’s etiquette. Thanks to governmental funds devoted to etiquette education on campus, the Commission had brought many of its affiliated children’s etiquette teachers to give etiquette lessons in schools. Teacher Lele was one among them. In this weekend class, she designed interactive games for the preschoolers to learn how to introduce themselves and greet others; how to know themselves and others through positive adjectives; how to sit, stand and squat properly. She observed that “most of my students came from better-off families, because only if the basic needs of life are met, would people think about other things on a higher level. Some other students come from open-minded families. They don’t mind if their children perform well academically, as long as they know how to be a proper person.” Etiquette was one

⁶⁹ An audio-recorded interview was conducted with Teacher Lele a few days later, after the class.

of “the things on a higher level”, in Lele’s view, *qingshang* (情商; Emotional Quotient), knowing how to be “kind and respectful”.

Over the period of four months, the royal founder Alexandra never showed up in Shanghai for the scheduled etiquette classes. Two British-style Afternoon Tea classes were also canceled for not having enough participants. Probably the slew of hiccups led Amy to postpone my interview request time and again, until we finally met in late November. By then, her upbeat cheerfulness had seemingly receded into evasive reluctance. On spot, the requested one-hour interview was cut to thirty minutes exactly, and her responses became studded with an increasing number of “I don’t know”, “I don’t want to answer”, “I don’t want to comment on that”, or “What?”. But somewhat unexpectedly, she gave a lengthy response to a simple question raised mainly to relax her visible tension:

Yikun (Y): Are you from Shanghai?

Amy (A): I’m from X province [a province in central China]. For us coming from X province, we are *waidiren* (外地人; outsider). I did not know the depth of Shanghai, this city. It is really, really deep. You cannot take control over it (驾驭) just because you wish to. I discovered that Shanghai is like this: it does not matter how much money you have, how much talent you have...your personal ability matters, and your outward appearance matters too. Yes, I also discovered that it is a multicultural place with different elements, because it mixes the western with the eastern. But it also sees everyone through *youseyanjing* (有色眼镜; tinted glasses). I think this may be similar to Western countries. This kind of tinted glasses is less obvious in inland China, but in Shanghai, you are evaluated by the way you talk and the way you dress, by your external appearance. So, when I first moved

to Shanghai, I felt no *cunzaigan*⁷⁰ (存在感; sense of existence) in those early years.

I was living in a big villa; I was a mother of two big children, but you discovered that you did not have any value as a person. Or, society sees your worth as zero. Maybe that I don't want to get old like this, just like today's deportment trainer said that she wished to remain an elegant lady even when she reaches ninety. Maybe it's just that I don't want to live a comfortable life inside a villa. Like I said, Shanghai is a net, or a circle. There are many links and chains connecting one another. If you want to be a part, you have to have your own value.⁷¹

Y: Why do you think in cities like Shanghai one's external appearance is very important?

A: Because you can only come into contact with the circle of people similar to you.

A question unrelated to etiquette yet led to a response revealing Amy's idea of etiquette, a view closely related to her assessment of the cosmopolitan metropolis of Shanghai from the perspective of a "*waidiren* (outsider)". The daunting complexity of a city of "depth" was partly attributed to its "multicultural" characteristics, "mix(ing) the western with the eastern". Its codes for inclusion and exclusion were barring yet invisible to Amy as an outsider, leading to a sense of loss and helplessness manifested in the feeling that "you cannot take control over it just because you wish to". But at the same time, Shanghai was seen as "a net, or a circle", with "many links and chains connecting one another". This perceived feature further accentuated the feeling of exclusion from the tightly-knitted network, particularly to the "outsiders" desiring to become a part, therefore to have the "*cunzaigan* (sense of existence)". These invisible codes of inclusion and exclusion were thought of as being neither mainly nor solely materialistic in Amy's

⁷⁰ *Cunzaigan* (存在感) has become a popular Chinese word in recent years. It refers to a sense of validation or self-import that could be based on others' assessment, or the self-perceived self-worth, or both.

⁷¹ My translation from Mandarin Chinese to English.

assessment: “it does not matter how much money you have”. For as a mother of two living “a comfortable life inside a villa”, a sense of exclusion lingered in her well-provided life. Amy had been in search of her “own value” to become the foundation of *cunzaigan* (sense of existence) and sense of belonging to the city where she had been living in. In the process and through a *waidiren* (outsider)’s gaze, she discovered that “your personal ability matters, and your outward appearance matters too”: Shanghai “sees everyone through *youseyanjing* (tinted glasses)”; “in Shanghai, you are evaluated by the way you talk and the way you dress, by your external appearance”. It was also Alexandra’s charming appearance that first attracted Amy to the etiquette industry. Deportment classes, etiquette lessons, and British Afternoon tea sessions all pointed to the enhancement of the outward appearance, valued as the ticket of admission to the networked metropolis through “com(ing) into contact with the circle of people similar to you”. In a cosmopolitan city with tinted glasses, in Amy’s perception, etiquette was about how to put on one’s best appearance when being viewed through.

Both Aubert and Amy view etiquette as the form of individualist cultural distinction befitting the cosmopolitan elites and root it in Western aristocratic traditions, but the collectivist nature of this form of individualist distinction is made clearer in Amy’s case. While they both accorded meaning to personal etiquette training based on the neoliberal order of worth founded on a person’s socioeconomic status⁷², Amy’s provincial outsiders complicate the issue by amplifying its sociocultural dimension. Viewing aestheticized self-presentation as the cultural means towards destigmatization, gaining “recognition and worth” by the social collective they

⁷² Lamont, Michèle, Graziella Moraes Silva, Jessica Welburn, Joshua Guetzkow, Nissim Mizrahi, Hanna Herzog, and Elisa Reis. 2016. *Getting Respect: Responding to Stigma and Discrimination in the United States, Brazil, and Israel*. Princeton, New Jersey Oxford: Princeton University Press.

are eager to join, is evidence of the collective orientation of this form of individually-embodied cultural distinction. The “recognition gap”⁷³ experienced by Amy, manifested in her perceived lack of *cunzaigan* (sense of existence) and self-worth, is sought to be bridged through group membership. This objective motivated her in her relentless search for the sociocultural codes governing the cosmopolitan Shanghai, where she had been living, yet without successfully becoming accepted as a legitimate member. In a sociocultural context where territorial stigma persists along the divides between the inland-coastal and rural-urban regions, etiquette is bestowed with the power of destigmatization for the socioculturally estranged. The “discrediting”⁷⁴ effect of her internalized cultural stigmatization resulted in cognitive confusion, fueling her desultory explorations for *the* cultural codes leading to the possible entry into the cosmopolitan society. The socio-cultural origin of *the* cultural codes of inclusion hardly mattered to her, as long as the promise of inclusion was in sight. For Amy and her followers, etiquette as a form of aestheticized personal distinction only acquires value if it manages to obtain recognition from the aspirational collective of their cosmopolitan peers. Further away from transnational cosmopolitan centers than Aubert and his clients, Amy was less certain about the cultural expressions that socioeconomic success should take. The European royal glamour embodied by “Alexandra” was part of her trial-and-error process for decoding cosmopolitan inclusion. In the international neighborhood where Amy held one etiquette class, I came cross another Chinese cosmopolite Carla and her newly-opened etiquette business.

⁷³ Lamont, Michèle. 2018. “Addressing Recognition Gaps: Destigmatization and the Reduction of Inequality.” *American Sociological Review* 83(3):419–44.

⁷⁴ Goffman, Erving. 1986. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Reissue edition. New York: Touchstone.

2.1.3 Shenghuomeixue (生活美学; *The Aesthetics of Life*)

On my way to Amy's Children's etiquette class at the X Club, a large poster erected at the stairway corner caught my attention. It was from X School of Etiquette and Protocol, with a list of ten etiquette programs for children above three and youths under eighteen. A collage of photos of Eurasian children and meticulously-edited bilingual (i.e., English and Chinese) program curriculums well fit the neighborhood where the Club was in. As one of the few International Communities in Shanghai, this area was also known as "mini-United-Nations". The majority of residents here were expats working in high-level managerial positions for transnational companies. With supermarkets filled with imported goods from around the world, English-speaking international kindergartens and high schools, exotic restaurants and well-maintained golf courts, and churches and clubs celebrating non-Chinese holidays, the neighborhood was more similar to any other cosmopolitan metropolis around the globe than to an inland Chinese town. It was around Halloween when I visited the X Club. The festivity in the lobby was surprising but not at all out of place in the Club. There were Halloween candies for sale and giant stuffed spiders clinching onto the fireplace chimney. Large butterfly-shaped decorations made from the national flag of France encircled a grand piano in front of a French Bistro-Café on the ground floor. The X School of Etiquette and Protocol had an office upstairs. The school was nascent. Its WeChat account had only started posting bilingual daily etiquette tips a few days ago. They were authored by the founder of the school, Carla Erving. Carla was fluent in both Mandarin and English, and Erving was the family name of her American husband, who was managing the Chinese market for a transnational company. Carla grew up in a central province in China before attending a well-known university in the south, majoring in both English and international

business. She had worked in governmental offices and then the hospitality industry before meeting her husband and becoming a mother of two. To prepare for her etiquette business, Carla had attended etiquette training both in China and in the United States. When we met, she was excited about having been “admitted” to Institute Villa Pierrefeu, “the last Swiss finishing school”⁷⁵ that has been teaching social grace to the rich and famous around the world for decades at an unfathomable cost to the majority⁷⁶. At her office inside the Club, I asked Carla about her newly-founded etiquette school. At the first glance, her position differed from that of Aubert and Amy in assuming a critical stance against the elitist pretense of boutique etiquette classes:

Carla (C): In fact I didn’t plan to start an etiquette training business in the beginning, and I don’t pay much attention to marketing. I was searching for etiquette classes for my daughters. I looked around for a few. Some of them hold really short-time training, one weekend, one day or two, and often in five-star hotels, for little princesses and princes, the aristocrats, or the elites. Then, it’s mainly about putting on beautiful clothes, in a luxurious environment, walking a few steps here and there. Then they teach a little bit of table etiquette. But I think just for one day, walking a few steps wouldn’t be helpful for training the posture. Then having a few bites at the dinner table, one day, one time, it’s not effective, useless. The majority of the etiquette classes for children are like this. So I looked around a bit more and found another type. What was it like? It’s for adults, mostly on physical postures. Most of them are short-term classes too, no long-term ones. I think these short-term classes are not effective. I attended a few of them.

[...]

Yikun (Y): Why were you searching for etiquette schools for your daughters?

⁷⁵ Source: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/08/lessons-from-the-last-swiss-finishing-school>

⁷⁶ Its official website: <https://www.ivpworld.com/ivp/en.html>

C: It's mostly because of my husband. He thinks learning etiquette is important for children. Our daughters were around five then. Then he noticed that sometimes after finishing their food, they just walked away from the table without saying anything to us parents. Then sometimes they talked very loud in public. My husband grew up in the United States, so he had the environment. They call it "charm school", having existed for a long time. They are quite plain, unlike in China, one class for over RMB 10,000. Those schools charge about USD 20 or USD 25 per hour. So average people could all attend. They even had these schools in very small towns. Every small town has this kind of school, often held in the teacher's home or in their "country clubs". It has nothing to do with being "fancy", and nothing to do with the aristocracy. They never called themselves aristocrats, hardly ever heard this word. Then I started searching after his suggestion. I didn't find anything around here. I went to one class called "little gents and ladies". It was planned to be held every weekend, for six weeks, costing RMB 8,000. Only three students went for the trial class, my two daughters and one boy. The class was simple. A teacher asked them to sit well, then gave them coloring and painting stuff. Then they were asked to introduce themselves to each other, doing handshakes. That's all. Then I thought for RMB 8,000, it doesn't worth it. It's acceptable to be around RMB 2,000. It was two years ago. Then I decided to start my own etiquette school.

Etiquette first came to Carla's attention through her American husband's concern over their children's manners. Behaviors such as walking away from the table without addressing others present and talking loudly in public were deemed more socially unacceptable in the social milieu where her husband grew up than in Carla's. She was therefore searching for commercial etiquette classes, similar to those offered at American charm schools, as professional assistance for improving her daughters' social manners that would be deemed appropriate in the international environment. But her survey of the available etiquette classes in Shanghai led to

her discovery of a shared issue of these course offerings in the markets, “*xingshihua* (形式化; formalization)”, in her own words. The manifestation of the issue in the course content was a limited scope of only focusing on physical deportment and table etiquette. How to apply a set of prescriptive etiquette rules was the exclusive emphasis, without further attending to other aspects of social interactions. The short duration of most of these classes also made their effectiveness questionable, for not having enough time to assist in forming enduring habits to be carried on in everyday life. Carla attributed the prevalent *xingshihua* (formalization) tendency in the commercial etiquette market to the over-commodification of the etiquette culture in today’s mainland. Having high price tags and advertising a conspicuous link to catchy words like “nobles”, “aristocrats”, “elites”, “princes”, “princess” and “royal courts” were deemed as marketing techniques that transformed etiquette into a status marker and an exclusive necessity of a few, at the top echelon of an economically stratified social environment. These commercial etiquette offerings, in her assessment, deviated from “the essence of etiquette” of “respect, consideration, and honesty”, citing the American etiquette guru Emily Post. It also appeared to be contra the dominant trend of profit-driven over-commodification that Carla further formulated her own understanding of etiquette as “*shenghuomeixue* (生活美学; the aesthetics of life)”, an idea beyond training deportment according to etiquette rules. Etiquette meant more in her view:

Y: What’s your thoughts for referring to etiquette as “*shenghuomeixue* (the aesthetics of life)”?

C: In fact, I think etiquette is part of the aesthetics of life, teaching us how to appreciate beauty in everyday life. Etiquette includes your manners, your appearance, your attitude to others and to yourself, the sense of gratitude, how to take care of others and think for them. It is “kindness” itself. If you have all of

these, you'll find more happiness. During your interactions with others throughout the day, you won't be easily bothered by trivial things. You'll be calmer. Then you'll have more time and energy to discover beautiful things, to appreciate goodness in others. So I think these two actually, etiquette is a small branch of the aesthetics of life, and it also includes many other things. Putting these two together, I think they form a concept⁷⁷.

The main influences on Carla's conception of the idea of the aesthetics of life came from across the Strait, in particular, the idea of *manshenghuo* (慢生活; slow living) popularized by her favorite Taiwanese essayist Lin Ching-hsuan (林清玄; 1953-2019). Similar to the anti-consumerist downshifting trend that began to spread in industrialized countries in the 1990s⁷⁸, the idea of *manshenghuo* (slow living) was built on an implicit critique of the materialist lifestyle produced by the capitalist industrialization process. But differently, *manshenghuo* (slow living) also absorbed the Buddhist influence of a peaceful view towards life. To slow down is to reflexively retrieve from the rat race enacted by economic materialism, which has turned life into the means leading to the end of consumerist pursuits. As seen in Carla's view of the aesthetics of life, beauty and happiness were set as worthy goals in life. Etiquette, as the embodiment of "kindness", can manifest in "your manners, your appearance, your attitude to others and to yourself, the sense of gratitude, how to take care of others and think for them". These embodied forms of kindness in social interactions are thought to be capable of leading to the discovery of "beautiful things" and "goodness in others", and ultimately a happy life. The anti-materialist inclination in Carla's

⁷⁷ The quotes are from the recorded interview with Carla, conducted in her office and in Chinese. Translation is mine. The contents presented within the quotation marks in this section were originally stated in English.

⁷⁸ Schor, Juliet B (2001). "Voluntary Downshifting in the 1990s". pp 66–79. in *Power, Employment, and Accumulation: Social Structures in Economic Theory and Practice*, edited by E. Houston, J. Stanford, and L. Taylor. New York: Routledge.

aestheticized view of etiquette formed a stark contrast against the quickly developing Shanghai, a city of speed and ambition:

C: I feel like everyone in Shanghai is running. If you just walk, you'll fall behind. But it's different abroad. You feel everyone is walking slowly and enjoying life. In Shanghai, people do not seem to enjoy life. Everyone is working hard to be better. So I feel everyone here is impacted without knowing it. No matter how much I'd like to keep up, to live the slow life, to be calm, I might still have been influenced. It's a fact.

Carla's classes and the aestheticized view of etiquette had attracted some of her friends from this upscale community. Most of her students were attending international schools and came from the Chinese "sea-turtle"⁷⁹ families. To teach them "kindness", in addition to etiquette classes, Carla had brought her students to orphanages, offered them music lessons, and taught them first-aid skills. Reflecting on her customer base, she observed that native Chinese families without any exposure to an international environment either thought learning etiquette was "useless" compared to other extracurricular classes for lending their children a competitive edge in the rat race, or preferred etiquette teachers "with a foreign face" out of long-held stereotypical cultural perceptions that also showed traces in Carla's own view (e.g., "it's different abroad. You feel everyone is walking slowly and enjoying life"). As for the foreign expats in this community, both "a sense of superiority" and relatively-limited financial resources (compared to wealthy native Chinese families) were thought to be what kept them away from her classes. It thus appeared that even among those who could afford to downshift and "enjoy life" amid the hustle

⁷⁹ "See turtle" (*haigui*, 海龟) is a popularized term to refer to the Chinese moving back from overseas after working or studying there. It came to being because "returning from overseas" (海归) is phonetically identical to "sea turtle" (海龟).

and bustle in the fast-paced Shanghai, viewing etiquette as the aesthetics of life only got traction from the selected few transnational cosmopolites of Chinese origin.

Is Carla's view of etiquette drastically different from that of Aubert and Amy, in particular in her criticism of the "formalization" trend in commercial etiquette offerings with an elitist appeal? Her general framing of etiquette as the aesthetics of life is formulated against these very tendencies. Such a broader formulation intends to re-root etiquette back into the layered fabrics of everyday life, beyond the exclusive focus on techniques for self-presentation or image management. Broader interactional principles of "respect" and "kindness" are also extended to more general cultural inclinations of appreciating "beauty", "goodness" and "happiness" in life. This view shows Carla's great reflexive understanding of marketing apprentices in China's etiquette market, yet this anti-materialist and more practical view of etiquette might be less radical than it seems. Proposed in sharp contrast against the neoliberal rat race, its mandate to downshift is in fact a highly selective lifestyle option, out of reach for the vast majority struggling to survive the highly competitive Shanghai. Paradoxically, the anti-materialist and aestheticized view of etiquette and life is preconditioned by socioeconomic success. Although toned down a few notches, this aestheticized view of etiquette makes it a form of individually-embodied cultural distinction available to the selected few who are molded to become appreciative of its value. Aubert's, Amy's, and Carla's views of collectively-referenced individualistic and aesthetic distinction are more commonly seen in transnational cosmopolitan communities in metropolises than in inland regions. In the next section, I present two personal etiquette businesses that have turned their attention inward, towards inner moral virtues.

2.2 Moral Virtues

2.2.1 *Zhixingheyi* (知行合一; *Mind and Hand*⁸⁰)

As Carla was searching for other available pedagogic models to re-root etiquette back to everyday life, one of her well-to-do friends recommended a *guoxueguan* (国学堂; School of Traditional Chinese Culture) that was rarely advertised but apparently popular through words of mouth. We paid a visit together after Carla's connection secured an appointment. The School of Traditional Chinese Culture bore a name that calls to mind the famous Chinese poet Du Fu (杜甫; 712-770), whose residence, now a National Heritage Site and a popular tourist attraction, was named *Du Fu Caotang* (杜甫草堂; Du Fu Thatched Cottage). The *X Caotang* (X 草堂; X Thatched Cottage) was located in a grand Industrial Park in a prosperous city to the west of Shanghai. This modern industrial township founded in the mid-1990s has become a top Economic and Technological Development Zone (经济技术开发区) in the mainland. The Thatched Cottage was housed in a sizable villa, away from the commercial center and hidden inside an affluent gated residential villa-community. On the day of our visit, Carla and I were welcomed at the door by a group of preschoolers and young women in traditional cotton-padded attires: girls in pale-pink and boys in light-gray. They greeted us with a formal bow, a gesture rarely seen in everyday interactions today. We were then led into an open room on the ground floor. Outside of its large windows was a well-maintained garden in the backyard. At the center of the room, a long wooden table was crouching on a tatami mat. A fabric table runner, elaborate Chinese tea sets, and

⁸⁰ The literal meaning of *zhixingheyi* (知行合一) is the unity of knowing and doing. Following the discussion (<https://www.yeswedo.net/a/47411-cht>), the phrase is translated to "Mind and Hand", the motto of MIT, from Latin "*Mens et Manus*".

blanket throws over quilted sitting mats were but a few symbols of traditional Chinese culture laid bare around. The melodious flute music in the background was another acoustic reminder of the tradition. As we walked in, a middle-aged woman was sitting at the table, smiling towards us as a welcoming gesture. It was Shandao⁸¹, known to us only by her Buddhist Dharma name. We came to know later that she came from a small coastal city nearby and started this School of Traditional Chinese Culture two years ago. With a controlled smile, unfaltering assurance, and a crispy voice, she spoke in short sentences and a philosophizing manner. Our expressed interest in her well-praised school was met with Shandao's introduction starting with a forceful statement: "We only see the surface, but there is no root in it. This is a phenomenon in modern China. So, how can we make Chinese not be laughed at by others? It is because of a lack of roots. We have no root now. Not that others look down upon us. We don't want (our roots)"⁸².

Shandao appeared to uphold a cultural worldview anchored against her own rendition of the western world and the modern Chinese society under its influence. Her unreserved criticisms of both were expressed through the lamentation over the loss of the traditional Chinese culture, "the root": "How can there be culture in the West? China has over five thousand years of history. How many years in the West? We forgot our deep roots." Western culture was characterized as "*bujiedi qi* (不接地气; haughty, literally means not touching the steam of earth)", "uncouth (meiwenhua, 没文化)", "hypocritic (xuwei, 虚伪)" and "pretentious (zhuang, 装)". Modern Chinese culture was thought as haven been eroded by the imported influence, producing self-

⁸¹ Shandao is a pseudonym for a Buddhist Dharma name. In recent years in the mainland, it has become a popular practice for people who are interested in Buddhist teachings, most often their popularized versions, to take up a Buddhist Dharma name.

⁸² The quoted contents in this section were originally stated in Mandarin Chinese and translated to English by me.

centered men and women who are “materialist (wuzhi, 物质)”, without “conscience (liangxin, 良知)”, nor traditional moral virtues such as “forbearance (renrang, 忍让)” and “shame (xiuchi, 羞耻)”. This framing carved out a cultural space for Shandao that is neither genealogically western nor temporarily modern. But somewhat surprisingly, she cited “a very smart guy, a foreign Doctor [i.e., a person with a doctoral degree]”: “the world can only be saved by Buddhism and the teachings of Confucius (孔子) and Mencius (孟子)⁸³.” The philosophized ideas behind her founding of this School of Traditional Chinese Culture indicated influences from both sources. The value of *guoxue* (国学; traditional Chinese teachings) taught at the villa was expounded within her Buddhist-ish worldview expressed through secularized Buddhist terms of ‘karma (yinguo, 因果)’, ‘karmic rewards (fubao, 福报)’, ‘destiny (ming, 命)’, and ‘attachment (zhizhuo, 执着)’. To help sail through life governed by principles such as karma and destiny, her private school offered “social education, teaching you how to be a human, a good human”. This relative cultural positioning against both western and modern Chinese culture also seemed to be manifested in her conspicuous aversion to any mention of monetary exchanges. Shandao’s school at the time offered preschoolers and young women “free” education and stay; and willing parents of these preschoolers could also join as volunteers (yigong, 义工). At the time of our visit, there were six preschoolers and three young women living in the villa, and one mother working as a volunteer. When asked about how to cover the cost of daily expenses, Shandao responded lightly: “sometimes they bring some vegetables or rice, no worries about hunger”. The discursive

⁸³ Confucius (孔子; 551–479 BCE) was a Chinese philosopher and educator; and Mencius (孟子; 372-289 BCE) was a Chinese Confucian philosopher, known as the “Second Sage” after Confucius.

combination of the gift economy⁸⁴ and the Buddhist idea of *bushi* (布施; charitable donation) distanced this School of Traditional Chinese Culture further away from the modern monetary economy, yet in which the school was embedded. Its financial structure was shrouded with a sense of secrecy.

The core philosophized idea behind Shandao's *guoxue* (traditional Chinese teachings) as the "social education" for making "good human" was "*zhixingheyi* (知行合一)", supplemented with "*houdezaiwu* (厚德载物)". "*Zhixingheyi* (知行合一)", uniting inner knowledge and exterior action, is a key tenet of the Yangmingism (心学)⁸⁵. Shandao interpreted this idea in a peculiar manner and with her own instrumental twist: "The authentic traditional Chinese culture exists in everyday life. It doesn't finish after class. All culture is useful. But if you don't use it, it's not useful. To use it is to apply it in everyday life." This pragmatic view had attracted many of her client-followers for producing visible behavioral changes. It was also the basis of her critique of "*weiguoxue* (伪国学; fake traditional Chinese teachings)" for an exclusive focus on scholarly learning of Chinese classics and etiquette texts within the confine of the classroom. Her school was innovative for having students stay and learn with her by living everyday life together, out of the stated idea: "Habits become nature, so habits need to be formed, as well as rules and regulations. They all come from the heart." Although everyday actions were esteemed as the primary location for cultural cultivation, Shandao also emphasized the necessity to have it rooted in "heart", as the ultimate source of all actions. "True etiquette comes from the heart," she said.

⁸⁴ Mauss, M. 1990 [1954]. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Routledge.

⁸⁵ Yangmingism (心学) refers to the philosophical thoughts of the Chinese Neo-Confucian philosopher and politician Wang Shouren (王守仁, 1472-1529), also known as Wang Yangming (王阳明). "Yangming (阳明)" is his *hao* (号, art name), therefore his philosophy *xinxue* (心学) is also known as Yangmingism in English.

It implied a moralized view of culture and etiquette, further revealed in her characterization of the major difference between Chinese and western culture: “The wisdom of Chinese culture is *houdezaiwu* (厚德载物)”. “*Houdezaiwu*” first appeared in one of the oldest Chinese classics the *Book of Changes* (《易经》): “Like the generous and vast earth, *junzi* (君子; a man of virtue) should develop the moral virtues to compass all (地势坤，君子以厚德载物)”⁸⁶. But instead of *junzi*, Shandao carried with herself a mission to cultivate a “good human” of virtue. Her definition included personal characters such as having the sense of shame, being focused, patient and rigorous, as well as a set of socially-embedded principles like loyalty, filial piety and adherence to traditionally-defined gender roles. Her “good human” could probably be described as a virtuous being who can fulfill the moral obligations demanded by one’s social lot carved out by stratifying orders such as the gender and kinship hierarchy. To drill these ideas from outside in, the preschoolers at the villa were dressed in uniforms of gender-specific colors and also assigned with different types of tasks. A few young women studying under Shandao were reminded of their “divine destiny” to “help your husband to grow and become successful”. Strictly patterned courteous speech was required for these preschoolers to initiate a conversation with any adult inside the villa. These practices were designed to transform etiquette into moralized principles (*guiju*, 规矩) passed down by traditions, rather than a limited set of behavioral codes. While this approach resonated with Carla’s formalization critique of not limiting etiquette to the narrow

⁸⁶ *Junzi* (君子; a man of virtue) is often thought comparable to “gentleman”, yet with a heavier emphasis on inner moral virtue while taking external appearances lightly. *Yijing* (《易经》; *Book of Changes*) appeared in the Western Zhou period (1000–750 BC). The quoted contents are my translation from classic Chinese to English.

scope of self-presentation, it appeared to have resulted in unquestioned or even robotic conformity, readily observable during our visit at the villa.

Shandao's pedagogical approach to moral education through living everyday life together, however, was largely disciplinary. Around lunchtime, a three-year-old boy waddled towards her cautiously with nervous eyes and reddened cheeks. After scanning around the table where we were seated, he began in a timid and sullen voice:

Boy (B): Teacher, may I ask if you are free at the moment?

Shandao (S): What is the matter?

B: Teacher's breakfast is now ready.

S: Lunch.

B: Teacher's dinner is now ready.

S: Lunch.

B: Teacher's lunch is now ready.

S: Ok. You may go now.

After everyone from the villa had seated at the lunch table, they all started to recite the "Words of Gratitude (ganenci, 感恩词)" aloud, after Shandao, sentence by sentence. Written largely based on the teachings from the Confucian classic *Standards for being a Good Pupil and Child* (《弟子规》), the Words of Gratitude went viral around 2012, when China Dream (zhongguomeng, 中国梦) and the Great Renaissance of the Chinese People (中华民族伟大复兴) became two key phrases in the mainstream political discourses. A renewed interest in traditional Chinese culture nationwide led to the sudden popularity of the Words of Gratitude in many varied versions. Many children's etiquette teachers and kindergarten teachers began to adopt it, like the foreign tradition of saying the mealtime prayers, for creating "a sense of ceremony (yishigan, 仪式感)".

The moral virtue of being grateful was reminded together with patriotic love, through thanking “heaven and earth”, “our country”, “our parents”, “our teachers”, “our classmates”, “farmers”, and “everyone”:

Words of Gratitude⁸⁷

Every bowl of congee and every grain of rice
Through great effort they come to us
Thank heaven and earth for enriching everything
Thank our country for cultivating and protecting us
Thank our parents for raising us
Thank our teachers for educating us
Thank our classmates for taking care of and helping us
Thank farmers for their hard work
Thank everyone giving to this world of gratitude

A little boy burst out crying halfway through reciting the “Words of Gratitude”. To my surprise, the rest of the group carried on without attending to him. He kept on bawling, repeating whenever halted to gasp for air: “Lanbao⁸⁸ is not crying...” But then suddenly, he began to recite aloud the Words of Gratitude from the very beginning, alone. It was the only way for him to secure the lunch according to the principles (guiju, 规矩) of the villa. The preschoolers who had finished the lunch then lined up in front of Shandao, repeating the identical dialogue one by one. Their familiarity with the routine had made the whole process appear more mechanical than ritualistic. Even Shandao’s clearly-stated permission to omit it was collectively ignored, perhaps

⁸⁷ My translation from Mandarin Chinese to English.

⁸⁸ “Lanbao” is a pseudonym for the boy’s first name.

out of fear of disciplinary punishment (e.g., early on a preschooler was asked to stand alone in a corner to reflect on walking too fast):

Child (C): Teacher, may I ask if you are free at the moment?

Shandao (S): What is the matter?

C: X [the child's own first-name] is going to take a nap.

S: Ok.

C: Thank you, teacher!

S: Ok. Go.

In these patterned exchanges, the preschoolers referred to themselves by their first names but not the egoistic first-singular pronoun of "I", therefore creating a reverential distance from the formalized role of "teacher". The after-lunch meeting was then carried on between Shandao and her three young female disciples in their early twenties, as well as one volunteer-mother whose twins had been staying in the villa for a while. They began with routine reflections on everything that had unfolded during the first half of the day, in a format strangely resembling the Communist Party's long-run tradition of "criticism and self-criticism": self-reflection and self-criticism were followed by critical observations and comments from others. The well-kept entrepreneur volunteer-mother started first:

Today, as a volunteer, I have been working closely with Teacher X [one of the three young female disciples]. I stayed close to her and learned a great deal. In the morning, Miyan [a preschooler] broke a glass. Because we were about to do exercises then, he was quite anxious. When he hurried to finish washing the glass, it fell on the floor. It's a normal reaction for a child, he's startled. Intuitively, he picked up the broken glass. Then after he picked up the broken glass. Teacher X really was wise, kept asking him about it. Then Miyan apologized. He said: "sorry, I broke the glass. I didn't mean to." So why was Teacher X wise? She didn't talk about the thing itself only. She planted a seed in the child timely. She said: "Were

you in too much a hurry?" The child didn't reflect that he broke the glass because he hurried, but focused on what should I do, now that the glass is broken. Teacher X directed him to think that the cause of breaking the glass was being in a hurry. I think this point intrigued me greatly ...

The volunteer-mother apparently had absorbed Shadao's teaching of looking beyond the surface. She had learned to view the incident of breaking a glass not solely as an event to be dealt with, but as an opportunity for shaping the child's moral character. Going beyond "the thing itself" led to a lesson on the negative consequences of haste. Within the system of Shadao's philosophized *guoxue* (traditional Chinese teachings), the lesson would be a step towards becoming a "good human", morally-virtuous and socially-fit. Resolutely turning against the cosmopolitanizing trend quickly spreading in the mainland, Shadao took up a radicalized position of embracing the ideologized value of traditional cultural heritage to the extent of curating her own set of "traditional" moral values "taught by her mother". Her attempt to reconnect etiquette to a traditional moral root was made possible through a nostalgic reconstruction of a past well-governed by shared norms, which were thought to have been passed down from one generation to another. Shadao's "good human" upholding her proposed set of traditional moral virtues could hardly be modern or culturally cosmopolitan, and moral distinction but not social distinction (as suggested in Aubert, Amy and Carla's views of etiquette) is deemed as the only worthy concern. Her culturally anti-materialist stance tinted with a distinct form of nationalist cultural pride was purposefully distanced from neoliberal and cosmopolitan influences that continued to mold the social life, in which her School of Traditional Chinese Culture was inevitably embedded. The "free education" offered at the school was in fact

sustained by a gift economy of “charitable donations”, and it relied on word of mouth to become known to the network of the Economic and Technological Development Zone.

As Carla and I were walking out of the gated community where the Thatched Cottage was, she reflected with apparent reservation: “I think some of what she [Shaodao] said makes sense, but...I don’t know...” Afterward, Carla neither pursued collaborative projects nor incorporated traditional Chinese culture classes and Shandao’s pedagogy into her etiquette programs that ended altogether two years later. Shandao’s traditional women and men, upholding both largely Confucian cultural ideals and nationalist fervor, radically differ from the transnational cosmopolites surrounding Carla. Indeed, as I observed during the fieldwork, the tendency to incorporate traditional Chinese culture into personal etiquette training was in general much more common among domestically-trained etiquette teachers in inland regions. Away from cosmopolitan centers in China, these domestically-trained etiquette professionals appeared to be more deeply immersed in the mainstream culture propagated by the party-state, in particular, the project of the “Great Renaissance of the Chinese People” at the time. Meizi, a hairstylist-turned-etiquette entrepreneur, recently developed great enthusiasm for China’s long tradition of etiquette and rites, while seeking its modernized cultural expressions.

2.2.2 Zhengnengliang (正能量; Positive Energy)

I first met Meizi in Liang’s⁸⁹ five-day train-the-trainer program in a southwestern city. In her late 20s, she had a quiet demeanor, yet always arriving to class with assertive makeup and trendy outfits. We were sitting next to each other in the western table etiquette “practice” session at a

⁸⁹ Liang is a domestically-trained etiquette trainer and owner of a commercial etiquette training business headquartered in Shanghai. Liang’s etiquette business is discussed in Chapter Two.

popular buffet-style *xican* (西餐; western food) franchise restaurant. This “practice” session was the second half of the western table etiquette training, following a one-hour “theory” lecture on a long list of pointers that began with “the differences between Chinese and Western table culture”: ambiguous versus exact measurement in recipes, familial versus business-like ambiance, all-purpose chopsticks versus knife and fork for their own specified functions as the main utensils, customarily having a male host versus a female hostess, and an emphasis on the value of nutrition versus refinement⁹⁰. The nomological mixture of cliches and truism set the stage for western table etiquette by presenting a different “West”: scientific, capitalist, and formalistic. Abstract and prescriptive rules on seat planning, tableware placement, behavioral taboos, and table etiquette for western-style dining were then swiftly covered in less than an hour. At the franchise restaurant, Meizi was still left perplexed in front of a piece of steak. After fumbling with her knife and fork for a while to slice off a bite, she turned towards me asking for tips: “I still don’t know how to go about this. I don’t think I’ve learned how.” Meizi appeared to be immensely curious about the outside world in our conversation, while habitually assessing what she heard with an air of scholarly-like seriousness. I also got to know that her well-kept appearance probably came from her profession - a hair stylist and hair-salon owner. Intrigued by her background, a few weeks after her return I visited Meizi at her salon in a small southwestern county.

Meizi came from a nearby village. The unsatisfactory academic performance led to her decision to withdraw from senior high school after the first year, at the age of sixteen. She reasoned that for a family coming from “the bottom of the social strata (shehui diceng, 社会底

⁹⁰ These quotes are based on the course slides that were originally in Chinese.

层)”, her further academic learning was only “a waste of money”⁹¹. Her peasant-parents had already been struggling financially for sending both her and a younger brother to school. Meizi went to get trained as a beauty specialist and then for a while worked as a hairstylist in the economically-developed Pearl River Delta in the south. When filial piety compelled her to return for better caring for the ailing mother, Meizi became a hair-salon owner at the age of twenty-four. The salon was at the heart of the county’s commercial center, frequented by small-town fashionistas and better-offs. It bore an idyllic name after a World Heritage Site in the Tibetan Plateau, an isolated region that is home to many exquisite wild animal species. Her work experiences in a southern metropolis made her salon the first in town to introduce an appointment-based service system⁹². It was a pioneer in offering image management (形象管理) services. The salon’s interior with minimalist decors and bright-colored furniture was accordingly divided into two spaces, with a tall mannequin in a black satin dress and a wide-brimmed beach hat standing at the center, as an emblem of cosmopolitan chicness. The image consultancy room inside the salon had a counter of voguish jewellerys, a vanity set displaying cosmetics and makeup tools, a rack of trendy clothes and ties, and a large panel of colorful fabric pieces for “diagnosing” the most flattering colors to individual skin complexions (Figure 27). Four etiquette books authored by a well-known native-Chinese etiquette expert were obviously new additions on a display shelf, with their transparent dust covers remaining intact⁹³. Over the years, Meizi

⁹¹ All quotations from Meizi were originally stated in Chinese.

⁹² Serving customers on the appointment basis is a relatively new practice in the mainland then, particularly in the less developed inland market. At the time when we met, Meizi was in the process of enforcing the appointment system at her salon. But some of her customers were highly critical of the new system, stately for the inconvenience caused and formality implied.

⁹³ It is a common practice in today’s mainland to have brand-new books completely sealed in transparent plastic dust-covers.

developed business acumen. Even at this early stage of adding etiquette training into the salon's service menu, an ad was already running on the tablet facing each styling chair inside the salon. Images of formally-dressed young women and men in conspicuous trained gestures were displayed side by side with these slogans: "X⁹⁴ Image and Etiquette: Transformation, Transformation, Transformation, Transformation"; "X Image and Etiquette: Make others like you at the first sight". On branching out to etiquette training for "ladies", "gentlemen", "college students" and "employees", Meizi was again "the first person to eat crabs (第一个吃螃蟹的人; a popular saying to refer to a brave person)" in the county.



Figure 27 The image management corner at Meizi's salon

Meizi's path to etiquette followed a career trajectory interweaved with her personal history. The decision to become a beauty specialist at the age of sixteen was out of the thoughts that "this profession can make myself look better...we rural girls always dress very plainly. Whenever we see beautiful girls from outside of the village, we feel envious." Only after having

⁹⁴ "X" stands for the name of Meizi's salon.

established herself as a sought-after hair stylist in town and a salon owner with a handsome income, she encountered a sense of unfulfillment: “I made money alright, but I had not bettered myself.” The agriculture-based small county had limited resources for Meizi to explore, so she searched online and found a commercial training program on image management in the capital city of her province. Within one month, she not only learned “technical stuff” like applying makeup, making public speeches, and pronouncing mandarin with a standardized accent⁹⁵, but also joined the franchise to offer image management services locally in the county. The franchiser supplied her with streamlined marketing strategies and material supplements like jewelleryes, clothing and makeup tools to be displayed inside her salon. Meizi also uplifted her business with more edgy practices for her small town, like holding a press conference for launching a new service. On a rented stage, she formally introduced the novel image management service to over a hundred town-dwellers that came by invitation. For a while, she also hung a framed photo portrait of herself around the entrance of the salon with a list of nebulous titles advised by the franchiser: “China Trend-Setter (中国流行社会人)”, “Member of Asia Colors (亚洲色彩会员)”, and “National Expert on Image Design (国家形象设计专家)”. But pouring a great deal of resources mostly for creating an image for the image management service, as Meizi gradually realized, was nothing but “all about packaging and marketing”. In her judgment, it deviated from the idea of self-improvement rooted in “the inner self (neizai, 内在)”, to make profound personal transformation possible. Meizi continued her exploration online and then again attended a costly

⁹⁵ It is in general harder for southerners (i.e., those coming from the regions below the *Yangzi* River in China) to speak mandarin Chinese without much audible accents associated to local dialects.

one-year training program - Carnegie public speaking and interpersonal skills⁹⁶, in the capital of her province. Etiquette was her latest discovery in this strain of pursuit. By the time of my visit, Meizi had just completed two train-the-trainer programs that had gradually modified her understanding of etiquette:

Yikun (Y): When you first heard about etiquette training, what kind of profession did you think it was?

Meizi (M): At that moment I thought it was elegant.

Y: What about after attending the etiquette training programs?

M: After the training I think etiquette is really about the moral traditions of Chinese people. It is not something that you can use right away. Or maybe, these things are not useful at all...Etiquette trainers are to enlighten (jiaohua, 教化) others. It is to pass on the traditions of Chinese people, the traditional virtues of our ancestors. Upon completing the etiquette training programs, I didn't hold any press conference (fabuhui, 发布会), like when I finished the image management training. I really want to improve myself gradually, slowly, in the future. When I become capable enough, I'll gradually offer etiquette classes or integrate etiquette training to my image management services.

Y: Your emphasis on traditional Chinese virtues, is it mainly from what you've learned at the X Etiquette [i.e., where Meizi attended train-the-trainer programs]?

M: We technologist-type (xuejishude, 学技术的) are realistic about learning. Also, businesspeople are pragmatic, hoping to learn something and then put it into use right away and make profits. I was thinking then, the sorts of things being taught in the program cannot be applied right away when I come back. I didn't feel I learned much when I first attended the training [...] I gradually realized that etiquette is about passing on the heritage. To become an etiquette trainer is to

⁹⁶ These are commercial training programs based on training programs originated from the American writer Dale Carnegie (1888-1955), who was one of the key figures of *chengongxue* (成功学; commercial courses on how to become successful) and self-improvement in the mainland during past few decades.

preserve and pass on the heritage (传承). The etiquette system in ancient China was already highly sophisticated, but I gradually felt that in our modern society the materialist desire had become so prevalent. Some people behave badly just because they think they are rich (财大气粗). In the past only cultured people were wealthy, but now, those with no culture could be rich too. The training had changed me greatly, changed my values.

[...]

Y: Now, do you still think that etiquette is about elegance and propriety?

M: I now think elegance is only one aspect. I now think etiquette is something that Chinese people should learn. It's not only about teaching people how to become elegant. It teaches the attitude towards life, the ways to treat others and deal with people. If it can be absorbed, etiquette will have a great impact on one's attitude towards life and one's values. It's not only about elegance. But elegance could be used to attract females to etiquette classes, like "learning etiquette will make you elegant" and "propriety and elegance could be learned" can be employed to attract them to our programs.

Meizi summarized her idea of etiquette as a form of *zhengnengliang* (正能量; positive energy), the most popular neologism in 2012. The word first emerged as a physics term from Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (1988) and then became popular as the Chinese title of the psychologist Richard Wiseman's self-help bestseller of *Rip It Up: The Radically New Approach for Changing Your Life* (2012)⁹⁷. The neologism became widely adopted for referring to "the people and things that are uplifting, healthy, motivating, empowering and inspiring hope"⁹⁸. But over

⁹⁷ A minor influence on the rise to popularity of the word *zhengnengliang* in the mainland was from Masaru Emoto's (1943-2014) controversial bestseller: *The Hidden Messages in Water* (2004). Its Chinese translation 《水知道答案》 was published in 2009.

⁹⁸ Since 2008, *Yaowen Jiaozi* (咬文嚼字) - a monthly periodical on letters founded in 1995 and based in Shanghai – has been publishing reports on the top-ten neologisms of the year. The list of the top-ten neologisms in 2012 (in Mandarin) are available at: http://www.wenming.cn/wmzh_pd/jj_wmzh/201212/t20121231_1008469.shtml

the past few years, as it had become absorbed into mainstream political discourses⁹⁹, the connotations of “positivity” also evolved towards advocating the party-state’s propagated ideologies so as to discourage criticisms of the status quo. Meizi’s view of etiquette as positive energy showed traces of such an influence. Etiquette was given a moral foundation of “the traditional virtues of our ancestors”, under a nationalist and romanticized view of “ancient China” as having developed “highly sophisticated” etiquette. In today’s “modern society” characterized by prevalent “materialist desires” and uncultured nouveaux riches, the lost “heritage” of traditional virtues deemed inherent to etiquette was respected as the route to “enlightenment”, capable of reaching deeper to the inner self (neizai, 内在) for triggering the genuine personal transformation. A better self should be built on traditional moral virtues, but Meizi’s two-layered idea of etiquette also highlighted a modernized behavioral façade for moral virtues to manifest, and no less importantly, for etiquette to become teachable as learnable codes. This layered perception made the transformative power of etiquette conceivable: “Positive energy, I feel I’ve bettered myself. People around me noticed that I’m different from last year, in the way I talk and live daily life.”

Meizi had held pilot etiquette classes at her salon. She began these sessions with a popular quote from Confucius’s *Book of Rites* (《礼记》): “Etiquette and propriety start with appropriate appearances, expressions and speeches. With appropriate appearances, expressions and speeches, etiquette and propriety follow.”¹⁰⁰ This quotation was deployed to establish a link

⁹⁹ An example of such a usage in the political context is: “习近平：汇聚起全面深化改革的强大正能量 (Xi Jinping: Gather Strong Positive Energy to Deepen Reforms in an All-round Way)” (2013-11-28) in 新华网 (http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2013-11/28/c_118339435.htm)

¹⁰⁰ The original text in classic Chinese: “礼义之始，在于正容体、齐颜色、顺辞令。容体正，颜色齐，辞令顺，而后礼义备。” The English translation is mine.

between etiquette and her image management service, and to situate etiquette back into Chinese cultural traditions. Her training would then turn to “technical” aspects of modernized etiquette codes that she learned from Liang, such as how to stand and talk in a standardized manner. But most of her small-town clients found her etiquette training “pretentious (zuo, 作)” and “overtly formal (wenzhouzhou, 文绉绉)”, wondering why was Meizi was not attending to her own proper business (buwuzhengye, 不务正业). It made her wonder if formalized etiquette rules she acquired through etiquette training programs were only for “between strangers, the first-time meetings, formal negotiations, or between countries and cities” when “presenting an image” is necessary. In her county yet to become a social environ amongst strangers, formal rules appeared not “relaxed” (suiyi, 随意) enough. Neither the moralizing idea of positive energy nor its formalistic behavioral codes seemed appealing to her fellow town-dwellers who had settled into a routinized life of habits and familiarity. Meizi thought her idea of integrating etiquette training into the image management service did not succeed. “But from the perspective of personal growth and in the long run, it did.” When we went for a stroll at the Confucian Temple (文庙) nearby her salon, Meizi talked enthusiastically about the Confucian classic of *Standards for being a Good Pupil and Child* (《弟子规》) and inquired about other Chinese etiquette classics. Her interest in anything cultural grew over the years: “I think I’m too weak on this. I regret deeply that I didn’t attend university, really. The main teachings of Confucius are on etiquette and rite. He is the first in China’s history to explain them. But I’ve never thought to visit this Temple with these thoughts before. People like us are too superficial when it comes to culture.”

Meizi's pursuit of self-betterment had an inward turn: from hairstyle and fashion, to public speaking, to image management, and then to partaking of the mission of passing down the traditional Chinese cultural heritage. Yet, the quest for a better self was not directed towards the objective of producing individualistic distinction. Her relentless drive for transforming into a better self gradually led her to view etiquette as having "a great impact on one's attitude towards life and one's values". From outwardly elegant self-presentation that attracted her to etiquette at first, she had turned inwardly towards the inner self's cultural and moral character. It was not partially unrelated to her self-perceived inadequacy in "culture (wenhua, 文化)" because of the truncated formal schooling. This self-assessment turned "culture" into an umbrella term for her to describe almost anything contrasting the rising materialist trend brought by economic development. Strong, almost omnipresent, presence of ideologized mainstream culture in inland regions also greatly colored her vision of etiquette with nationalist pride, in particular of traditional Chinese cultural heritage tokenized by Confucian teachings on rite and etiquette. Meizi's moralizing view of etiquette shares great commonality with Shaodao's, but is also distinctively modern, likely a result of her earlier exposure to cosmopolitan influences while working in developed southern coastal regions. While Meizi had been seeking modernized embodied expressions of traditional etiquette teachings, her idea of self-betterment demanded more than techniques for self-presentation, for individualistic distinction thus achieved would appear too egoistic and superficial to be called positive energy in her view now.

3. Functional Integration with Cultural Differentiation

The distinctive functional feature of etiquette professionals as experts on self-betterment is evident in the five cases analyzed above. This function shared by personal etiquette teachers in today's mainland emerged along with China's own path to individualization. In this social context with "neither a culturally embedded democracy nor a welfare state"¹⁰¹, structural individualization first initiated during the Mao era (1949-1977) was initially led by the party-state and then escalated after the economic reform (1978) with the joint force of the market economy. In this state-managed process throughout, signs of emancipation politics are detected in the second phase of individualization: a partially privatizing labor market and economy, policy relaxation on rural-to-urban migration for employment opportunities, enhanced awareness of the individual's legal rights, self-assertion foremostly in the area of consumer rights, and increasingly flexible biographical trajectories of individuals¹⁰². But what remains absent to this date is a set of institutionalized basic rights for governing the relationship between the individual and state in a society featuring the political leadership of the party-state and a globalized market economy under its government. Without significant changes in political structures, it is therefore not surprising that the individuals gradually disembedded from traditional social categories and cultural norms were largely relocated to the new consumerist market for self-betterment, on which etiquette professionals claimed their expertise. In the commercialized terrain, the life

¹⁰¹ Beck, Ulrich, and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. 2010. "Foreword: Varieties of Individualization". Pp. xiii-xx. in *IChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, edited by Mette Halskov Hansen and Rune Svarverud. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

¹⁰² Yan, Yunxiang. 2010. Pp. 195-206.

politics of reflexive self-actualization is severed from emancipatory political concerns of “exploitation, inequality and oppression”¹⁰³.

Functional integration with cultural differentiation is a unique characteristic of the professionalization process of etiquette experts in the mainland, as shown in the five cases presented in this chapter. This professional development reflects the complexities entailed in China’s path to individualization, charted by the interplay of the party-state and the increasingly globalizing market economy. Not only these two forces have been together molding structural changes leading to the gradual disembedding of individuals in Chinese society, but also, no less importantly, they have exerted cultural influences in shaping the images of the ideal self in today’s market of self-betterment. Personal etiquette training emerged along with the process of individualization by offering new possibilities for the nascent malleable self to essay, albeit only as a private being and through consumerist means. The observed gendered phenomenon does not undermine its broader implications. In particular, the trend of functional integration and cultural differentiation among etiquette professionals is also visible in the quickly-expanding sub-market for children’s etiquette. The structural and cultural influences of the market and the party-state are evident in the images of the ideal self at the core of the two camps of personal etiquette teachers and their followers pursuing the same goal of self-betterment: the gentleman with *sprezzatura* and the traditional Chinese *junzi* of moral virtues¹⁰⁴.

On the one hand, the community of transnational cosmopolites intends to cultivate individualistic cultural distinction in the image of the gentleman with *sprezzatura*, in more or less

¹⁰³ Giddens, Anthony. 1991. P. 211.

¹⁰⁴ Both “gentleman” and “*junzi*” are employed in a gender-neutral sense throughout.

formalized manners. The highly aestheticized form of individualistic distinction embodied in the mastery of the art of self-presentation is embraced as the identity marker for the “We” collective of global economic elites as the most salient beneficiaries of the globalizing market. Aubert’s “*le transfuge de class*”, Amy’s provincial outsiders, and Carla’s residents of the “little United Nations” are more similar than different from this perspective. Their aestheticized views of etiquette are culturalized expressions of the neoliberal order of worth based on the individual’s socioeconomic status defined in reference to the international community of cosmopolites. On the other hand, Shandao’s “good human” and Meizi’s cultured persons with “positive energy” model the ideal self in the image of the traditional Chinese *junzi* with Confucian moral virtues, to which neither social status nor individualist distinction is deemed significant. Forming a sharp contrast against transnational cosmopolites, the worth of the individual in this view is based on its relationship to the state underlying the surface of Chinese cultural traditions, as the identity-marking “We” and as the authoritative embodiment of collectivist moral virtues¹⁰⁵. The value of etiquette is thus considered more of a matter of morality than aesthetics, and the inner self outweighs its outward presentation in determining an individual’s worth (Table 2).

Name	Location	Education	Main Etiquette Programs	Etiquette	Cultural Repertoires	Image of the Self
Aubert	Shanghai	University (Master)	Deportment, table manner	Status legitimation of “ <i>le transfuge de classe</i> ” through acquiring embodied culture	French (aristocratic) culture, international etiquette	Gentleman with <i>sprezzatura</i>
Amy	Shanghai	College	Deportment, children’s etiquette	Cultural means of destigmatization for provincial outsiders in cosmopolitan cities	European ‘royal’ tradition and domestic etiquette knowledge system	

¹⁰⁵ Pye, Lucian. 1991.

Carla	Shanghai	University (Bachelor)	Children's etiquette and other courses	Aesthetics of life manifested in social interactions and the view towards life	<i>Manshenghuo</i> (Downshifting) philosophy, international etiquette	
Shandao	a city to the west of Shanghai	Unknown	<i>Guoxue</i> for preschoolers and young women	"The good human" embodying radically 'traditional' moral virtues	Popularized <i>guoxue</i> (traditional Chinese culture), Buddhist ideas	Junzi of moral virtues
Meizi	a southwestern county	Technical school	Traditional and modern etiquette, image management	Positive energy merging traditional moral virtues and modern behavioural codes	Politicized Chinese culture, domestic etiquette knowledge system	

Table 2 Etiquette Businesses and Images of the Ideal Self

Complexities underlying the tendency of cultural differentiation among etiquette professionals are more intricate than these two ideal images of the self might suggest. Close analyses in this chapter have shown that general views of etiquette as individualistic distinction embodied in artful self-presentation or collectivist-defined moral virtues can take on varied forms and present in divergent logics, as the etiquette teachers' biographical trajectories and cultural repertoires vary, even if they dwell within the same space defined by the economic standard. If we attend to the similarities shared by these two apparently contrasting images of the ideal self that have divided the personal etiquette market in the mainland into two segments, the complexities entailed in this professionalization trend become even more evident. These two disparaging conceptions of etiquette as individualistic distinction versus collectivist moral virtues are in fact both collectively framed in reference to a certain "We": Individualistic distinction as shown in the mastery of self-presentation is meant to be validated by the (aspirational) transnational community of economic elites, and collectivist moral virtues are approved by the party-state as the ultimate moral authority. It means that the worth accorded to the individual

via the route of etiquette remains collectively censored. At the same time, both of these two images of the ideal self appear ideologically-charged, for implying a vision of social structure and its sociality that echoes the ethos of either the market or the party-state, whereas in reality both forces together shape the social environ these etiquette teachers and their clients are situated, into one tapestry.

The complexities contained in the trend of functional integration with cultural differentiation in the professionalization process of etiquette experts in mainland China are as much related to the context characterized by drastic sociocultural transformation, as to China's own path towards individualization curated by the party-state throughout. The heightened importance of ideologies at the time of unsettled periods¹⁰⁶ is accentuated by the clearly demarcated political limits from above in China's individualization process. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim contend that "(t)he Chinese reform of the market-economic individualization *truncates* – or, to put it bluntly, castrates – the process of individualization in its claims to democratic political participation...it is supposed to be confined to the sphere of economic activities and private lifestyles."¹⁰⁷ The market of personal etiquette training emerged within such a context. Without delving into the thorny issue of "democratic political participation", the observed professional trend of functional integration and cultural differentiation functions to culturally re-embed individuals with the freedom of choice into two competing sociocultural systems, in which the mirage of individual freedom is offered, and clear pathways of self-betterment are paved.

¹⁰⁶ Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2):273–86. In particular, Pp. 278-280.

¹⁰⁷ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim. 2010. Pp. xviii-xix. Italics in original.

Conclusions

But in China manners are indestructible. Not only are the women completely separated from the men there, but one teaches manners as well as mores in the schools. A lettered person is known by his fashion of bowing graciously. These things, once given as precepts by grave scholars, are fixed as principles of morality and no longer change.

-Montesquieu, "On manners among the Chinese" in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748: P. 315)

Much of the falsehood to which the Chinese as a nation are said to be addicted is a result of the demands of etiquette. A plain, frank "no" is the height of discourtesy. Refusal or denial of any sort must be softened and toned down into an expression of regretted inability. Unwillingness to grant a favor is never shown. In place of it there is seen a chastened feeling of sorrow that unavoidable but quite imaginary circumstances render it wholly impossible. Centuries of practice in this form of evasion have made the Chinese matchlessly fertile in the invention and development of excuses. It is rare, indeed, that one is caught at a loss for a bit of artfully embroidered fiction with which to hide an unwelcome truth.

-Chester Holcombe, *The Real Chinaman* (1895; cited by Erving Goffman in *Interaction Ritual*, P. 29, note 22)

One cannot avoid comparing the direction of this civilizing-curve with the custom long practised in China. There, as has been said, the knife disappeared many centuries ago from use at table. According to the feelings of many Chinese, the manner in which Europeans eat is "uncivilized". "The Europeans are barbarians", people say there now and again, "they eat with swords". One may surmise that this custom is connected with the fact that for a long time in China the model-making upper class was not a warrior class but a class of scholarly officials pacified to a particularly high degree.

-Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (1939: P. 207)

The Backdrop of Changing Social Figurations

This research project exploring the phenomenon of the rise of the etiquette industry and its auxiliaries is situated in a China that is apparently different from Montesquieu's depiction of a nation of rites, Holcombe's portrayal of social interactions with strict etiquette codes, or Elias's characterization of a civilizing curve mainly shaped by a long tradition of pacified scholarly officials. In the sociohistorical backdrop of this analysis are two major figurational changes of varied scales, yet both have been shaping the structural nexuses of social relationships in modernizing Chinese society amid the fluctuating balances of power and its tensile equilibriums on varied levels. The broader of these two figurational developments manifests itself in the shifting power ratio between the individual and the state (and society) along with the emergence of the modern polity and the new identity of the modern citizen in the early 20th century, and the other figurational change of a comparatively shorter time span is shown through the fluctuating power differentials between different social strata constituting the contemporary Chinese society in the post-reform era. Both streams of development are in the general direction towards reduced power differentials, from two different aspects of "between governments and governed"¹ and "between different strata"², as the chains of interdependence in the modernizing Chinese society have become increasingly differentiated and elongated in a process that is referred to as functional democratization by Elias. These two streams of figurational developments together shaped the structure of social relationships that form the background of this study.

¹ Elias, Norbert. 1984. *What Is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press. P. 65.

² Ibid. P. 67.

In the changing power ratio between the individual and the modern state that arose out of feudal systems of hereditary rulers, we can detect an emergent vision of the individual that has been greatly influenced by imported western ideas like democracy and individualism since the late 19th and early 20th century. One aspect of this new vision of the individual is the ideal citizen suitable for participating in the public life of the modern polity, as envisioned by the party-state. The New Life Movement (1934-1949) discussed in Chapter One marked the beginning of state-led “civilizing” initiatives for producing modern citizens in Chinese history. While this mode of social change appears to echo Montesquieu’s advice that “when one wants to change the mores and manners, one must not change them by the laws, as this would appear to be too tyrannical; it could be better to change them by other mores and other manners”³, it has a distinctive characteristic in the Chinese context, associated with its persistent one-party political structure: the party-state as the self-appointed civilizer, the ultimate moral authority, and the major agent for social changes. This method of producing citizens through cultivating the body appears to have survived China’s transformation into a socialist state in 1949. Under a similar party-state system now headed by the CCP, top-down “civilizing” practices continued. The Civilized City/Town/District/Village campaign discussed in Chapter Two is one of these state-led initiatives in recent years. As the party-state’s need to legitimate its ruling authority in a rapidly stratifying society has become more urgent, the scope of these top-down “civilizing” attempts has become broader, and the intensity greater. Another aspect of the new vision of the individual emerged from the individualization process, as the individual has been gradually freed from

³ Montesquieu, Charles de. 1989. *Montesquieu: The Spirit of the Laws*. edited by A. M. Cohler, B. C. Miller, and H. S. Stone. Cambridge University Press. P. 315.

traditional confines and transformed into the basis of reproduction and the site of reflexive identity work. The increasingly malleable self, as discussed in Chapter Four, makes possible the reflexive construction of a coherent biographic narrative of the self.

The second stream of figurational change introduced by the shifting power differentials among the social strata constituting the CCP-led Chinese society was largely initiated by economic reform. Social stratification brought about by the exponential economic growth during the past four decades is most evidently shown in the rise of China's new economic elites, the High-Net-Worth Individuals discussed in Chapter Three. The salient condition characterizing this nascent group of economic elites can be described as functional democratization without political democratization. Elias notes that "[functional democratization] is not identical with the trend towards the development of 'institutional democracy'. [The former] refers to a shift in the social distribution of power, and this can manifest itself in various institutional forms, for example in one-party systems as well as in multi-party systems."⁴ In the post-reform era, the new economic elites' increased power potential brought by their critical role in national economic development co-exists with a stabilized political system of centralized and exclusive political institutions led by the CCP. Functional democratization in absence of political democratization is also described by Klaus Mühlhahn as economic modernization being decoupled from political development⁵. It consequently resulted in a condition that while the new economic elites have been bounded with political elites through institutionalized clientelism, their quest for social

⁴ Elias, Norbert. 1984. P. 68.

⁵ Mühlhahn, Klaus. 2019. *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. P.18.

recognition is directed towards an “imagined cultural tradition”⁶. At times this tension manifests as two competitive yet co-existing orders of the neoliberal market and the mainstream ideology propagated by the party-state. These cultural orders have a spatial aspect, shown in the divide between economically developed coastal regions with a closer tie to the global market and less developed inland areas more aligned with the mainstream ideology. The strategic creation of discernible “culture scissors” by some etiquette businesses, as shown in Chapter Two, and the varied images of the ideal self that underlie the individual etiquette training services discussed in Chapter Four, reflect these economically- and culturally interweaving orders.

Although both of these two figurational developments are towards the general direction of reduced power differentials in Chinese society, the one-party system that persisted throughout these processes gave the nexuses of social relationships distinctive characteristics. They differentiate Chinese society from other urban industrial societies in the early industrial period, although these societies all share the commonalities of social mobility becoming increasingly widely accepted, everyday social interactions growing more impersonal, and the identity of self turning more protean⁷. As the party-state remains acting as the ultimate arbiter of the distribution of social power, underlying today’s tensile equilibrium of power balances is the growing tension between the changing power differentials in Chinese society that has been particularly escalated by economic development during the past decades, and the concentration of political power in the CCP-led political institutions; or in other words, a condition of functional democratization without political democratization.

⁶ Osburg, John. 2013. *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality among China’s New Rich*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. P. 139.

⁷ These attributes of urban industrial societies and their similarities with the court society is argued in: Morgan, Marjorie. 1994. *Manners, Morals, and Class in England, 1774-1858*. Macmillan Press.

Businesses of Sociality: Valuation through Structural Tension

The etiquette industry and its auxiliaries analyzed in this study emerged against the backdrop of these two streams of figurational changes and their underlying power balances. The constant flux of power is evidently shown that once the “uncivilized” and “barbarian” European manner of eating “with swords”, as quoted by Elias above, is now taught in boutique etiquette schools to an exquisite market niche by etiquette professionals flocking to the mainland market from abroad. More importantly, this analysis shows how these two streams of changes have shaped the etiquette and its auxiliary industries that emerged in the post-reform era with a distinctive set of services that can hardly be found in different social contexts. In addition to offering business etiquette training or consultancy to the third/service industry, similar to their peers outside of the mainland market, etiquette professionals in the mainland market have been attempting to develop a unique line of services. Chapter Two explores how Liang’s civility business seeks to build upon the top-down civilizing campaign and profit through creating discernable “culture scissors” along the established geographic-cultural hierarchy; Chapter Three analyzes the emergent professional type of the modern butler designed in response to the new economic elites’ status aspiration; and Chapter Four shows how individual etiquette training products were designed to satisfy the need of self-betterment in absence of institutionalized individual rights. Commonalities of these products and services point to a similar foundation in the tension between the changing power distribution in Chinese society and the stabilized structure of the political system that modulates such changes. These etiquette-related products and services are commercial offerings that are developed in response to emergent yet apparently structurally-unsatisfiable needs, because of the fundamental tension mentioned above:

cultivating public morality (Chapter Two), gaining social recognition compatible with the new economic elites' power gained through functional democratization (Chapter Three), and pursuing individual freedom beyond the limit of the commercial market (Chapter Four). The tension intensified by economic development in relationship to the stabilized political system is seen transformed into a socially-contingent source of valuation⁸ by commercial etiquette businesses and its auxiliaries.

This source of value in (political-) structurally-shaped tension also explains the apparently fragile and ephemeral characteristics of these commodities; that is to say the worth/value of these commodities justified through "valuation practices"⁹ hardly become institutionalized. This feature is partially reflected by these etiquette products' shared attribute of combining a set of prescriptive behavioral codes with external moral principles for legitimatizing their value, in this context, often drawing on the logic of the neoliberal market or that of the mainstream ideology propagated by the CCP, as clearly illustrated by the two images of the ideal self as the gentleman with *sprezzatura* or *junzi* with moral virtues in individual etiquette training services (Chapter Four). These commercial etiquette commodities legitimated by external moral principles through valuation practices form a sharp contrast against the etiquette codes that are prevalent in other urban industrial societies in the early industrial period. While these highly aestheticized etiquette codes of "sociality" (i.e., the structure of social relationships) in today's mainland market are seen justified by external moralized rules, "sociability" (i.e., principles of social interactions) as

⁸ Helgesson, Claes-Fredrik, and Fabian Muniesa. 2013. "For What It's Worth: An Introduction to Valuation Studies." *Valuation Studies* 1(1):1–10.

⁹ Lamont, Michèle. 2012. "Toward a Comparative Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38(1):201–21. P.205.

embodied behavioural codes in early industrial societies has tact as its intrinsic morality¹⁰. The maxim shared by these commercial etiquette products and services in the Chinese market is not “do not offend” as demanded by interactional tact, but “act it right” according to the desirable order of worth, be it that of the neoliberal market or the party-state ideology.

This analysis also shows that these businesses of sociality profit from the established socio-cultural hierarchies and therefore could unintendedly reinforce these existing hierarchical inequalities, such as those between economically developed coastal regions and less developed inland provinces. The incessant flux of power and its shifting balances also propel these entrepreneurs to adjust their offerings accordingly, giving these culturalized industries a seemingly “bubble/crash dynamics”¹¹. Changes in the etiquette industry and its auxiliaries have been observed, as the imperative of “common prosperity” (共同富裕)¹² has become increasingly reiterated by the state policy as a counter-measure against social stratification in the post-reform era. Towards the end of my fieldwork, a public book talk by a boutique etiquette expert who had been interviewed by international media at the start of the “western etiquette boom in China” was entitled “from an average girl to an international socialite”, where ordinariness was first seen related to these pricy services that had been out of reach for many. Gradually in the years that followed, Monsieur Aubert began to post more and more in Mandarin Chinese on WeChat. The emergent professional type of modern butler started to be trained more in Chinese-style

¹⁰ Simmel, Georg. 1971. *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*. edited by D. N. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. P.130.

¹¹ The term “bubble/crash dynamics” is borrowed from: Zuckerman, Ezra W. 2012. “Construction, Concentration, and (Dis)Continuities in Social Valuations.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 38(1):223–45.

¹² Xi Jinping reiterated the importance of developing “common prosperity” in the Tenth Meeting of the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission, stating that “common prosperity is required by socialism and is an important characteristic of Chinese modernization.” (Source: http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2021-10/15/c_1127959365.htm)

services. Some of the etiquette trainers I met during the fieldwork even have left the industry altogether for better opportunities. Lili turned from an etiquette trainer to become a tutor of trendier Buddhist Zen dance (chanwu, 禅舞); Carla continued her cultural explorations, but this time in music theater; Amy has been searching for new *fengkou* (风口, wind/air gap; meaning opportunities brought by official policies and/or fads) industries to start anew.

List of Archival Documents on the New Life Movements Viewed at the Second Historical Archives of China

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全宗号	案卷号	案卷标题
1938.2/1944.2	2(2) 59	江宁区成立抗敌后援会推行事宜
1948.2/11	-- 261	社会部南京办事处关于江宁区抗敌后援会
1941.12/1945.1	-- 1541	合作事业管理局江宁区分会
1944.7/1947.9	-- 4499	江宁区第一区抗敌后援会
1943.5/1947.9	-- 4500	江宁区第二区抗敌后援会
1945.9	-- 4501	江宁区第三区抗敌后援会
1938.11/1944.7	-- 4503	江宁区第四区抗敌后援会
1939.7/1947.7	-- 4504	江宁区第五区抗敌后援会
	-- 4508	江宁区第六区抗敌后援会
1940.10/1947.10	-- 4510	江宁区第七区抗敌后援会
1941.11/1943.5	-- 4511	江宁区第八区抗敌后援会
1939.2/1947.5	-- 4513	江宁区第九区抗敌后援会
1941.11/1942.9	-- 4532	江宁区第十区抗敌后援会
1940.1-10	-- 4543	江宁区第十一区抗敌后援会
1938.7/1947.12	-- 4551	江宁区第十二区抗敌后援会
1938.7/1947.12	-- 4552	江宁区第十三区抗敌后援会
1938.7/1947.12	-- 4553	江宁区第十四区抗敌后援会
审核意见		审核人

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